The Wisdom of Vulnerability:
A Post–Structural Feminist Exploration of Healing in the Aftermath of War

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Drawing on narrative and post-structural feminist sensibilities, I query the relational nature of healing in the aftermath of war of these 21st century wars (Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)) as they are experienced and understood through this contemporary U.S. culture. Thus, in the course of this study, I met with and interviewed military and non/military participants. In this sense, I was able to meet with OIF/OEF military personnel including those veterans who had terminated their active or reserve duty with a military branch. I met with currently ‘active military’ as enlisted personnel, ranked professionals and/or reservists. These participants were currently employed with a branch of the military or National Guard and/or were still be connected to, or otherwise involved with the Iraq and Afghanistan ongoing wars when I met with them. I met with participants ranging in age from 24 – 62 years, ranging in rank from enlisted personnel to high level officers, and spanned the spectrum of military branches including the Navy, Marines, Army, National Guard or National Guard Reserves.

Thus, listening to the accounts of warriors and those who support them, I trouble the ways in which bodies speak to and through us as a means of expressing [beyond the language we are accustomed to] the profound disjuncture or fissures in the lived experience of repeated trauma as enacted through these wars in particular. Each person’s
story exposed the nuanced ways in which suffering could not be isolated, captivated or clearly defined. Here I draw our attention to the ways in which we experience both suffering and support in relational and institutional contexts. I probe those inter-related master scripts, power structures and vast forms of sense-making apparatus that function as both enabling and constraining texts. The crux of this project lies in listening both with and through body/narratives and further querying scripts that traverse the personal, familial, social and political terrain. I probe ontological and epistemological ideals regarding the relationship between warriors, the loved ones who support them and the embodiment of social and institutional structures, systems, and objects. Participant’s narratives speak to the ways in which combat and trauma moves through and transforms a warrior’s and a support warrior’s body.

Critical to this endeavor is the understanding that discourse coheres in an amalgamation of multiple and complex power relations. Thus I probe our inherent signifying practices and work to transcend the binaries that ultimately emanate from a reliance on Cartesian biomedical models. Where such a model works to isolate, and individualize illness, I draw on scholars such as Frank (1995), Grosz (1994), Harter, Japp & Beck (2005), Lindeman-Nelson (2001), McKerrow (1998), Morris (1997, 1998) and others, to further trouble social constructs that not only undergirds what it means to be a warrior, but importantly, what it means to “support our troops.” Herein, issues of the corporeal, embodiment, and our intercommunicative texts rage in the confluence of body-being facing multiple deployments and limited resources. We have terrific advances in technology that allow for significant rates of increased body survival. Yet, given the historical dearth of research regarding combat trauma, during and in the aftermath of war,
we have failed as a culture to listen, acknowledge, and consequently prevent such burdens that traumatize the souls of our young women and men. Moreover, we have barely begun to acknowledge those traumatized by default, support warriors whom also harbor considerable angst. This work then forefronts the relational components of how it is we come to identify illness and healing.

With this understanding I seek to frame vulnerability as an emotionally rich concept for pursuing relational healing. Where we are culturally inclined to relegate pain and anguish to the private sphere, our inculcation in war requires (demands) the response of a social body. Healing is both public and private in profoundly complex ways. I am thus compelled to ask, to listen with, for and from not only those bodies as they appear central to this dilemmas – our warriors – but also those bodies on the periphery – those that take up a space frequently silent in the deluge of attending to trauma in the aftermath of wars. I take up this question probing our cultural responses and understanding of what it means – beyond the rhetoric, beyond the infiltration of abundant texts that want to rally us all to “Support our Troops?”

The proposition I forward here, is one that lies within us. Drawing on our vulnerabilities, a wisdom (and great potentiality) resides in our most vulnerable moments; a vulnerability that implies great strength. This - is indeed a paradox not only for the warrior but for us as a nation. The possibility that strength lies in our fragility rests paradigmatically opposed to our understanding of living in a body where the reasoned mind subordinates the body.
To the wise and vulnerable in our midst.

“There is sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief and unspeakable love”

- Washington Irving.
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To the warriors who shared with me a piece of their homes, lives, and stories:
Each of you, in your own-right, has moved me and through me in words, in the heat of any given day, in tears shed and laughter that filled the cracks. The memories linger with me still. It is through those very moments and these culminating texts that I want to express my deep sense of love and gratitude. I do believe this is a just project and I hope you will know that your time, stories and lives have planted seeds that I pray will bloom far into the future. They are certainly blooming through me.

For my son, Levi: I may not have come to this project if it weren’t for you. From the onset, you filled my heart/arms. I was mesmerized by your tiny being; all of who you already were and all we might become. You, my beautiful son, my first born, brought me home to myself and to our future. You were the beginning of an unimaginable life. This work is dedicated to you with such deep and potent love - I’m not sure you’ll ever fully understand or grasp its measure. Such potent love harbors with my daughters, Chelsea and Ivy, who likewise followed, filling my being, and composing the center of my heart. Your joy, and laughter and sorrows have always inspired me forward. You are cherished beyond measure. For Erin, we are all blessed to have you join our family – Thank you for all of your support and interest. I cherish the laughter you bring in every encounter. For my husband Tom, I thank you well beyond that which you will know. You paid the bills, cleaned the house, and did the shopping. You took care of the insurance, cell phones, the gutters and the dogs. It went on and on with all those seemingly mundane tasks that ultimately allowed me the time to dig deeper and explore other realms. Your
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Mommy can you make me some of these? Levi is four and holding up Richard Scary’s “Big Book,” and it is a BiG book for his little arms and body. He’s pointing to General-Bear and wants me to make him a pair of epaulettes, those fringed shoulder accessories that serve to identify the rank of military officers. (Mmmm I pondered, though we’ve established a no weapons policy in the house - I never did say anything about uniforms).

Some 12 years later, an early spring evening finds us running out the door after dinner, after practice, after a full day of school and work. We are headed to the college fair at a local campus. Levi, his Dad, and I. I move from table to table, searching for any possibility and reaching for links, “how bout this one, or this?” I border desperation while Levi moseys. Not much passion happening for him here. I feel powerlessness and a growing dread rising up from my toes. He’s been talking to an army recruiter at school. I know and I don’t want to know… Do I have the courage to hear what I don’t want to hear? Tonight, the front porch light will harbor this moment. I am on the 2nd stair, taking my 3rd, darkness at my back, and the words come, “I wanna go into the military. That’s what I want to do.” BOOM in my chest. Fear. Dread. Angst. A silent scream rises up, and I choked it right back down. “NO, not you too.”

At 17, he and I are driving back from Parkersburg. We’ve picked up the tux for his first prom. Driving in the truck, sun bearing down, and its spring again. We pick up the conversation. Levi mistakes my fear for disdain, “You just don’t respect me - my choice.” My person pain feels hurt, powerlessness again. My mother pain wants to reach
out. In a blend of the two, I respond, “Oh, but it’s not you I don’t respect or trust, it’s the people who will make decisions about you, for you. Not you love. You are not a number to me. You are my blood and bones. And more - in this I can not protect you.” My words make little sense or difference to a soul who’s had this mission coursing through his 17 year old own bones and blood since, well, maybe before he was even here. I should’ve let you have all the guns and sugar you wanted. Maybe it’s my fault. You want what I didn’t want you to have. Except for me, it was never about “having,” it was about being. And I am left to reconcile here, now, your being. YOUR call not my own. How to reconcile our one-two bodies, our family. Of course I do not, cannot bring myself to speak this dense fear. Words won’t muster past my throat into the open.

This story—BOOM in my chest and heart—has a name. I fear like Frankie, you might not come back home. I fear you will die like my brother. If I say it, it will be possible, and I am not ready for that possibility. My fear is not yours. It’s mine to deal with. And right now (and still) I just want to press it down, down, down, down as hard as I can.

We negotiate. You do R.O.T.C. Go to college, and get a degree. Ok. Go to the military academy for 2 years, 17 hours away, and then finish up closer to home. At least you’ll be an officer, and have more options. Everyone is telling me I have nothing to worry about. The world is at peace. No imminent danger. Just worry in my bones. All this before 9/11 – and then ...worry begins to eak out through my marrow, to the surface of my skin. I am pressing this fear down, down, down. Worrying, will they take you now – out of school? And we can only wait. This war engages us from the periphery, pulls on us, pulls us in even as some of us resist.
Graduation. I cannot bring myself to give you Frankie’s watch. I’m afraid to - afraid it will bring the same, his own end.

You’re off to Germany and my new work out buddy is training to get back into the military. I press him, wanting to know and feel what pulls you, what pulls me. My new boss is an army reserve nurse. What pulls him? What propels him? People come into my life. Fodder with which I might reconcile my fears, your being, what is. Not that there is ever a reconciliation. I don’t know what it is. But I weed through it, pick at the pieces, try to find some nuggets that make sense. Nuggets I can hold, feel the weight of, that inform my struggling, staggering sensibilities. Help me love you more deeply and fear less.

Air. I can breathe again now at the sound of your voice, here on home turf. Even if this return is a farewell for your imminent departure into the depth of this war. Now it is only touching, holding. We cook together, laugh, talk, play games, I watch you. Burn you into my bones. Every moment is a memory waiting to happen.

In the doorway. In the dining room. Passages. It is time to go. Time to begin to say goodbye. I can only hold you and make you promise to come home to me. “You have to come home to me Levi. You have to come home.”

V o i d

The last call.

“Mom, I don’t know if I’m ready for this,” and this one breaks me, because I can not retract you from there to here. It is done. And worse I have to betray myself to pick you up and prepare you to go, “This is what you have been working for all this time Levi, you are ready.”

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On the sidewalk, walking down the street behind Frankie, he’s holding hands with Mary. White picket fence way over my head. Like a duckling I follow. I can see the back of Mary’s green mustang parked in front of our house. Sand sidewalk. At 18 years old, Aunt Mary Kearns says to me, “you know Marie, Elizabeth wasn’t Frankie’s favorite. You were. You used to follow him everywhere he went.” I think about the stories we tell and who we tell them for. How reality is shaped in the making and undoing of one another. How do stories sustain us? How do we live inside bodies that know stories that are never told?

Now, 40 years later, I ask Elizabeth what she remembers about the day we found out about Frankie. I have only tiny fragments of that August day in 1968. Hearing about it in the park from the boys on the street. All the talk. How did I get from there to home? The front door. Who told me, us? There is nothing solid about that time period. Staying at Aunt Marion’s. Staying at Mrs. Valarie’s house in summer, in spring. Elizabeth remembers everything and twice she has told me. But still I can’t remember, and I can hardly even remember what she told me. Is this memory the BOOM in my chest?

“Mom, I know you don’t want to hear this……….but we killed three Taliban guys today........ They’re bad guys........it was a good thing.” Honestly, I didn’t want to hear it. At the same time, I knew I must. Not merely in and through my profound love for him, not just as one person in his communal support system, but from one human being to another. One, who through action or inaction, I have asked and made way for his participation in this war...regardless of my own inability to change his mind.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

My son and his peers – young women, men, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons, mothers, fathers, friends, lovers, and partners – have profoundly invested their lives and souls in the making of others’ wars. As we publically “support our troops,” I contemplate the meaning and depth of support. What does it mean for us as a community, peoples, and nation to bear the bumper stickers, to wave our flags, to tout our blessings? I wonder what support means—in both abstract and embodied senses—during and in the aftermath of war. How do soldiers returning from combat experience their re-engagement with friends, families, co-workers, neighbors, and organized communal life? How do those of us who did not serve on the frontlines help warriors heal in the midst of psychological, social, and corporeal wounds? As we welcome home warriors or pay our respect to lives lost, we must ask—how can we help others and ourselves heal? Healing invokes broken and missing body parts, even as it requires deep attention to profound wounds of the soul.

These questions, for me, are deeply personal. I pose them in memory of my brother who never returned from the battlefields of Vietnam, and with deep concern for my son who recently arrived home from Afghanistan. My lived experiences in healing and trying to help others heal in the aftermath of conflict have given rise to my professional interest in this project. Even as I acknowledge my personal motivations in raising these questions, I am moved to consider them from a scholarly and political standpoint. As a health and organizational communication scholar with feminist and narrative sensibilities, I seek to develop a relational and communal understanding of healing that reaches beyond individual soldiers to acknowledge how suffering and
support occur in relational, institutional, and material contexts that take on meaning in and through symbolic interactions.

I believe that violence and trauma, like chronic and episodic illness, are calls for stories (see Frank, 1995). When faced with reintegration in home communities, soldiers must (re)create a sense of self in the aftermath of war, selves in relation to others in situated moments. The scripts that once helped them navigate their daily worlds may no longer seem viable. Settings that once were serene may now feel chaotic, even dangerous. Over the past ten years, narrative and feminist scholars across disciplines have explored how individuals narrate their lives toward therapeutic and palliative ends (e.g., Sharf & Vanderford, 2003; White & Epston, 1990). This is not surprising in light of the biomedical model’s tendency to care for individuals. Even so, soldiers do not re-story their lives or experience suffering and support in isolation. Individuals may experience memory loss or sensory disorientation, but post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its treatment (or lack thereof) are inherently relational experiences that shape and are shaped by discursive and material forces.

A soldier’s interactions with comrades, family, friends, co-workers, and health care providers all have the potential to affect her or his reintegration into society. Additionally, I agree with Michelle Obama who, throughout the 2008 presidential campaign, argued, “When soldiers go to war, families go to war.” Wives, sisters, brothers, friends, pastors, and neighbors are affected by the trauma and violence associated with war, and they are also faced with the task of making sense of loss and change. Too often narrative scholars fail to acknowledge the relational and dialogic nature of storying self and other in times of loss and pain (see critiques by Beck, Harter,
& Japp, 2005). Drawing on my post-structural feminist sensibilities, I explored the relational nature of healing in the aftermath of war by acknowledging that we experience suffering and support in relational and institutional contexts that are composed of inter-related master scripts (e.g., what it means to be a tough soldier; what it means to support our troops; what it means to be a mother), material resources (e.g., third party payer endorsement of treatment for mental illness), and power structures that both enable and constrain (e.g., military hierarchy, biomedical models of health and healing).

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the nature of health concerns associated with 21st century conflicts involving U.S. forces. Chapter Two overviews my post-structural feminist sensibilities and research questions. Chapter Three outlines my general research design. Traversing across personal, social and political spheres, chapters four and five thematically harbor issues of embodiment and identity as they emerged through the course of inquiry. Finally chapter six pulls threads from each of the subsequent chapters to address the research questions that guided this project. This chapter discusses the implications and limitations of the project as well as potential avenues of inquiry.

21st Century Wars on Terror: Emergent Health Concerns

Soldiers deployed to fight in Operation Iraqi Freedom I and II and Operation Enduring Freedom work under the greatest of stressors to keep themselves and others alive while bearing witness to death and tragedy. Age acceleration is a psychological condition acknowledging that, in the course of a life, it is most often not until the end of one’s life that a person will witness the death of so many peers. This sort of loss ages the
person beyond her or his years. However, it is understood in Ho Chunks (Winnebago) communities that those who survive war have survived not only the trauma of witnessing a significant amount of death, but much loss and waste as well. In discussing healing that comes from being welcomed back into the community, an Elder explained that, “as a Winnebago, we honor our veterans for their bravery and because by seeing so much death on the battle field they truly know the greatness of life” (Holm, 1986, p. 246). For countless soldiers returning now from Iraq and Afghanistan, and those with whom I met, “the greatness of life,” was often elusive and frequently peripheral.

The combination of medical and technological advances in warfare in addition to the persistence of guerilla warfare has resulted in unparalleled rates of physical and psychological trauma for this generation of American veterans—and their families and loved ones. As of February 10, 2009, a total of 5,529 warriors have been killed between both Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Of these losses, 3,831 people were killed in action (KIA) while 1,054 represent “non-hostile deaths.” A staggering 33,724 women and men have been wounded in action (WIA). 18,319 wounded soldiers returned to combat within 72 hours (Department of Defense, 2009). Given these statistics it is clear that, “an unprecedented number of the [visibly physical] wounded, 90 percent are surviving their injuries” (Friedman, 2005, p. 1290). For these veterans, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is yet another highly complex injury to contend with. Indeed, Loree Sutton, Director of the Defense Centers of

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1 Ho Chunks, "People of the Sacred Language." This tribe has always occupied lands in Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, South Dakota and Minnesota.

2 Updated weekly by the Department of Defense.
Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, positioned the counterinsurgency-type operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as, “one of the most psychologically corrosive environments known to warfare” (Krusell, 2008, p. 5).

The scope of physical and psychological trauma for warriors is indeed a labyrinthine of trauma. Commonly referred to as invisible wounds by lay, medical, and military communities, psychological traumas are highly pervasive and pose an intensely complex array of issues that are most often identified as: PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Major Depression, and Military Sexual Trauma (MST) (Corbet, 2007; Litz, 2007; Williamson & Mulhall, 2009). It is the suffering that accompanies physical and psychological wounds that concern this project. Of concern is how both suffering and healing are intricately coiled (constructed) in and through diverse physiological, discursive, and material bodies. For instance, TBI frequently escapes concentrated medical attention in part because TBI and PTSD share similar symptoms. Moreover, a traumatic event such as MST can be complicated by combat conditions that can induce PTSD (or vice versa). Additionally, extended and multiple deployments specifically unique to these wars further confound and delay the healing process for warriors.

In the Spring of 2007, tours of duty were extended from 12 to 15 months, and troops faced multiple deployments. Shortly after Levi’s departure to Afghanistan in April of 2007, we began to hear about extended deployment. Once confirmed, it was no longer a story in the paper; it was him and it was us. Of significant concern is that, “more than 638,000 troops have deployed more than once” (Williamson & Mulhall, 2009, p. 6). Thus, the combined impact of multiple traumas, over the course of multiple deployments for Iraqi and Afghanistan troops, has resulted in significant physical and psychological
wounds. In terms of numbers, the most recent studies suggest that of the 1.7 million veterans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, “about half a million are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD], depression, or Traumatic Brain Injury, [TBI]” (p. 17). More specifically, a 2008 comprehensive study of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in the U.S revealed that, “14 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans screen positive for PTSD, 14 percent screen positive for major depression, and 19 percent of those surveyed screen positive for a probable TBI” (p. 5). Finally a recent study by the VA suggested that of those women seeking assistance from VA clinic, “reported experiencing sexual trauma during military service” (Fouse, 2008, ¶ 1). Moreover, those who reported MST, “were more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition than those who did not report MST” (¶ 3).

PTSD is understood as an anxiety disorder brought on by catastrophic life experiences (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2009). PTSD is manifested when circumstances threaten the safety and well being of a person, particularly where lack of control and uncertainty prevail. Events such as natural disasters, rape, military combat, and childhood abuse or neglect can lead to PTSD (Department of Defense, 2009; National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2009; VA National Center for PTSD, 2009). According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (2009), combat warriors’ symptoms can include: hallucinations, intrusive nightmares and strong recollections, vivid feelings of events happening again, and persistent avoidance of associations with the traumatic events including thoughts, feelings, places, conversations or people. Increased arousal for returning soldiers can lead to sleeplessness, or difficulty maintaining sleep periods, and increased agitation. Williamson and Mulhall (2009)
identified the symptoms of *major depression* as including, “persistent sadness or irritability, changes in sleep or appetite, difficulty concentrating, and feelings of guilt or hopelessness” (p. 3).

Referred to by health care providers as the “signature injury of the Iraq War,” TBIs are induced by contact with explosive blasts. In these wars, these blasts primarily stem from Improvised Exclusionary Devices (IEDs), and rocket propelled grenades (Singer, 2008). TBIs can happen not only via direct hits to the head, but also through the forces of the blast itself. In interviews with researchers, Singer suggested, “forces unique to blasts [such as] massive pressure wave, the electromagnetic pulse and the light, heat, and sound from the explosions may ravage the brain in ways that haven’t been fully documented” (p. 56). The symptoms for TBI also can include, “emotional problems; vision, hearing or speech problems; dizziness; sleep disorders; or memory loss” (p. 3). Like major depression and MST, TBIs share similar symptoms to PTSD. Indeed, “44 percent of soldiers who had lost consciousness on the battlefield met criteria for PTSD, compared to 16 percent of those same brigades who suffered other injuries” (p. 58). Alarmingly, 20-40 percent of troops re-deploying still suffered symptoms of past concussions (Williamson & Mulhall, 2009). And though the DOD boasts of its efforts at reducing casualties, according to Williamson & Mulhall, “the ratio of behavioral health care workers to troops deployed dropped from 1 in 387 in 2004 to 1 in 734 in 2007” (p. 2).

Importantly, non-traditional battlefields and combat strategies are increasingly incorporating the skills of women into the mechanics of military warfare. According to a special investigative report by David Brancaccio and Maria Hinjosa, there are 26,000
women deployed in U.S. military combat around the world (PBS’s Weekly NOW, 2007). Women veterans comprise, “15 % of active military, 20% of new recruits, 17% or reserve and National Guard and 13% of OIF/OEF troops” (Westrup, 2006, Power pt. slide #3). Women are not only experiencing more combat trauma—many are fighting two simultaneous battles. A military blog on PTSD, noted, “In 2005, 2,374 military sexual assaults were reported. From 2004 – 2005, 3,038 investigations were conducted, and to date, 329 perpetrators were court-marshaled (10%)” (Blog, 2008). Hinjosa and Brancaccio reported that in these cases, the majority of the perpetrators are peers and that some have also been identified as commanding officers. The culture of military rule and hierarchy further compound the stress some of these women endure. According to Suri, Lind, Kashner, Borman & Petty (2004), women who are raped by peers and/or superior ranking individuals may be “unable to leave their duty stations without permission and they are subject to disciplinary action, including court marshal” (p. 750).

The gendered nature of trauma, suffering, and healing is significant. The hegemonic masculinity associated with the military image is one of strength, honor, and perseverance. We are reminded of ads that tout such ideals as “An Army of One” or “Only a Few Good Men.” Even so, soldiers’ wounds expose them and us to profound vulnerabilities. For soldiers in the military, admitting to PTSD can be paramount to ending their military careers, and admitting defeat. With regards to suicide, male veterans are more than twice as likely to die by suicide as those men with no military service. Overall, the suicide rates among veterans of these wars have not only increased every year since their onset, but reached a 27 year high in 2008 (Williamson & Mulhall, 2009).
Summary

In light of these health concerns and trajectories, how do female and male soldiers experience societal re-integration after overseas deployment? From the mountainous terrains of Afghanistan and the barren deserts of Iraq to the hills of Appalachia, how do veterans cope with the physical and psychological dimensions of shrapnel wounds amidst the daily routines and settings of their lives? Reporters and politicians have begun to ask these questions. I enter these conversations as a post-structural feminist scholar interested in discourses of healing and organizing processes. In the next chapter, I highlight my theoretical sensibilities and research questions that guided this project.
CHAPTER TWO: POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINIST THEORY AND PRAXIS

Poststructural feminism demands that we interrogate how discourse works to construct social realities. Specifically, we are called to probe at the confluence of institutions, structural hierarchies and publics as meanings emerge, are contested, and reconstructed through time (Fraser, 1989). Lupton’s (1995) definition of discourse offers a useful framework:

Discourse, in this usage, can be described as a pattern of words, figures, of speech, concepts, values, and symbols. A discourse is a coherent way of describing and categorizing the social and physical worlds. Discourses gather around an object, person, social group or event of interest, providing a means of “making sense” of that object, person . . . all discourses are textual, or expressed in texts, inter-textual, drawing upon other texts and their discourses to achieve meaning, and contextual, embedded in historical, political and cultural settings.

(p. 20)

Additionally, we are further called to attend to those material constructs as manifested through the uses and distribution of power (Foucault, 1972/1980; Fraser, 1989; Weedon, 1987). Poststructural feminism situates discourse as central to the process of questioning whose voice is/will be heard and, more importantly, who and what are silenced in the process.

Perhaps it could be said that feminist efforts have their roots in vulnerability. Women in particular understand that the world has not been a safe place for feminine minds and/or bodies (See, Ahmed, 2004, Behar, 2004). We have only to consider the contemporary plight of the vast majority of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo
who are caught in the battle for material resources, their bodies and livelihoods brutalized while the world looks on. The forces of the Taliban in Afghanistan have been equally, appallingly, invasive in attempts to enact power and control over the very being of women. Here in the U.S., “women, who account for approximately eighty-five percent of domestic abuse victims each year…. Nearly one-third of American women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives, and each year as many as 324,000 women experience domestic violence during their pregnancy” (Feinstein, 2004, p. 1). Clearly, women throughout the world understand the vulnerability of living in a female body.

It is indeed vulnerability on multiple fronts that has inspired the rise of feminist efforts. Behar (2004) suggested that in order to understand and find strength in vulnerability incurred in ‘being,’ we might explore and then, “make room for the more elusive border positioning of girls and women” (p. 131). Living in bodies marked as feminine, (one emerging through both an historical and contemporary feminist agenda), vulnerability could be understood as a conglomeration of the personal, political, and social. To be vulnerable (and vulnerable in illness) a person is at once a subject, positioned and enacted in and through multiple hierarchical structures. Yet where power exudes, we know, particularly as feminists, resistance inevitably emerges (Foucault, 1980; Fraser, 1989). In a culture that demands individualistic response and strength to (a perceived) weakness, illness often dislocates us from our understanding and relationships with self and other (Goffman, 1963/1986; Lindemann-Nelson, 2001). Therefore, if we were to understand vulnerability as a source of strength, a great potential for healing, the words of Butler (2004) become an imperative; “we cannot understand vulnerability as
deprivation” (p. 31). A poststructural feminist experience, wisdom, and episteme allows for this. Specifically, a poststructural feminist analysis demands that we account for the discursive configurations of power, control, and resistance particularly as they work to confine individuals through subject positioning.

I organize this Chapter around four key arguments: (1) the need to transcend binaries and imagine realms that enlarge subject positions; (2) discourses, knowledge, power and materiality; (3) mobilizing vulnerability as a resource for healing; and (4) storytelling as primary signifying processes.

Transcending Binaries: Imagining Realms to Enlarge Subject Positions

Post-structural feminists remain interested in how subject positions arise, are sustained, and/or are disrupted in and through discourse (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). “Language, in the form of a historically specific range of ways of giving meaning to social reality,” argued Weedon (1987), “offers us various discursive positions, including modes of femininity and masculinity, through which we can consciously live our lives” (p. 25). In the past twenty years, poststructural feminists have enlarged their understanding of signifying practices beyond language to include other meaning-making resources including visual imagery and embodied movement (e.g., Ellingson, 2008). A broader imperative of poststructural feminist work, then, is how do cultural practices (e.g., artistic forms and commodities such as yellow ribbons) challenge men and women to intersubjectively (re)construct their identities? Additionally, poststructural feminists acknowledge the fluid and indeterminate process of subject positioning. Weedon continued:
The political significance of decentring the subject and abandoning the belief in essential subjectivity is that it opens up subjectivity to change. In making our subjectivity the product of the society and culture within which we live, feminist poststructuralism insists that forms of subjectivity are produced historically and change with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them.

(pp. 31-32)

In short, poststructural feminists focus on the indeterminate symbolic processes through which some subject positions are legitimized and privileged while others are disqualified or denied expression.

Concomitantly, poststructural feminists work to resist hierarchies that often accompany binary thinking or dichotomies. Binaries such as reason/emotion, leisure/labor, and private/public discursively emerge and are intertwined hierarchically with masculine and feminine subject positions. Each has a claim to power, value and position in relation with and – in opposition to - the other. Importantly, we do not understand these qualities in isolation. They come to us already laden with meaning; in the subtext, gender is bound to each. It is through multiple (macro and micro) and complex discourses that power, authority, and positionalities institute relational inequalities. Male typically is equated with strength, control, instrumental logic, and master of public sphere. Female, on the other hand, has connotations of weakness (‘the weaker sex’), highly emotional and out of control (e.g., PMS), and ‘mistress’ of the home. While I would suggest these specific binaries lie at the heart of our communicative understanding, others emerge in and through them each.
Within the structures of both the military and the biomedical model, hierarchies abound. The biomedical model has been grounded in, indeed emanated from, institutionally designed concepts (discourse) that define and isolate the well (productive) body (Lupton 2003), from the sickly/damaged (un-productive) body. The body is further subjugated and dichotomized in an episteme that specifies and limits our knowledge of male/female forms (Laqueur, 1992; Tuana, 1990) whereby reason trumps emotion, and ultimately a premier social and historical emphasis dichotomizes the public from the private. In each of these examples, the latter has been positioned as subordinate to the former (See Grosz, 1994). Indeed Mckerrow (1998) introduced the, “notion of corporeal rhetoric that merges binary oppositions into an organic whole prior to lived manifestation as gender or sex” (p. 319). Vulnerability might be observed in the space between and around. Perhaps vulnerability might be alternatively perceived as residing in a realm of interplay; a tapestry of cognition and emotion. The interplay allows for re-visioning the perception of the subordinate counterparts as significant if not principal.

With this understanding I seek to frame vulnerability as an emotionally rich concept. When we are vulnerable, often fear, anxiety and uncertainly resonate. Indeed Charon (2006) named the emotions of, “shame, blame, and fear [that] erect the most unbreachable divides between doctors and patients” (p. 30). Vulnerable beings must trust in the ability of individual persons and multiple institutions to help us in ways we cannot help ourselves. At the same time our identity with self and others must be redefined (re-negotiated) in the process of reintegration. These are by no means exhaustive terms or descriptions for understanding vulnerability, but rather serve to illuminate the palpability of emotion and reason as one body. Notably that, “emotion is both a bodily and social
phenomenon; it is through bodies that people feel and act” (Lyon, 1996 p. 69). From this perspective, emotion can, “provide an alternative analytical framework that both challenges assumptions regarding the division between biology and being, and provides a new perspective on the interrelationship of these different orders of phenomena” (p. 69 emphasis in original). Significantly, then, where we primarily imagine this vulnerable body as one in need of our care, the warrior is poised to teach us. Buddhist Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh (2007) suggested:

Veterans are the light at the tip of the candle, illuminating the way for the whole nation. If veterans can achieve awareness, transformation, understanding, and peace, they can share with the rest of society the realities of war. And [perhaps] they can teach us how to make peace with ourselves and each other. (¶ 9)

Thus, the returning warrior is a body that brings attention to, and more aptly seeks to reconcile our collective vulnerabilities.

The history of our relationship with the binaries of emotion/reason and body/mind can be traced back to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Grosz, 1994; Tuana, 1992). Their influence on the development of knowledge production has maintained a stronghold on contemporary culture and the institutions that define them. Grosz (1994) explained, “the body has been regarded as a source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason” (p. 5). Yet the communicative, corporeal body is indeed an emotional body. Importantly, emotions are communicative structures as well. Emotions, “are performative and they involve speech acts, which depend on past histories, at the same time they generate effects” (Ahmed, 2004 p. 13). Recognizing a place for vulnerability as an interplay that involves reason and emotion is a necessary act
for imagining a non-linear, non-bifurcated realm of experience. Specifically, if we desire to transcend the reason/emotion and mind/body binaries, the language of a ‘realm’ might allow us to experience and contemplate the complexities that emerge in the midst of both rather than the privileging of one over the other that accompanies linear and hierarchical thinking. The corporeal body can be understood as an emotional body – physical and spiritual – intertwining all at once. Notably, “emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds” (p. 12). McKerrow (1998) suggested that bodies are, “trapped inside cultures and exhibit those acts promoted within the culture – they are within this context, neither inherently male nor female, neither inherently reason-based, nor emotion based” (p. 319). Bodies and beings become what we need them to be. What, I wonder, would we begin to hear and to learn if we were able to listen for both (as one)?

Our understanding of the public/private sphere generally calls for the expression of emotions as private affairs. Yet, critically, feelings, “are immediate and which may involve ‘damage’ on the skin surface, are not simply feelings that one has, but feelings that open bodies to others” (Ahmed, 2004, p.15). The public/private divide is dense with contingent dualities. Male/female is incorporated into the public/private sphere with all the implications of gender, in addition to the histories of emotion/reason and a response to self/other. Butler also suggested that, “the body has its invariable public dimension, constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere; my body is and is not mine” (p. 26). We are want to relegate pain and anguish to the private sphere, yet our inculcation in war requires the response of a social body. Healing is both public and private in profoundly complex ways. Suicide and PTSD are often understood as personal, private matters requiring an individualistic response. Yet as our highly medicalized systems of
healthcare become increasingly efficient, the locus of responsibility for health care rests with individuals. An individualistic (private sphere) response serves to obscure inherent relationships between larger social and economic structures (James & Gabe, 1996; Lupton, 2003). Clearly, the high suicide rates, in addition to the vast number of vets suffering from PTSD, demand a public address not only in terms of the rates and numbers, but specifically in the case of war.

In imagining a realm by which we might address healing in the aftermath of war (for these particular vets) –a poststructural feminist lens calls us to recognize how binaries and subject positions are discursively manifested in and through hierarchical structures. Moving across historically bounded binaries (and concatenations) such as male/female, emotion/reason, public/private, and self/other, Ahmed (2004) cautioned:

Crucially, responding to pain depends on speaking about pain, and such speech acts are the condition for the formation of a ‘we,’ made up of different stories of pain that cannot be reduced to a ground, identity, or sameness. Stories of pain can be ‘shared’ only when we assume they are not the same story, even if they are connected, and allow us to make connections. (p. 174)

As communication scholars we are called to account for the ways in which knowledge structures are produced, reified, and/or re-produced. Rather succinctly, Grosz (1994) summed up the relationship between discourses, subject positions, and the binary framing of experience by noting, “corporality can be seen as the material condition of subjectivity, and the subordinated term in the opposition, can move to its rightful place in the very heart of the dominant term, mind” (p.103).
Discourses, Knowledge, Power, and Materiality

Poststructuralist theories are grounded in the knowledge that signifying practices shape our understanding of the world. It is through language and other symbolic resources that we construct both what is possible and what are actual forms of social organizations. Where discourse arises from and facilitates the construction of materiality, a culmination of social, political, and institutional agendas compete and collide (Weedon, 1987/1997). Poststructural feminism extends the goals of poststructuralists to further analyze how it is that discourse reflects and reinscribes gendered ideologies, but also resists hegemonic patterns. Poststructural feminists seek to pursue those discursive formations as they ambulate through social structures, take hold, create meaning, shift and reemerge over time and texts. Critical to this endeavor is the understanding that discourse acts as an amalgamation of multiple and complex power relations.

As previously discussed, binaries such as male/female, public/private, and emotion/reason simultaneously demonstrate power relations through diverse and multifarious texts. Conglomerations of power shift through micro and macro practices of all our social structures: in a gendered body, in the privacy of our homes, in a third redeployment, in a shrapnel laden body, whether she is trying to sleep between the wheels of trucks in a stopped –for –the-night-convoy in Iraq or a hospital bed without a limb in Baghdad, or the deciding to live another day. Power relations shift our very being; we are always in the process of re-emerging through signifying practices.

Discourses shift in and through political, juridical, and economic institutional structures. At the junctures of race, class, gender, and numerous other lived differences, poststructural feminists call for explicit attention to cultural issues of power, articulation,
and authority (e.g., Dow & Wood, 2006; Harter, Kirby, Edwards, & McClanahan, 2005). It is in this confluence that we discover the ways in which the strength of these relationships works to signify meaning; meaning, which, is often mis/understood as the Truth. It is in and through the process of subject positioning that such ‘truths’ serves to define and redefine our understanding of self, other, and society. Here Foucault (1972/1980) urged us to understand that as truth and power are manifestations of our own discourse and, given our societal propensities for hierarchies, there is a “constancy and intensity” in our pursuit and re-articulation of ‘truths’ that keeps power circulating. (p. 93). Foucault explained:

We are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we must speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes, and rewards its pursuits…. We must produce truth as we must produce wealth, indeed we must produce truth in order to produce wealth in the first place (emphasis in original. p.93).

Social meanings make possible or deter particular forms of organizing. Discourses are at once the medium and outcome of institutions and individual subjectivities. In this way, poststructural feminists further acknowledge that organizing patterns emerge from and are contested in signifying practices (Buzzanell, 1994, 1995; Buzzanell & Liu, 2005). For this project, political constructs, a military complex, the biomedical model, and pharmaceutical industries converge, forming vast ‘matrices of power’ (Foucault, 1990/1978). Fraser (1989) argued, “Struggles over cultural meanings
and social identities are struggles for cultural hegemony, that is, for the power to construct authoritative definitions of social situations and legitimate interpretations of social needs” (p. 6). The discursive configurations emanating from these wars have already begun to pivot and shift our understanding and response to war and healing. A poststructural feminist purview demands that we account for those meanings, question authority, and continue to offer alternative ways of seeing, being, and healing in this world.

The discourses of combat and MST induced PTSD, in addition to the extraordinarily high rates of suicides among OIF/OEF, exist in the midst of economic (e.g., Department of Defense profit-making), socio-political (e.g., support for the war, support for veterans), and the military and biomedical models that are rife with subject positions inherent in the living realities of mind/body, reason/emotion, male/female. Critically important to this endeavor is the recognition that such discourses offer various interpretations of needs; they serve to both define and guide the development of policies, services, and individuals’ identities (Trethewey, 1997). How these needs are, and will continue to be, interpreted continue to shift as communities, institutions, and warriors persevere in re-defining themselves. In his sensitivity and commitment to the nature of healing, Madrona (1997) provided critical wisdom: “illness is a major life experience, and like any such experience, it must be handled gently. People are as open to being traumatized in these moments as they are to transcending illness and being healed” (p. 143). As poststructural feminist theorists, we are not only bound to question whose needs are being addressed in discourse but to acknowledge the historically contingent and contextual nature of exactly who is defining those needs (Naples, 2003; Weedon, 1987).
These shifts inevitably lead us to address the material consequences of our collective meaning-making. With an emphasis on the critical junctures of discourse, meaning making, and socio-political/institutional structures, poststructural feminism draws attention to the materiality of communicative practices (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Turner, 1987; Weedon, 1987). We are called to query how we understand what we understand and what are the ramifications for doing so. What do we need to understand and bring to bear to manifest the necessary resources for healing OIF/OEF warriors, for understanding PTSD, and what has driven so many of these soldiers to take their own lives? When I think about deep structures of power and authority – and I wonder what does it mean to be warrior with a mission to heal? How does that ‘mission’ manifest across genders? Under whose authority is individual healing (healing as a command), and then how does the organization and community uphold a commitment to healing with and for the warrior? Asking these questions serves as an accounting of ontological and epistemological practices that manifest as material outcomes.

Material outcomes are further textualized on the bodies of women and men, and on communities in and through the policies and available resources that direct our ways of living and being in the world. For example, how much of our reliance on the pharmaceutical industry will direct the ways in which we continue to approach healing? How much of our conceptions and propensities to bifurcate and alienate will influence the solutions we seek? Do we – from the very micro – to the intuitive macros – have the courage to risk a vulnerable self in an attempt to seek new ways of being in the world? I wonder what new ‘truths’ we will rely on, how we seek, and what will emerge. Indeed, Alvord & Van Pelt, (1999) reminded us that “while epidemiologists were looking of the
resolution in their microscopes, the hataalii had looked to the macro level- disturbed natural patterns in the universe” (p. 121).

Across diverse cultures, contexts and institutions, countless ways of knowing, being and healing have long been “disqualified in the hierarchy of knowledge and sciences” (Foucault, 1972/1980, p. 82). In terms of responding to the poststructural feminist call to imagining new ways of being in the world, perhaps it might be better surmised as newer ways for us to be. In turning to those subjugated knowledges, I wonder what ontological and epistemological alternatives we might draw on to discover how it is we can approach healing. Tolman & Reedy (1998) argued that, “the highest quality of services will come only when professionals accept that barriers to care utilization3 lie within themselves, not within their patients or their patient’s culture” (p. 383). The challenge is both in letting go and hanging on – the ideals embedded in creativity and constraint (Harter, Japp & Beck, 2005). Madrona (1997), an American Indian M.D., spoke to both the difficulty and the importance of this ideal when he suggested, “healing is messy and confusing… there is commotion and disorder. Mess. But from this comes new life, new being….before you can become a healer you must make friends with chaos” (p. 98). In this, I am reminded of the condition of and ravages of PTSD and equally inspired to think about what such wisdom can offer us, with other eyes toward healing.

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3 New word/concept for that refers to the ways in which in this American Indians fail/refuse to seek out the practices and options offer via biomedical model.
Beyond Materiality: Mobilizing Vulnerability as a Resource for Healing

“Loss has made a tenuous ‘we’ of us all” (Butler, 2004, p. 20)

The notion of healing, from a western perspective, immediately invokes a vast array of institutional structures and technological forces. Warriors returning from war are all at once engulfed in bureaucratic systems, policies, rules and countless regulations. Bureaucratic organizations and those instrumental forms of reasoning grounded in hierarchical principles have largely influenced (and continue to) our collective concepts and responses to health and healing. Yet, in the aftermath of war, the needs of our returning warriors demand that we account for both the personal and the political aspects of health and healing. It is indeed imperative we recognize that, be it the medical field (dominated by the bio-medical model) or the military, these organizations are, as Mumby (1993) suggested, “political.” Specifically, institutions are political, “in the sense that the complex systems of discursive and nondiscursive practices that make them up reflect the struggle to fix and institutionalize the dominance of certain groups and meaning structures over others” (p. 21). In matters of war, health, and healing, diverse historical, political and socio-economic factors compete amidst contemporary struggles for position, voice, and the power “to decide.” Clearly, “organizational boundaries are permeable and in flux … the dividing line between organizations and society cannot easily be drawn” (Mumby & Stohl, 1996, p. 65). Our innately “irrational” bodies subsist in the midst of medical, military, and governmental institutions. The complexities of a social body further complicate an episteme ensconced in institutionalized instrumental rationalities. How we view, approach, and respond to veterans, and then mobilize resources for healing in the aftermath of war, is indeed a byzantine endeavor.
Initially, public support for contemporary U.S. fought wars in the Middle East has been fervent in culturally bound symbolic displays – those countless banners, yellow ribbons, car magnets and American flags. As Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman (1996) suggested, such symbolic representations are equally complex, as they are also grounded in historical and political interpretations. In “supporting our troops” we understand that young women and men serve to uphold American honor, to “protect” and commit (with their lives) our national integrity and individual freedoms. Traversing the country, these symbols function both to unite and solidify a stance of support; they (may unwittingly) link us with larger institutional goals/projects even as they aid in symbolizing home, family, community, and country. The aim of critical theorists and feminists alike is to examine the symbolic representations as not only relational, the meaning between us, but to further critique micro and macro relationships of power within social communities (Buzzanell, 1994; Foucault, 1980/1972-1977; Fraser, 1989; Weedon, 1987/1997). A critical value lies in probing the development and formation of knowledge as processes of production (Deetz, 2005). As Mani (2003/1989) reflected, “moving between different configurations of meaning and power can prompt different modes of knowing” (p. 367). Fundamentally, we may understand and respond to the ideal of unity. However, “moving between different configurations of meaning and power” will undoubtedly require different configurations of knowledge.

For all our public “support,” grieving lives lost and attending to the profound physical and emotional wounds of returning warriors has largely been relegated to the private realm. We have a long history of meritocracy and individualistic responses to socio-communal problems. Embedded within the culture at large and military in
particular are the discursive, symbolic renderings of “pull yourself up by the bootstraps,” “just get over it,” “be a man” or don’t act like such a girl.” Moreover, we have firm beliefs about what is appropriate – expected in public and private realms. Consider the prohibition against viewing flag-draped coffins returning “home,” regarded by many as a political ploy (National Security Archive, 2008; Tyson, 2009). Fears of a “weak America” led politicians to worry over continued public support for these wars. We feared another betrayal of our soldiers, in the rejection of a war. Like many, Butler (2004) articulated an ardent concern for us all, and communication scholars in particular, when she argued that “to produce what will constitute the public sphere, however, is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see” (p. xx). Importantly, she emphasized, “The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not” (emphasis added, p. xx). Similarly, this speaks to Mumby and Stohl’s (1996) “problematic of voice” in organizations where the concept of who “can” speak and/or make “legitimate” claims is a matter of power, authority, and position. Relegating the discursive renderings of voice (e.g., flag bearing coffins) to a private sphere not only exemplifies the power to control what “can” be discussed and viewed, but perhaps more profoundly, we are called to question what more is lost in the silencing of caskets.

Here, I want to extend a specifically politically framed maneuver—the prohibition against viewing the homecoming warriors in flag-draped coffins—to consider the ramifications of the politics of health and healing. Everyday healing is indeed both a personal and political endeavor (See Lupton, 1995, 2003; Frank, 1995, 2004). Relegating
these images to the private sphere not only serves to minimize our contact with the harsh realities and costs of war, but also inhibits opportunities to grieve, acknowledge, and honor loss as a collective nation/culture. I imagine this as a disruption in the healing process of our warriors, families, and a culture at large. Lyons (1996) explained, “It is through emotion that social and historical processes and individual experiences are linked …this social nature of emotion has implications for how we understand its importance both in human experience and human agency in social processes” (p. 70). What, I wonder, are the cultural consequences of relegating grief and grieving to the privacy of homes, and the celebration of warrior’s heroism to monuments? Importantly, “the concept of emotion enables a theoretical articulation of the social structural context, subjectivity, and bodily being … its social ontology is crucial to the constitution of emotional being in the individual” (p. 71). Thus, I want to more deeply probe our contemporary response to healing in the aftermath and in the midst of war. The immense attention to issues of PTSD in addition to extraordinarily high rates of suicide4 experienced among returning vets (USA TODAY, March 25, 2009), poses a unique and timely opportunity to re-examine our traditional responses to health and imagine alternative possibilities for healing. More aptly stated, we need, I believe, as Butler (2004) suggested, “an insurrection at the level of ontology” (p.33). Perhaps it is because I

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4 In an article in USA Today, March 25, 2009, author Alan Gomez wrote, “an epidemic of suicides, which has killed almost as many U.S. service members this year as combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan combined”
have been moved to both grieve and to witness a community of grief at the Vietnam Memorial Wall that I too, am struck with a sense of incompleteness.

FRANK E. LITCHFIELD. Barely breathing, I stood before his name. Just stared for a long time. So much to wonder over... and when I opened myself, kneeling down with carbon and paper (If you ask, any of the volunteers will provide you with those tools) I started rubbing – FRANK E. LITCHFIELD – across the middle, and then FRANK E. FRANK E. over and thru it, and over and over again – The grief struck me like a predator from behind. A gut wrenching sobbing erupted –oblivious to place, space and time; I am that little girl voice inside my head shouting, “Franky! Franky!” - me rubbing FRANK E. FRANK E. over and thru it, over and over again ... It was a monstrous fury, welled up from an unknown dept (depth)... way down deep ... When finally I turned and leaned my back against the wall – stunned - not quite spent, not quite present... I found he was sitting there, a volunteer squatting beside me– silent. His presence suggested/offered protection and witness. This presence marked a knowing, knowing that it was a painful, staggering, unanticipated grief. “One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one’s own deliberate plan, one’s own project, one’s own knowing and choosing” (Butler, 2004 p. 21).

Narrowing my focus specifically to how soldiers and community members heal in the wake of trauma and war, I take up an issue of vulnerability, particularly as we juxtapose this with the ideal and illusion of control (embodied by instrumental
rationalities) inherent in organizational structures. Three texts reveal themselves to me as important in this endeavor. These texts are important enough to acknowledge their titles here. *The Vulnerable Observer. Anthropology that Breaks your Heart.* Ruth Behar (1996) explained that the essays composing the text were written over a nine year period, “when her spirit and her writing” were, “nurtured by friends and colleagues in many fields” (p. xi). *The Renewal of Generosity. Illness, Medicine and How to Live.* Arthur Frank (2004) conveyed his ideal of “fundamental medicine [as] face to face encounters between people who are suffering bodily ills and other people who need both the skills to relieve this suffering and the grace to welcome those who suffer” (p. 1). *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence.* Judith Butler (2004) explained that the essays in this text were all written after September 11, 2001, “in response to the condition of heightened vulnerability an aggression that followed from those events” (p. xi).

Behar (1996) spoke to the challenge and fear of writing vulnerability; “to write vulnerability is to open Pandora’s box. Who can say what will come flying out” (p. 19). Here she alludes to the uncertainty and fear of vulnerability; a fear that marks our collective consciousness. In one essay she shared a story of her grandfather’s funeral whereby, after the visitors left the church, the rabbi gathered the family around to place hands on the coffin. In that space, he invited members take the opportunity to ask for or to grant forgiveness. Here Behar tells us of how her father wept, how she too wept for her father and for herself. She wept for all that was lost in a difficult relationship with this man. This loss she suddenly understood as alienation. The three were not only alienated from each other but it marked a presence between them in the lives they shared. In the act of forgiveness, (acknowledging their vulnerability) their pain was opened to the present
and was revealed in that moment. It became a space where their humanity and loss were acknowledged and shared. They were changed.

Both Frank (2004) and Butler (2004) draw on the philosopher Levinas (1906-1996) in their effort to articulate alternative responses to understanding the self, other, humanity, and healing. Where Frank’s response would offer an exploration and re-articulation (conclusion) in the term “generosity,” Butler speaks to the ideal of vulnerability. Here I would define Frank’s terminology as “active.” Generosity is something we can (choose to) give, to offer the other. He also refers to the notion of medical (institutional) providers as “hosts.” Here, ‘hosts’ also implies a measure of authority, of power, of a hierarchical structure. I will do for you. I (can) offer generosity.

OR even as he suggests “should;” “medical workers have the responsibility to be hosts, not just providers. Their actions can positively affect social expectations” (p. 25). In this sense the power lies in the institutional framework to do, to provide. This stance seems less a shared vulnerability, and more of an ability to make way for another’s vulnerability.

Vulnerability is often misunderstood as a form, or act, of passivity. From this stance, the perception that one must relinquish control or power over another heightens resistance to such an act. And yet, vulnerability does require that we surrender ourselves; we must expose ourselves to and with others. In a way, this is what Butler asks of us; she asks us to choose – to be actively vulnerable that we might more deeply understand ourselves and the other. “Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure” (Butler, 2004 p. 20). And, while
Frank does not frame the term “vulnerability,” I believe there is a “vulnerable self” that exists in the act of “generosity.” Moreover, I suspect that it is in understanding and practicing the vulnerable self that we might discover how it is we could respond to healing the profound wounds of both body and soul in the aftermath of war. Perhaps most importantly, I would theorize that there is immeasurable strength and a great deal more to learn about being and being with our collective vulnerabilities - our vulnerable selves. Perhaps the ontological insurrection lies in recognizing vulnerability as a strength [as opposed to a Pandora’s box – of fear]. In this way, understanding that vulnerability, often perceived as a form of passivity and/or weakness, is not a binary response to active engagement, but rather a form of engaging with the other.

Engaging with the other is indeed a risk – one which exposes and makes us vulnerable to loosen our imagined sense of control. In mechanistic organizations, “the desire for more definition is often in effect a wish to that the limits of one’s tasks more neatly defined” (Burns & Stalker, 1961 p. 203). A reliance on linear thinking, certainty in the face of uncertainty is genuinely appealing and gratifying for those oriented and equipped with a mindset toward effective solution orientations. Montgomery (2006) takes up the issue of uncertainty in the medical profession and explained how it is that “we” (patients, health care providers, family members) negotiate what I perceive as an aspect of vulnerabilities – the uncertainty of not knowing or fully understanding. When our “rational” sensibilities are betrayed in the face of uncertainty, we seek to find comfort in the known, a steadfast inclination toward the seemingly rational ideal. She argued, “today when diagnosis and treatment are based on scientific research, seeking medical help is an enormously improved but still uncertain quest. That uncertainty is ritualized,
professionalized and then for the most part ignored by both patients who seek help and the physicians who must act on their behalf” (p. 4, emphasis added). Here, either of “us” fails to respond to our collective vulnerability to seek solutions, alternative ways of knowing and being in the world.

As these 21st century wars wreak havoc on the physical and mental health of our warriors, and ultimately our nation, feminist ideals that challenge the limits of bureaucratic discourses inherent in our military, government, and medical discourses, may also provide opportunities for re-visioning what it means to heal beyond rational, technical, and instrumental responses to the body. In combination with ideals of vulnerability, “feminist discourse and practice entail a struggle for individual autonomy that is with others and for community that embraces diversity – that is for an integration of both the individual and the collective in an ongoing process of authentic individuation and genuine connectedness” (Ferguson, 1984 p. 157). It is in the notion of being with the other that I seek to bring together wisdom from feminist ideals of understanding, in addition to indigenous forms of knowledge (ontology and epistemology), to explore how we might experience vulnerability as strength, as a means of understanding ourselves and others.

Butler (2004) spoke to the issue of our very humanness as a requirement that we depend on – turn ourselves over to another. She asked,

If I deny that prior to the formation of my “will” my body related me to those whom I did not chose to have proximity to myself, if I build a notion of “autonomy” on the basis of the denial to this sphere of a primary and unwilled
physical proximity with others, then I am denying the social conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy? (p. 26)

I think about how our children provide opportunities to teach us, in their need and in their innocence, to embrace and deepen our vulnerability through and with them—if only in being with them. Perhaps it could be said that feminist ideals attest to, are borne out of, an understanding and response – ontology of experience. By this I mean there are those among us who have experienced living in, through, and with persistently complex forms of subject positioning; the subject positioning inherent in hierarchical structures and rationalities of (effectiveness and) instrumentality (Ferguson, 1994; Fraser, 1989; Weedon 1987/1997). Deetz (2005) offered up another accounting when he explained that, “intersubjectivity precedes any subjectivity or objectivity as structured in specific ways” (p. 92). Our warriors are the daughters and sons of us all – of an entire nation (at least). We are called not only to respond to these profound wounds, but also to be vulnerable in bearing witness to what we have asked them to do. It is indeed an intersubjective endeavor.

In many ways the military has already begun the process of responding to a vulnerability, without, however, outwardly acknowledging or naming it as such. For example, a commercial put out by Community of Veterans shows a vet presumably returning from overseas. It looks as if he is alone in the world. In the airport there are no people, no noise. Even as he walks through the streets, there is silence. It’s not until another vet approaches, and shakes his head, that suddenly the world (people/noise) appears. The words, “If you’re a veteran of Iraq or Afghanistan you’re not alone. We know where you’re coming from” is displayed across the screen. Vulnerability is not
openly discussed; rather, it is symbolically invoked in the isolation that permeates from this particular vet. Other examples lie in the number of Vet centers that are beginning to emerge. For instance, in Massachusetts, every single town is required to have a Vet Center where returning vets can easily access assistance. The desire to reach out, to let vets know that they are not alone is evident and growing. These examples clearly respond to a vulnerable self; less so, however, to a vulnerable collective. I want to more deeply understand the personal and political possibilities in pursuing vulnerability as a course of action, a response to wounds of war. The radical number of suicides and vets struggling with PTSD continue to baffle our collective efforts. Clearly, the complexity of the issues continues to perplex us all.

To display is to acknowledge - to make a presence known. The public acknowledgement of our warriors returning home in flagged draped coffins clearly resurrected vulnerability. A ‘Pandora’s Box’ of fear seemed to propel the public controversy that ensued. Vulnerable bodies and caskets bearing the symbols of a nation inculcated us all, yet the dominating response was to veer away, ignoring our vulnerable selves. The power of instrumental rationalities relegated vulnerability to the private sphere. In this way the public sphere was removed as a site by which we might collectively re-define, recover, and compose our grief. In the confluence of institutional forces we are reminded that, “organizations are not neutral sites of meaning formation; rather they are produced and reproduced in the context of struggles between competing interest groups and systems of representation” (Mumby 1993 p. 21). How will we as a nation redefine healing as we respond the profound wounds of our warriors today and our future as a nation?
I am struck with the juxtaposition of Behar’s (1996) story regarding the laying of hands on the coffin. Though she described a “private” performance/acknowledgement – I continue to be compelled as to the loss of a public response to grief. How might we discover and heal our vulnerable selves, as a nation? It occurs to me that there is much more to unpack in terms of understanding the relationship between generosity, power, and vulnerability. However, ultimately, I find that I am most deeply moved by Butler’s (2004) plea for a more profound response toward understanding vulnerability. It seems to me, as warriors seek to reengage with their families and communities, we are all left to contend with an extraordinary silence of traumas; traumas that have yet to be more aptly reconciled in the healing process.

_Storytelling as Primary Signifying Practices_

Bodies, I believe, are the harbingers of our stories and keepers of our sacred selves. They are vestiges of our (collective) histories, emotions, and experience. The bodies of our returning warriors are indeed story-laden beings. Theirs are the bodies not only of a self, but of a self in the midst of social, political, economical and historical unrest. News reports, radio series, magazines, newspapers, various texts and discursive representations presently offer publics fragments, pieces of those stories in order that we might know. However, as health communication scholars, the application of both a narrative and poststructural feminist lens to the healing of returning vets requires that we makes sense of these stories beyond the personal – beyond an “aboutness” (Ahmed, 2004) - and strive to understand more deeply how it is that warriors and the communities to which they return make sense of healing in this milieu. These theoretical frames
acknowledge the centrality of stories in the communicative process of healing; concomitantly, I recognize that stories never emanate, stand, nor rest in isolation.

Our stories help us make sense of the world even as they are situated and contested in an ever-changing world (Bruner, 1986; Frank, 1995). From a poststructural feminist stance, narratives assist in drawing our sensibilities to query those stories that contest both the canonical (or meta-narratives) and the micro practices of individuals and publics. Lindemann-Nelson (2001) suggested that, “identities are collaborative ventures requiring a number of people to bring them into being” (emphasis added p. xii). I would also suggest that people move in and through multiple and complex discursive practices. In this light, narratives provide avenues for exploring the very signifying practices important to a poststructural feminist agenda. Indeed, narrative scholars, Harter, Japp, & Beck (2005) explained the influence and interaction of public narratives as, “pervasive patterns that provide the language, structure and formulas that shape our ways of thinking and our collective understandings” (pp. 3-4).

Specifically, narratives call our attention to the construction of characters as they emerge, develop and traverse through time (Fisher, 1984, Nelson, 2001, Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). However fragmented our stories and time might appear, critically essential to discerning the complexity of narrative is the strategic use of emplotments. Plots are those story lines, the ruptures -that trouble with a Capital ‘T’ (Burke 1954/1984) - that move us, define us, (teller and listener) in, out, and through vast webs of relationships. How we understand ourselves in the midst of time, place and others happens as we reference others or events in relation to ourselves and each other. As “Homo-narrans” (Fisher 1984 p. 6), our stories contextually shift: If I am Army or Navy – soldier/wife? Mother?
Warrior? Daughter/Marine? Husband? Airforce? Father? Son? Then who am I in relation to you? Disruptions in the trajectory of our lives incite and inspire. We want to know (follow-make sense of) what caused something – to explore the relationship between time, place, self and other. Where stories have beginnings, middles and ends, as story tellers and listeners, we construct the links between them those causal agents. Causality, Charon (2006) explained, “is always a human invention” (p. 48). How we ultimately put it together, speaks to our positionality – or how we imagine it to be - in the world.

Stories are shared; they come in to being and traverse through time as a dialogic process. Just as poststructural feminism seeks to make sense of ourselves and others in the confluence of institutions, relationships, power and discourse, “the meaning and coherence of a story, and of the self it conveys, are drawn from the linkages built between what is available to construct personal accounts, the biographical particulars at hand, and the related work of contextualizing who and what we are” (Holstein & Gubrium 2000 p. 108). Just as poststructural feminism recognizes the personal (micro) in (and within) relationship with the macro (political) narratives serve to capture all of what makes us uniquely human across our collective humanity; “discourses are selectively tailored to the lives under consideration, yielding stories that are understandable in broad terms but still differ in their particulars” (p. 110).

We are all indeed, always, bodies in the midst of other bodies – temporally shifting through time and space. Narratives are dialogic endeavors. As Bruner (2002) suggested the dialectical tensions that serve to construct our stories are, “instruments not so much for solving problems as for finding them [tensions, incongruities]” (p. 15). Communities of healing are drawn together through stories. They are held together in the
processes of deep listening, of witnessing for each others’ stories. Narrative analysis calls us to listen more deeply as to how we shape and are shaped not only by scripts of our own making, but to those scripts imposed upon us (Frank, 2002). Narrative analysis and research recognizes that stories are inherently relational. We are not so much focused on knowledge about others’ stories, as researchers we participate in the process of storytelling even as we listen (Charon, 2002; Frank, 1995, 2002,). As listening is indeed a relational process, we must be further motivated to act.

In imagining a future, counter narratives may provide the means for understanding some of the personal and political moral dilemmas of our time. How else might these narratives help to define or otherwise confine us (Frank, 1995; Lindemann-Nelson 2001)? What stories will/need to emerge in order for returning and traumatized vets to re-define a sense of self? How will they emplot themselves in time - from who they imagined they once were before going to war –what aspects of self emerged during their combat experiences and whom might they be wondering is this person returned home amidst converging worlds and experiences? Lindemann-Nelson (2001) referred to this shift as a counter story. She explained that a, “cluster of histories, anecdotes and other narrative fragments that resist a master narrative and begin to replace it with one that commands more respect” (p. 6). Record numbers of soldiers returning as amputees, with PTSD, in addition to startling rates of vet suicide clearly indicate that renegotiating self and other has been a weary task. Noted Frank (2007), “health, for individuals and for communities depends of which stories are heard, which are taken seriously and what sense is made of those stories” (p. 422).
Counter narratives offer alternatives not only for the individual in the midst of change, but as master narratives are disrupted, they also disrupt our understanding of self and other. For poststructural feminists, such a disruption (of canonical truths) is imperative in the effort to re-imagine new ways of being in the world, new ways of living in with and solving problems. With regards to issues of mental health, soldiers have long been reticent in declaring their needs, expounding on their fears in the aftermath of war (Presidential Task Force, 2007). Lindemann-Nelson (2001) suggested that counter narratives serve as a means for rejecting the assumption that, “people with a particular identity are to be subordinated to others or denied access to personal and social goods. They are then, narrative acts of insubordination” (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001 p. 8).

Counter stories are acts of resistance. Seeking a wisdom in and from vulnerability might be perceived as a counter-intuitive endeavor. However it might rather emerge as a counter narrative to the master narratives embedded of our present in our attempts toward reconciling the trauma related to OIF/OEF vets.

Through a poststructural feminism lens, the use of narratives allowed for a deeper and more thorough inquiry into the vulnerabilities and implications of war induced trauma and the healing of warriors and a nation’s communities in the ongoing and aftermath of these wars. The ways in which our vets attempt to make sense and re-story themselves and their experiences are indeed relational endeavors. They (vets and stories) compel us together in this time, from other histories as we imagine a future. Finally, for all the trauma and disruption in the personal and political scope of our times, Charon’s (2006) words provided direction and clarity as to the power of narrative for this project:
The narrative impulse does not excavate the unknown beyond recognition. It does not sanitize it of danger; it does not consign it to sameness with other such predicaments. Nor does it take away what it makes of itself, or take it apart beyond putting it back together. It celebrates the uniqueness and respects the unity of the event while representing it. Expansive rather than restrictive, multiplying possibilities instead of reducing them, narrative practices enable the observer or the participant to live in the face of contingency without trying to eradicate it. (p. 50)

Summary and Research Questions

In summary, this dissertation arose from my interest in the storied nature of suffering and healing among veterans, their families, and other support providers. From a post-structural feminist standpoint, I explored the socio-historical, institutional, discursive, and material circumstances that shaped how individuals experienced suffering and healing. The following general research questions guided my work with veterans and their family members.

RQ1: How do veterans experience trauma, vulnerability and healing?
RQ2: How do family members experience trauma, vulnerability and healing?
RQ3: How do corporeal, material, and gendered forces shape the experience of trauma, vulnerability and healing?
CHAPTER THREE: PRACTICES OF INQUIRY

_Aroha kit e tangata (a respect for people) .... Kanohi kitea (the seen face, that is present yourself to people face to face) ... Titiro, whakarongo ... korero (look, listen, and speak) ... Manaaki kit e tangata (share and host people, be generous.... Kia tupato (be cautious) ... Kaua e takahia te mana e tangata (do not trample over the mana of people) ... kaua e mahaki (don’t flaunt your knowledge). - Kaupapa Maori practices (Smith, 1999 p. 120).

An interpretive project is one poised in the midst of time, culture, and terrain. It is a reflexive and critical sense-making process. It is a deeply personal, courageous, and artistic endeavor. Interpretative work is personal in that we come into the midst of dynamic lives, bearing our own (dynamic) histories, in an attempt to more deeply understand both other and self. We are forever changed in the process of discovering. It is courageous in that we are challenged to listen and to hear in new ways – to be touched, to be vulnerable, and to be transformed through and with an/other being/s. Inquiry is artistic, in our ability to imagine and query beyond our present means. It is artistic in the interpretation and multiple forms of rendering of these (storied) realms. Goodall (2003) explained, “interpretive ethnography is always about the joining together of two otherwise disparate storylines- the story of the self who has the stake, who asks the questions, and does the interpreting; and the stories of others who help us find or create meanings …. to do interpretative ethnography is to connect your story to something larger than yourself” (p. 60 – 61, emphasis in original). VanMaanen (1988) eloquently positioned interpretive work as, “highly particular and hauntingly personal, yet it serves as the basis for grand comparison and understanding within and across a society” (p. ix).

As this chapter proceeds, I make clear my epistemological stance with regards to interpretive, critical, and feminist methodologies. I then ground these approaches in
attributes of reflexivity and the reflexive process. I followed Reinharz’s (1992) lead in combining multiple methods of inquiry, and in casting my net wide for deeper and more nuanced understandings. She noted, “Feminist descriptions of multimethod research express the commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks” (p. 197). In combining methods, she suggested, “researchers are able to illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences. Multiple methods increase the likelihood of obtaining scientific credibility and research utility” (p. 197).

Interpretive Research Methods

This project was guided by my commitment to both theoretical and methodological practices imbued in the processes of interpretive, critical, and feminist sense-making. Underpinning these frames I hold a firm (professional and personal) commitment to the concept of reflexivity. Given this project’s reliance on poststructural feminism and narrative signifying practices, Guba & Lincoln (2005) provided insight that serves to unite such an undertaking:

Reflexivity – as well as the poststructural and postmodern sensibilities concerning quality research – demands that we interrogate each of ourselves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives. We must questions ourselves too, regarding how those binaries shape not only the identities called forth in the field and later in the discovery process of writing, but also our interactions with respondents, in who we become to them in the process of becoming to ourselves. (Emphasis in original p. 210)
Yet clearly, my work is not solely situated with the personal. Interpretive research is an inherently political process of seeking and probing how it is we come to be, know and live the complex worlds in which we occupy. Care is imperative. In our quests for meaning, the ubiquitous gaze can be as disarmingly dangerous and/or as liberating and empowering. As such, I am equally cognizant of the inherent power differentials and vulnerabilities of both participant and researcher. We are cautioned to guard the intimacies born out of relationships formed as participant/observer/informant (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, & Cohen, 1989; Stacey, 1988). Thus I am reminded to proceed with humility and respect, knowing that, “what is left in and out, [of the story] whose point of view is represented, and how the scenes of social life are depicted become very important matters for assessing the ‘poetics and politics’ of the ethnographic text” (Clifford & Marcus, 1986 in Lindolf & Taylor, 2002 p. 17).

Next I delve specifically into the interpretive, critical, feminist, and reflexive frames I adopted for this project.

*An Interpretive Frame*

The process of ethnographic journeys (methodologies) is not to uncover a *Truth*, but rather to discover the multiple and complex ways we come to understand and create meaning in our lives. The meanings we create rest among *many truths*. Interpretive scholars seek to identify and articulate particulars that question the norms, and probe those vast webs we as humans create, exist in, and multiply. We are indeed a complex web of beings, meanings, and signifying practices ( & Lincoln, 2005; Geertz, 2000; Weber, 1978/1968). The work of the interpretive scholar lies in applying a rigorous inquiry guided by, but not blinded by, theoretical principles. Qualitative research then is
not, “an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz, 2000, p. 5). Moreover in the process of interpretation we draw on “the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers” (p. 16). Indeed, of specific relevance to this project, Harter (2009) explained, “to exercise our imagination is to affirm our capacity to move beyond the boundaries of [our] own bodies and experiences to appreciate others’ storied representations of reality” (p. 147). Importantly, “from a dialogic standpoint, meaning does not reside in the mind or words of any single participant but rather emerges in the interfaces between stories, people and contexts” (p. 142). An imaginative inquiry serves to illuminate multiple truths.

The interpretive scholar understands that research is, indeed, an interactive, reflective, and dialogic process. Any realm we enter, we enter into a conversation that began long before we were born. Burke’s (1969) “parlor metaphor” serves to remind us that the conversation is always ongoing, always shifting as actors enter and exit. We are called to account for those histories whose conversations began long before we entered any realm of inquiry. Our histories are bounded in multiple stories. As such our gender conveys yet another (nuanced) story; it is the corporeal experience from which we seek to understand and rearticulate meaningful insight in the turbulence of culture and gender. Similarly, meanings are further convoluted in and through histories bounded to race, social class, ethnicity, time, location, and a host of forces. The layers run as deep for us as they do for those whom we learn with and from (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). However we come to understand and rearticulate meaning, interpretive scholars must account for these positionalities.
A Critical Frame

A commitment to critical inquiry summons researchers to question deeply, examine closely and take action. Simply put, a critical project will focus on, “the relationships between power, knowledge and discourse that are produced in contexts of historical and cultural struggle” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 47). It is an “ethically heightened and politically [reflexive] project” (p. 47). More specifically, Thomas (1993) determined that “critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge and action, it expands our horizons for choices and widens our experiential capacity to see, hear, and feel. It deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas” (p. 2).

For instance, in attending to discourse, it is indeed imperative that we recognize, as Hall (1985) suggested,

struggles of meaning around cultural terms (such as “terrorist”), then involve far more than “semantics.” They represent ideological attempts to interrupt and refashion the “signifying chains” of conventional associations that underwrite intuitional authority. (in Lindlof & Taylor 2002, p. 51)

Thus a critical endeavor and interpretation is a useful tool for those researchers intent on putting into question seemingly unproblematic ways of knowing, being and becoming.

Signifying chains rest among a myriad of embodied experiences and texts. For instance, when subject positions emanating from embodied experiences such as gender, class, race, and/or ethnicity, thwart access to resources (i.e. the power to speak and/or the presence to be), critical scholars question those often unspoken discrepancies. In shifting
our frames, we seek alternative patterns that give rise to alternative ways of knowing and being. It is an ongoing, hermeneutic process. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) explained, critical interpretation involves a shift in focus, so that the balance between what appears self-evident natural and unproblematic on the one hand, and what can be interpreted as the freezing of social life, irrational and changeable on the other, moves in favor of the second, this enabling it to become the object of further scrutiny. (p. 144)

In this way we are reminded that “critical theory is never static; it is always evolving, changing in light of both new theoretical insights and new problems and social circumstances” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306).

The density and complexities of multiple relational aspects of inquiry through a critical lens adds nuance to qualitative inquiry. I would offer one final caveat. Though the term “emancipation” is often linked to the critical agenda, I, like many others, reject the notion, intention, or ideal that “I” might bring about “emancipation” for any other (let alone myself). Though I am committed to probing and resisting norms, seeking to make way for new ways of understanding, speaking and knowing, I follow with Kincheloe & McLaren (2005) who shared, “that no one is ever completely emancipated from the socio-political context that has produced him or her” (p. 308). There are indeed multiple truths to living in the worlds we do.

A Feminist Frame

Across multiple texts, authors, and histories it is indeed impossible to articulate one specific form of feminism or even a feminist methodology. Critically important to this project is the understanding that as feminism has and continues to evolve, so to does
the work, scope and agenda for feminists. Feminist works have enriched and further
developed both our theoretical underpinnings and the ways in which we employ them.
Feminists have applied specific (and critical) attention to issues of power, institutionality,
gender and race that have contributed to a global scholarship, and praxis. Indeed, in
Skeggs’s (2001) meta analysis of feminist authoring, contributions, and ethnography, she
articulated, “Explanatory power is one of the major ways in which feminists have used
and created theory, that is by searching for the most effective explanation for
conceptualizing the process, matter, person, issue, event or context (or all of them
together) that need explaining” (p. 431). As our reflexivity is informed, Butler (1995)
reminded us that, “the actions instituted via the subject are part of a chain of actions that
can no longer be understood as a unilinear in direction or predictable in their outcomes”
(p. 43).

Importantly, through a critical reflexivity, the shift in feminisms have served to
broaden our application. Our history is indeed important. Re-visioning how it is we make
claims of knowledge as articulated through the corporeal body is indeed an imperative
component of shifting knowledge claims. The reintegration of body and mind as opposed
to the dichotomous positioning of the two is an imperative component of the process.
Entering the conversation, as a visceral, reflexive endeavor certainly increases
vulnerability, yet it is a stance (a way of knowing, interpreting and experiencing the
world) that women and other marginalized populations know (see Ahmed, 2004). Cixous
(1976) spoke to the reinterpretation of the ethnographic project that includes our histories
as ways of knowing and imagining:
Women must write about herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (p. 875 in Stollar, 1977, p. 5)

In taking up the last sentence in particular, I link this with a broadening feminist agenda. Stetz (2001/2003) asserted, “when I speak to the work of feminists I am not referring to women alone but to both female and male thinkers who put the critical examination of gender and its relationship to power at the center of their analyses” (p. 139). Butler (1995) further challenged our reliance of conventional methodology. She explained that we cannot, “stand outside the conventions by which “we” are constituted, but only the possibility of reworking the very conventions by which we are enabled” (p. 136, emphasis in original). In the effort to articulate the specificities of academic rigor, I felt both wanting and challenged by this conundrum as I entered the field.

A Reflexive Frame

Given our histories and experiences, complete neutrality is not possible in the field. However, it is the job of researchers (and commitment of this particular one) to account for and temper any bias that may arise. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) cautioned, “what is explored, and how it is explored can hardly avoid ether supporting (reproducing) or challenging existing social conditions” (p. 8). It is in the telling, the writing, and discovering that, “the integral work of putting discourses in to narrative play stretches the boundaries of the self on its own, supplying substance and organization” (Holstein & Gubrium 2000, p. 107 emphasis added). Moving between two realms,
Eisenberg (2007) spoke a more altruistic, but potent ideal nonetheless. Though the letting go is challenging for most, he suggested, “a certain degree of nonattachment and vulnerability with regard to one’s identity and belief is essential to the survival of our planet and to our species” (p. ix). Throughout the inquiry process, I thought of yielding - both holding on to our understanding, and at the same time making way for other ways of knowing.

In seeking to acknowledge and explore the wisdom in vulnerability, we must be equally cognizant (and courageous) about our own vulnerabilities. I concur with Hertz (1997) as she specified that, “to be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment” (p. viii). As Guba & Lincoln (2005) suggested, that there is no objective researcher that stands apart from the experience and practice of research. Reflexive research is “a conscious experiencing of self as inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself” (p. 210). We arrive in all our multidimensional selves, in the midst of those other selves as well. Another comes into being as we are situationally created in new relationships during the ethnographic process. Carspecken (1996) noted that, “you sense a place for yourself in meaningful acts of other people that might threaten the habitual ways in which you construct yourself. If you are not prepared to be wounded, you will not make inferences true to that validity requirement of normative, intersubjective, and thus subjective reconstruction” (p. 170). Indeed the vulnerability of young women and men, and their families, as they transition through trauma is a process of mutual wounding. He suggested that “the pursuit of truth in social justice cannot be followed without becoming open to wounding without caring about
those who are impoverished and oppressed. It will be painful at times, but it will develop and empower those who follow with integrity” (p. 171). Like Behar (1996) I believe that research that doesn’t break your heart isn’t worth doing; meaning that, unless we too are transformed in the process, opportunities for all are lost.

It is indeed a reflexive endeavor to stay open to, be present in, and witness other vulnerabilities as avenues of strength and hope. So often the vulnerability brings on, entails despair. Yet, Carspecken (1996) asserted, “being wounded through conducting research with integrity is ultimately going to be more empowering for us because it will change us, broaden our horizons, help us to grow as human beings” (p. 170). It is not so much what we believe as how we might be willing to grow.

In summary, multiple layers of meanings, signifying practices and power differentials will undoubtedly emerge from the application of feminist, critical, interpretive, and reflexive lenses to a specific ‘field.’ Each frame, then, aids in a deeper, more complex, and nuanced understanding of lives and meaning. More specifically these frames help to elucidate and further articulate the effort at seeking “thick descriptions.” Geertz (2002) sums up my understanding of thick descriptions as he articulated the process of ethnographic practices that I find to be wholly reflective of this qualitative project: “Ethnography is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them super imposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular and inexplicit, and which [s/]he must contrive how first to contrive, somehow to grasp, and then to render” (p. 10).
Discourse Collection through Fieldwork

The approach/es to field work for this project have been inspired in and through numerous years of extraordinary mentorship. Further licensed by my committee members to “be creative,” to, “envision this project for [my]self” and with the request that, “we would see more of your stories,” I approached fieldwork with all aforementioned and forthcoming theoretical sensibilities, the blessings of my committee and the courage to enter the land of the vulnerable, seeking wisdom. In retrospect, I recognize from the very conceptualization of this project through this final document, (and onward) my vision aligned with many of the tenants in Ellingson’s (2009) Crystallization. Here she described the scope of her project:

Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (p. 4)

Throughout this project, I have attempted to make sense of a series of (sometimes) seemingly disparate, punctuated moments, through a series of punctuated encounters all of which traversed the intimately personal, our collective social, institutional and political spheres of beings.

Participants

From southeast Ohio I travelled by car, as far west as Cincinnati, North to Cleveland, east to Massachusetts and south to North Carolina to meet with participants. I
spoke with participants via phone as far west as Colorado and back again to the east coast to Massachusetts. My primary means of soliciting participants for this project stem from what Patton (1990) termed as *purposive sampling*. In this case having shared the project with a variety of people involved with veterans, these contacts reached out to others. In the process, willing participants were solicited, or made suggestions as to additional people who might be interested or willing to participate.

However, I found the military population difficult to access (and especially so for attempting to access female participants). Indeed, one source told me in a phone conversation that the only reason he was willing to assist me was because I had a son in the military. Given this challenge, I was openly vigilant to diverse and serendipitous potentialities. These included, for instance, meeting with Marines on a Beach in North Carolina, a chance meeting with a vet who initiated a conversation with me (not knowing of my project) while standing in line, and another passing conversation that ultimately led to my involvement in a university wide committee. I sought assistance from leadership in a university R.O.T.C. office and met with VFW personnel across southeast Ohio. I also conducted internet wide searches on organizations working with returning vets, promoting events or establishing programs for said populations. In this way I was able to establish (e-mail) contact with the founder of a university program. This led to phone conversations and ultimately an invitation to visit and meet with participants.

Once I was able to establish contact with participants, I was able to further recruit additional participants following the research design of Manoogian, Harter, and Denham (2010). Following their lead, I asked each veteran to identify one family member or loved one who would be willing to participate in interviews. Advantages to this form of
sampling stemmed in identifying multiple (and previously unknown) stakeholders in addition to building on existing networks, and made way for those I met with to acknowledge other individuals in their webs of support who were relationally involved in the healing process. Such diversity allowed for shared patterns to emerge across multiple texts and stakeholders while at the same time providing each person’s unique insight/experience (potential further inquiry – thicker descriptions). Importantly, for this process, the number of respondents were not as relevant as the, “the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1988, p. 77). Finally, redundancy was met when little or no new information was forthcoming (Guba & Lincoln, 1991).

Thus, in the course of this study, I met with and interviewed military and non/military participants ($n = 36$). To distinguish and clarify: I was able to meet with OIF/OEF military personnel ($n = 18$). This group included veterans (those who have terminated their active or reserve duty with a military branch) ($n = 10$). I met with currently ‘active military’ as enlisted personnel, ranked professionals and/or reservists. These participants were currently employed with a branch of the military or National Guard and/or may still be connected to or otherwise involved with the Iraq and Afghanistan ongoing wars when I met with them ($n = 8$). I met with participants ranging in age from 24 – 62 years, ranging in rank from enlisted personnel to high level officers, and spanned the spectrum of military branches including the Navy, Marines, Army, National Guard or National Guard Reserves. Within this age range, some were veterans of previous wars. (See appendix B for complete breakdown). I was unable to solicit any female military participants for this project. The composition (including previously
accounted for vets) of participants I met with who were in close, primarily familial relationships with OIF/OEF warriors including parents (both mothers and fathers) and (female) spouses (including: present spouses, long-term military spouses, recent marriages, soon to be married, and recently divorced) \( (n = 13) \). Parents and spouses included females ranging in age from 21 years to 60 + years.

Finally I met with university administrators, volunteers and or participants who were either involved in campus wide awareness for returning veterans or otherwise involved in providing specific programs to assist the veteran reintegration process. \( (n = 5 \) interviews, aprox. 12 meeting participants). For instance, at one university, administrators, mental health professionals, combat veterans and staff from across the campus, pooled their (originally) exclusive efforts and formed a working committee to address the needs of returning warriors. University administrative persons have been moved to prepare for an increase in returning veterans given a GI bill passed in July of 2009. This bill has considerable fiscal implications for both veterans and universities nationwide. I was able to participate in these meetings for a number of months until schedule and work conflicts interfered in those efforts. Another university implemented a program specifically geared for those vets, returning to the university on said GI bill. I had multiple conversations with Mr. X who developed and marketed S.E.R.V.E. (Supporting Education for the Returning Veterans) across the country in addition to high level military/government personnel/agencies in the D.C. area. S.E.R.V.E. is/was operational at Cleveland State University and it was here that I was able to meet with two administrators of the program and a number of veterans involved with and accessing their
services. All participants have been provided pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

**In-Depth Interviews**

There is indeed a visceral vulnerability that resides in the presence of and for both interviewer and interviewee. I have continued to be awed by the potency of such encounters. I remained cognizant of and adhered to Smith’s (1999) ethical imperative having expressed, “I found that people trusted me with information about themselves which was highly personal. *I felt honored by that trust, and somewhat obligated as well - in the sense of having to be very careful and very respectful of how I handled that information*” (emphasis added, p.197). In the course of interviewing I strove to establish trust, first by fully acknowledging the purposes of my inquiry, maintaining a commitment to their confidentiality, and perhaps most importantly, a commitment to listen and be fully present to their time and stories. Such a commitment was grounded in my desire to know and to learn, beyond myself, and remain open with them to the vulnerability of transformation. Listening then, accounting for another’s story, not only required an ethical mandate about what I planned to do with the information – but importantly, the interpretive process guided as this project is, demands I open to *the art of listening*. Hearing, Rawlins (2003) offered, “is a form of surrender, a vulnerability and susceptibility to others, a readiness – an uncommitted potentiality for change” (p. 123). “Listening matters only if you actually do hear, only if you allow the other person’s voice and stories to reach you, to change you” (p. 122).

Given my commitment to such a transformative process, and written IRB approval, (See Appendix A) I used an open-ended, semi-structured interview protocols
(See Appendices B –D) where participants were able to offer retrospective accounts of their experiences. These interviews, by their very nature, led to opportunities for narrative accountings, a *recollection* of events, and “transformations of experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 54). In this way, a more conversational tone during the interview process allowed for unanticipated avenues of inquiry to emerge (See Bishop, 1999; Fetterman; 1998; Reinhartz, 1992). Thus, I relied on the work of Foley & Valenzula (2005) who spoke to the value a dialogic style of interviewing where a measure of informality between both interviewer and interviewee allowed for more ease. An open ended conversational interviewing style served further to, “generate more engaged, personal narratives … [and] …candid opinions …” (p. 223-24).

Indeed, throughout the process of interviewing participants and I were moved across an emotional spectrum including laughter, awe, grief and wit. This level of trust served to build and increase rapport through the interview process. Participants were able to speak to and further elaborate on issues that I had not, nor could have anticipated. Raven put it to me like this, “I love to talk to people like you because you’re trying to help us - you’re not getting a story out of me to get on the newspaper someplace.” He touched on another critical factor, “You have a son over there too so this is all helping you as a mother and father.” I am struck with the truth in his words and the wisdom of reciprocity in the midst of vulnerability. Each person I met with brought me closer to understanding my son’s world, brought more probing questions and awe and angst for the world in which we all inhabit. Importantly, all theoretical ‘tools’ aside, I was reminded that interviews are collaboratively produced accounts in the midst of our beings,
whatever life experience the interviewer and interviewee bring to the setting (Gubrium, 1993; Naples, 2003; Oakley, 1981; Riessman, 1990).

I was further led by Rapley (2001) who drew our attention to the process that evolves in the “Doing being an open-ended interviewer” (p. 310). He refers to the, “local interactional contingencies in which speakers draw from, and co construct broader social norms” (p. 303). Using a semi-structured interview protocol he suggested is akin to “the art of interviewing [as] a product of artful social interaction; it relies on and attends to the skill and methods people employ in doing everyday life” (p. 309). Not only is what comes out of the interview process a result of “deep mutual understanding – the stuff of real feelings and personal ideas and emotions” but he went on to suggest that we may just as easily, “write this as discourse – the stuff of discursive repertoires, ideological dilemmas and identities” (p. 309). Holstein & Gubrium (2000) likewise articulated this stance noting, “The selves that stories convey, as well as the identities of storytellers and listeners are thus shaped and edited as storytelling proceeds” (p. 113).

Narrative Mapping

Communication scholars (and, in general, academia at large) have a long history of prefacing and privileging the written/oral text/word as a means of “truth” and knowledge production, (See critiques by Hariman and Lucaites, 2002). Yet, increasingly scholars have been drawn to query a vision-based epistemology; one that recognizes the relationship between seeing and knowing. Drawing on the concepts of participatory photography (See Wang, 1999) and inspired by Freirean (1970) techniques of participatory communication I wanted to provide participants an opportunity to express themselves beyond the verbal. In this way the means of producing stories and their own
unique perspectives moved literally through the hands and body-being of each participant. One further influence in conceptualizing these “narrative-maps” came from Kretzmann and Mcknight, (1993) who used mapping with youth as a means of accessing and identifying potential assets and leaders in their local communities.

Just as the intent for the camera lies in tapping other sense(ory)-making processes, these maps removed imitations of language, and made way for more nuanced expressions of seeing and being in the world. Prosser and Schwartz (1998) provided critically relevant observations; “like our field notes and other forms of empirical data, photographs may not provide us with unbiased, objective documentation of the social and material world, but they can show characteristics attributes of people, objects, and events that often elude even the most skilled wordsmiths” (p. 116). This method then emerged as creative impulses often do, with a compulsion to explore beyond that which we know, fueled by willingness to risk. Having a firm belief in the wisdom and knowledge within each participant, I was moved to encompass the body/ies of participants. Here, incorporating a different set of speaking tools and drawing more deeply on the visceral experience provided a means of moving beyond the ways in which we (researcher and participant) are accustomed to limit or otherwise be limited by specific (and narrow) forms of acceptable expression (See Stollar, 1977). I might not always have the specific words to express what I feel, but often I can see and feel it; I can rearticulate the corporeal relational experience in and through visual imagery. Likewise, participants were able to address and speak to issues that were difficult to articulate within the limitations of our language.
Participants were offered a large (14 X 17) sketch pad, a slew of various color and thicknesses of markers, pens, and colored pencils. At the onset of the interview I explained the rough outline of the interview protocol which was structured around receiving word of deployment, preparing, leaving and returning. They were a series of punctuated moments collapsed for the purposes of narrating the experience of/over time and the opportunity to express, reflect and re-construct through means of alternative sense-making. Once we moved through the interview protocol and emergent revelations, I laid out the ‘tools’ and asked how they might articulate this process as we just discussed. I was inspired to draw on the metaphor of charting this map as a pilot might, after interviewing a pilot. Here I talked about the headwinds that might cause resistance, mountain ranges as landmarks, “etc.” and I shared with subsequent participant that the description was indeed inspired by a fellow participants. I asked them to chart their own landmarks, what key events marked the terrain of their experience. In the midst of vulnerability, the narrative maps provided a unique opportunity for participants to articulate what mattered, or what “felt” relevant to them and their process of reintegration.

Finally, being sensitized to the importance of dialogical communication and interviewing methodologies, the maps became an extraordinary means of deepening our conversation, communication and understanding. One I could not have otherwise anticipated or specifically planned for. Providing a means for more creative and engaged interviewing, Harper (1998) noted, “The photo-elicitation interview may redefine the relationship between [interviewer and interviewee] and the interview material may be presented in any number of creative ways” (p.36) (See also, Caldarola, 1985). Moreover,
where Rieger (1996) looked at the relationship between visual change and social change, I wanted to hear/see and query the changing face/body of warrior and a warrior’s communities as told from their body-beings.

**Conceptualizing Rigor: Data Analysis**

Throughout the process of data collection, I kept a log of my activities in the field and trace artifacts (see Appendix H). With participants’ permission, I digitally recorded interviews and maintained audio-files that were later transcribed. Additionally, I took scratch notes throughout the interviews to account for unique and nuanced perspectives, patterns or specific observations and quotes that I would later pursue. The minimum amount of time spent interviewing was approximately 45 minutes (one participant only). However, the average interview time consistently ranged between one and two hours, a few went over three hours. I found participants, once willing to meet and begin a conversation, were inclined to continue speaking as we were able to develop a strong mutual rapport, respect and trust. Many were interested in meeting again, and while I was able to initially manage some meetings, ultimately time, distance and work/school schedules impeded that effort. Finally, the resultant audio recordings were transcribed via multiple avenues. Through a combination of personal funds, funding from the School of Communication Studies, and Scripps College of Communication, the work of hired transcribers, a transcription company and myself the files were transcribed verbatim.

The epistemological frames that undergird this project lay a strong foundation for the rigors of my research. Grounded in a responsive ongoing reflexivity, each frame required that I consider positions of power (including my own), the dynamics of power (across multiple lives, time, and space) and the implicit power in those, “stratified
hierarchy of meaningful structures” (Geertz, 2000 p.7). More specifically, I employed a component of grounded theory as developed by Glasser & Strauss (1967). Constant comparative analysis was used as method of collecting, coding and analyzing discursive materials in the process of collecting them. Adhering to this methodological standard required that I continually move back and forth between the materials that were previously collected/observed with what emerged in the process of collection and observation. Thus, I attended to themes as they emerged during the interview process. Additionally I reviewed transcripts for error and consistency with their audio counterpart. Having read and reread the transcripts multiple times, listened to audio similarly, I began to organize emergent themes and patterns as well as unique and important “rich points” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000).

In tandem with these commitments, I sought to identify any emergent, consistent, patterns over the course of time and study (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Janesick, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). In the culmination of themes, I sought to distinguish between vets (34 themes) and supports (20 themes). And where themes overlapped, I maintained perspective distinctions between the two groups. Again, I went through transcripts culling and organizing important quotes that supported those categories and themes. I further organized and structured according to emergent sub-themes between the two groups. Additionally I drew on themes that rose to the surface in the artistic renderings of the narrative maps and worked to identify links, bridges and fissures between what participants spoke to, what was silently present and how the maps cohered overall with the transcripts.
Thus, as opposed to conducting a deductive process of inquiry, this method of inquiry was both inductive and dynamic thus allowing for a measure of flexibility, discovery and creativity throughout the research process (Boje, 2001; Charmez, 2002). When new patterns stop emerging or present patterns become overly redundant, it became clear that “theoretical saturation” had occurred (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, p. 110). Similarly, Fitch (1994) specified standards for assessing the qualitative endeavor. They include assessing the depth of involvement with the group or topic that allows for a measure of closeness and a need for distance (perspective); “claims should be saturated in the data”; “data analysis should be preserved as accessible records; and “data and analysis should include consideration of inferences and interpretations, as well as concrete phenomenon” (p. 36).

Fetterman, (1998) called us to practice a process of moving between the emic (an insider’s) and etic (an outsider’s) perspectives of reality. Commitment to the emic allows for a more “instrumental understanding” (p.20). Nuanced particulars may be more likely to emerge – where the “insider” speaks her/his truth. Moreover, multiple insiders speak to multiple realities (truths) that further serve to support the hermeneutic development between “thick description” as rigor for the project. As unique terms emerged in the process of conversational interviews I was able to clarify historical and ideological explanations of events and perspectives. “Battle-Rattle” was once such term which in turn laid the foundation for considerable inquiry. I might not have ever heard or known about if not for an “insider’s” tale. On the other hand, the etic has us look from the outside in. This distance allows for shifting what is understood in macro and microcosm as ‘normal’ - into the unknown.
Another aspect of employing rigor to analysis is through member checking. This adds to rigor in at least three important ways. First, as part of the dialogic (and dialectical) collaborative venture of an interpretive endeavor, we engage both an emic and etic perspective. Member checks allow for (inside) participants to add depth, breadth and perhaps contrast to our own (outside) findings. This was often accomplished in the course of interviews as I asked for clarification. Next, engaging members falls into line with a respectful, reflexive episteme. Involving participants in the process (i.e. reading transcripts, verifying accuracy, seeking clarity and conversing with and about diverging perspectives), aids in reducing the hierarchal stratification inherent in the interviewing process (Bishop 1999; Foley & Valenzuela 2005). In this regard, the majority of participants failed to respond to requests to view transcripts or respond to requests for additional thoughts and perspectives. With those I was able to contact and who were willing to read over texts, our conversations proved both edifying and clarifying.

Finally, and importantly, Fine & Weis (1996) reminded us of the vulnerabilities of those with whom we invite and participate in the process with, noting; “a full sense of community is fictional and fragile, ever vulnerable to external threats and internal fissures. A sense of coherence prevails only if our methods fail to interrogate difference” (p. 225). As we interrogate, probe and question, so too must we remain open, reflexive and responsive. Thus, with the assistance of member checks and constant comparative analysis, “the storyteller is in effect an editor who constantly monitors, modifies, and revises themes and storylines” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 113).

Knowing we are indeed fragile beings, Clair (2003) asked ethnographers (the qualitative researcher) to more creatively approach encountering the world around us – to
be “disarmed” to “set aside past dictates to categorize, compare and analyze” and instead she wants us to become, “vulnerable, sensitive, and dynamic” (p. 92). Clair challenged the ethnographic hold on naming and declaring the limits of qualitative research. She understood culture as dynamic as both theory and art. Moreover she saw the culmination of these components as relational, dynamic encounters. Goodall (2003) further challenged us as scholars to stretch the imagined limits of our vocation; “to extend the work of scholarship in the world … seeing ourselves as engaged citizens … framing our work as a form of meaningful social action” (p. 59). He urged us to, “strive to conduct ourselves - in our fieldwork, in our teaching, in our living, and in our writing and performing – with a sense of committed civic engagement. We are not simply learning from cultures we are ethically responsible for giving something of value back to them” (p. 59). Working hermeneutically, from inside out, outside in, and all those mysterious unanticipated sideways places, further serve a commitment to rigor.
CHAPTER FOUR:

EMBODIMENT: THE STORIES THAT SPEAK THROUGH US AND TO US

In this chapter I explore what it means to live in and through an American body in the midst of these OIF and OEF conflicts. Acknowledging that wars fought on other terrains involve a multitude of cultures and peoples, this project aims to specifically address U.S. responses to societal reintegration and healing in the midst of and in the aftermath of these wars in particular. The U.S. military is an inextricable component – a founding thread running through the fabric of our nation. The complexities of these wars (are having) have profound consequences for our nation, indeed for each of us. The toll of multiple deployments alone spans the personal, physical, emotional, social and economic aspects of our collective social order. I believe that we are all touched by these wars. The toll hovers in our midst; it lingers on in our future -though we may not always recognize the path of its presence. Even as I address fractional components of healing here, on U.S. terrain, I do so with the knowledge and heartfelt recognition that these arguments rest amidst considerable angst, untold burdens and grief beyond measure in those nations across the seas. I take up my place here, acknowledging that the political, social and cultural sorrows and complexities as experienced afar are well beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The crux of this chapter lies in listening both with and through body/narratives across familial, social and political realms. Here I probe ontological and epistemological ideals regarding the relationship between warriors, the loved ones who support them and the embodiment of social and institutional structures, systems, and objects. In “Bodies Speaking” participant narratives speak to the ways in which combat and trauma move
through and transform a warrior’s body. In “Body Speaking” I take up the relationship between a warrior, her/his body and the tools, “battle rattle,” that work to define her/his body-being in time and space. The next section, "Bodies of Support” explores how trauma takes up space in the bodies of loved ones supporting warriors and likewise explores the relationship between their bodies and the tools which work through them. The remaining sections, “Threads of Embodiment” and “Now What do I do” hear how it is that uncertainty bears a particular freight in these body-beings.

When I met with Kip in July 2009, he shared with me his experiences and perspectives having served two distinct tours in Iraq, one with the Army and the other as National Guardsman. In August that same year, I spoke with Roger, Kip’s father, whose contemplations were diverse, honest and often quite reflective. Given his own military background (retired Army Lt. Colonel) he told me, “I like to think because war is so terrible that people would see that and they would go - oh we got to figure out another way, besides war . . . But it doesn’t seem to work that way.” I am thus compelled to ask, to listen with, for and from not only those bodies as they appear central to this dilemmas – our warriors – but also those bodies on the periphery – those that take up a space frequently silent in the deluge of attending to trauma in the aftermath of wars. I take up this question probing our cultural responses and understanding of what it means – beyond the rhetoric, beyond the infiltration of abundant texts that want to rally us all to “Support our Troops?”

In listening to bodies-beings, I have been compelled to probe issues of embodiment and lived experiences through the narratives of warriors and their support systems. I want to trouble our reliance on and question our “confidence in hierarchically
driven” (Clair, 2003, p. 83) models of approaching a body in need of healing. This hierarchical drive is evident in a persistent reliance on Cartesian dichotomy; one that resonates through a biomedical model and continues to influence our episteme with its fierce emphasis on a (rational, logical) mind; a logical mind that, in turn, signifies an (irrational, emotional- inferior) body (Grosz, 1994, Laquer, 1990, McKerrow, 1998, Tuana, 1993, Zita, 1998). Such entrenchment and persistence is evident where Montgomery (2006) likewise challenges a positivist, Newtonian scope of medical knowledge. Culling out such reliance, she directed our attention to the ways in which we lean into a scientific model for, “the explanation of how things work, how they really are … the uninflected representation of reality [that] pervades our culture” (p. 8, emphasis added). Inextricably linked, I draw on Foucault’s (1978) concept of a “history of bodies” in the process of querying what it means to support our troops.

A history of bodies rises through the sovereignty of a nation, over and through its peoples, obliterating the lines between biology and power. Such a concept draws attention to how it is we discern and subsequently attach both meaning and value to bodies specifically via, “the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested” (p. 152). Wacquant (1995) rearticulated this as well, “specific social worlds invest, share and deploy human bodies and to the concrete incorporating practices whereby their social structures are effectively embodied by the agents who partake them” (in Nettelton and Watson, 1998, p. 3). These underpinnings rest here as a means of stirring up the matter of an episteme toward health and healing with warriors. In its wake, I seek the ways in which actors and participants story the complex matter and material outcomes in those same “investments.” For as Bruner (2002) so aptly identified,
“stories are a culture’s coin and currency. …culture is figuratively, the maker and enforcer of what is expected” (p. 15). Thus, however mutually bound, (voluntarily, or by default) military bodies are indeed *emplotted* bodies (Frank, 1997, Harter, Japp, & Beck, 2005, Lindeman-Nelson, 2001).

Warrior bodies are inculcated and disrupted to support a vast array of scripts that comprise personal and socio-historical and political structures. Narrative, Bruner (2002) suggested, “in all its forms is dialectic between what was expected and what came to pass” (p. 15). Scheper-Hughs & Lock (1987) drew us specifically to the physicality of body as one speaking through illness:

Sickness is not just an isolated event nor an unfortunate brush with nature. It is a form of communication -- the languages of the organs – through which nature, society, and culture speak simultaneously. The individual body should be as the most immediate, the proximate terrain where social truths and social contradictions are played out, as well as a locus of personal and social resistance, creativity and struggle. (p. 31)

Clearly a U.S. soldier’s body is one critical juncture for exploring the ways in which we attempt to narrate our experiences in conjunction with those social commitments, expectations, and response-abilities. In this array of scripts, how might we consider the body as a speaking one – with a language both informing and of an informant? Troy’s journey map is one such unique story. He explained the phases of basic training, combat experience and reintegration telling me, “It’s like a seismograph and your world is shaking up and down.”
Narrative Map 1: It’s like a Seismograph (Troy)

Bodies Speaking: “We’ve Fried and Refried Some of These Soldiers”

This journey wants to query the bodies of our warriors and their support systems through the rolling, tumultuous landscapes of the personal lived experience, over and through those socially constitutive and symbolic body-beings, and finally, disquieting the regulated and disciplined body - a body-politic (Foucault, 1978; Frank, 1995; Fraser, 1989; Tuana, 2006; Weedon, 1989). In contemplating our cultural response to PTSD, I ask and explore the relationship between (traumatic) experience as it traverses through a cultural body and the social contracts we story through warrior bodies. Indeed, Haraway (1991) reminded us, “we need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings, but to live in meanings and bodies that have a future” (p. 187). As a feminist I am bound (and committed) to attend to, to listen for and with those marginalized body-beings whose stories might reveal other truths. In those vast landscapes, silence marks a presence, echoes and reverberates through time. Such silences have become vastly present for me.
In speaking with Roger, I sensed a man who was moved to contemplate both his own and his son’s lived experiences through war. On a hot August afternoon we sat overlooking fields, hills and horses on the family farm he shares with his son and his son’s family. Turning to me, Roger pondered, “Maybe, you know -- the transition from one totally alien life to another totally alien life is difficult for anybody - Kip understands that - It’s not, he’s not suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome - He’s just suffering. Like we all suffer. He’s just suffering - because of it - you know- we are what we are because of where we’ve been.” As I listen to the accounts of warriors and those who support them, I wonder over the ways in which bodies speak to and through us as a means of expressing [beyond the language we are accustomed to] the profound disjuncture or fissures in a lived experience of repeated trauma as enacted through these wars in particular. Each person’s story exposed the nuanced ways in which suffering could not be isolated, captivated, nor clearly defined. Suffering indeed spans a vast landscape. As Morris (1998) attested, “Suffering is not a raw datum – not a natural phenomenon we can easily classify and measure despite its links with our biological processes – but a fluid state: a status that we extend or withhold” (p. 216). In contemplating these deployments, and more specifically multiple deployments, Radar, a Retired Army, Lt. Colonel nurse summed it up rather frankly, “I think one of the hardest parts is that we’ve fried and refried some of these soldiers.” As I listened and continue to listen with warriors I, too, want to understand how it is that we are all changed by war.

As previously noted, the Ho Chunks American Indian nation (and others) acknowledge the specter of age acceleration, recognizing a rapid maturation process manifested in those young warriors who experience the loss and injury of so many peers.
Such losses place their own mortality in the forefront of time and space; it both changes and ages us in dramatic ways (Gross 2007, Holm, 1986). Perhaps no one has so openly articulated this stance as Rory does here,

Yeah, the closer you get, [to your departure from combat] you get more worried because over there you realize today could be my last, you’re always thinking that -- I actually just wrote a paper in English 102 because [the professor] wanted us to introduce ourselves -- You realize because you know every day you see fire fights-- well not every day but -- while you’re there you see fire fights -you see mortars go off - you see trucks blown up -you see dead bodies - so you realize -- over there -- life’s short. So you take each day as it comes - but live life to the fullest.

Where the Ho Chunks speak to us of the ways in which war ages a body-being, I heard both the simple and the profound as Troy reflected on a buddy he served with; “he’s just a little older than me by a couple months. But when we got back from Iraq - he had gray spots growing in his hair.” When contemplating signing on into the Special Forces, A.J. weighed the impact his deployment had on his Mom,

As much as I wouldn’t mind it, I wouldn’t do that to my mom. I love my mom too much -- her hair was the greyest I’ve ever seen it when I was deployed --- They sent me pictures --and she just didn’t look good -- yeah, it stressed her out.

Baylor and I laughed as he pondered the irony of his own body, “I feel like I’m like 40 years old,” [I can hear him smiling [phone interview] and he starts chuckling and laughing through this] “and I have aches and pains -- like no one else, I know.” He then went on to describe watching another company commander, “I was thinking -- he was
going to be like 46 -- 47 years old -- at least. He’s only . . . . only 33 -- I’m like oh man - I hope I’m not *that* worn out when I’m that old.” At 24 years, Troy told me,

My ankles pop and grind now and give out and my knees…My knees get inflamed and hot -you know -arthritis and stuff - they did an x-ray on that and said that I had fractured that, too – I had an ankle issue at one time - some small fracture - avulsion fractures they called it.

There is undoubtedly an external physicality of age acceleration manifested through the body. Troy raised his foot up, “listen to this” rolling his ankle I could hear the crunching – in that crunching were stories he had revealed and, surely, many left unspoken.

Yet, amidst our laughter, another kind of aging resonates. Wise quietly and rather eloquently reflected on leaving combat, “We were leaving . . . . Just a huge part of our lives - I guess.” April shared her perspective as the spouse of a National Guardsman (declined interview) who served in Iraq. She thoughtfully articulated it this way, “maybe some innocence has been taken away --- things are put in perspective when you face death, I’ll just put it that way. It makes you really think about how would you cope with this and so innocence is the one thing that would stand out in my mind.” These speaking-bodies-beings have indeed been aged beyond measure.

Though persistent suffering has plagued American warriors returning from battle to home, answers to trauma continue to baffle our sense-abilities. From the Civil War through these most recent wars, combat related trauma afflicting warriors has been known through a succession of labels. In the Civil War the emotional afflictions plaguing warriors were referred to as, “soldier’s heart.” In WW I, the term was “shell shock;” “combat fatigue,” when referring to veterans of WW II and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
(PTSD) emerged in the aftermath of the Vietnam War (Talbot, 1997). Clearly, throughout our history, warriors have returned from combat in a vast array of physical and emotional anguish; anguish so deep, it seems to render us both stricken and perplexed. This rendering traverses an intimately personal body, a social and cultural body—a body politic. The term “PTSD” lingers over and through our lexicon. It is a term that stakes a fragile hold on our need to narrate, comprehend, or otherwise encompass our experience and understanding of a being/body’s response to trauma, combat and healing. Heath spoke to what he framed as the most difficult for him to conceptualize and hence rearticulate as the “the speed of lethality” telling me, “I suppose the most dramatic thing that effected me -- affected me was the speed at which – the speed of lethality. Combat -- watching how fast things happen.” “Marie,” he said, “There’s nothing you can prepare yourself for psychologically you go to combat because you don’t know what you’re gonna see until you’ve seen it. There’s nothing that really replicates it.” He went on,

I don’t know if it’s that you slow down or its just the nature of what happens but when you see people get blown up -- its not like fourth of July - its like -- its - one minute they are there - and the next minute -- they’re just gone -- and you’re like - oh my gosh-- you’ve never -- until you’ve seen that -- you’ve never seen it. So to prepare yourself for that - there’s’ a shock - the speed of lethality. Correspondingly, Wise touched on the difficulty in any sort of sense-making. His words continue to resonate with me,

Well, its -- I’ll tell you what I remember but -- a lot of that part of my life is -- just kind of a blur to tell you the truth. Like our unit . . . . We had a lot of casualties and stuff like - so we were like in an ultrasensitive unit I would say . . . Just like,
just like everyone is going to be more irritated by the regular world then most thought. So like umm when we got back they had a therapist come talk to us all. Troy was in the same unit. He explained it like this:

We were one of the more combat-engaged units. We took a lot of casualties. One out of three were killed or wounded. We had 23 guys in the company killed out of about 160. You know - I have this tattoo -- I had had the tattoo for about four or five months, and [my Mom thought] that it was about this one day where I had a close call. I was like, NO. I was like – I was like --- That’s the picture that – you know - people have of it. . . .But it’s not about that one day. . . .It’s about the whole deployment. ---- It’s about everything - It’s a memorial for the guys who we’ve lost, and - You probably don’t want to hear this -- but when you talk about the close calls ---- I remember counting up ten times that were very close.

Troy did not offer to show me the tattoo and so I did not ask to see it. I was clearly impressed with his sense of protection. I was struck with the very presence of stories that were as deeply embedded in his psyche, in his body and very being, as the ink that permanently marked his flesh.

Though the ways in which we refer to combat trauma have shifted across various psychiatric diagnoses over time, the consistent anguish warriors’ bear, do not. Today’s warriors continue to struggle with the helplessness of preventing the deaths of fallen comrades, they continue to struggle with memories of their own wounding and throughout history the use and abuses of alcohol remains a prevalent and destructive force (Talbott, 1997). This was clearly evident and often difficult to hear in interviews with the vets to whom I spoke.
What’s tough now - and still during that time is -- I’m here. There are still other Marines there. I want to be there, too. I want to be there with them . . . . and then there’s – at that time, I didn’t – it took me a little while to pick up on it - and for about two years, I had a lot of survivor’s guilt - and that was part of it. I wanted to go back, I think, and just . . . . I would have been happy to be dead there, too. . . I mean, I would have been happy to go back and fight and die fighting like, so many of the guys did - Or at least change places with one of them, one of the guys that, you know, were getting married or had an unborn child still or, you know, children to come back to, you know, and I’m just coming back to this great college life. (Troy)

Raven shook his head telling me, “Survivor’s guilt destroys me. It destroys me because to this day -- - how come I was allowed to live and do all this other stuff? -- You know my friends died --- and they can’t do this anymore? They can’t see their kid grow up.” For Wise, the challenge was in dealing with the whole of it. He reflected, “Well like with me - a lot of stuff is hard to - like --- to get over everything that happened - The main thing with me --- just trying to acclimate to society - not thinking about it 100 times a day.” All of these warriors speak to the stories that survive through us. In terms of the alcohol, almost every soldier spoke to their relationship with alcohol. Like Baylor, many saw it as both necessary and problematic.

You kind of get to the point where it’s like, training’s done. We’re gonna go here in a month. Now it’s like you’re really getting to know each other … you’re partying together, and hanging out, and just doing whatever. People say that the training you know, training bonds everybody. Like, “Oh, training – training
makes you able to work with people more,” -- but what bonds everybody is the partying.” It’s like – I mean - it’s going back - it’s the off hours -- you know, it’s sad to say but - it’s the drinking, that everyone really - you know - becomes close -- and you know -- you accept like we’re leaving. I’m not – that’s just kind of what there is to do on base. I think if there is one problem in the Marine Corps, it would be drinking.

AJ similarly describes, “It was like training -- plus party. Yeah you’re getting ready to go back overseas -- you might as well get it out while it’s there.” For others, like Troy, “It’s got to be the stress… I still don’t sleep. I can’t. I think that’s why I like to drink a lot of times, because I – those are the times that I probably sleep the best.” Wise’s mother, Kate reflected, “And I think he wasn’t drinking to be happy. He was drinking to numb himself.” Wise reveal this in a portion of his journey map that expressed his first Half year home.

Narrative Map 2: “Booze and Anger” (Wise)
In a historical accounting of soldiers, combat and psychiatric treatment, Talbott (1997) addressed the epidemic proportions of “shell-shocked” warriors our country encountered during WW I whereby the psychiatric profession was ill equipped to assist in the healing of warriors. The focus and research primarily anchored in those medically acute ailments. Citing Dr. William H.R. Rivers, a leading diagnostician of the era, “the outbreak of the war found the [psychiatric] medical profession with no such common body of principles and measures as those which enabled Medicine and Surgery to deal so successfully with the more material effects of warfare upon the human organism” (pp. 443-444). Tad, a major with over 20 years and multiple deployments with the army has been thoughtful about the matter for some time. He too wanted to know, “So, why is it not improving? We’re missin’ something if this isn’t getting’ any better. And it’s this. That’s what we’re all missing. [counseling] Hell, if guys are goin’ to counseling and it’s not getting better, we’re missing somethin’ somewhere.” Reflecting further Tad suggested, “I think we do a good job getting the information out there on the way home. It’s just when a guy has a real issue, it’s getting’ ‘em to the right source. And I don’t know if we do a very good job of that.” This is clearly evident.

Today we continue to hail the technology that is able to save lives that might have otherwise been lost (and rightly so). Consider Heath’s (medical doctor with the National Guard) description of preparing for combat trauma. Before he left for Iraq, Health explained how important it was for him to prepare by taking on extra hours in local emergency rooms;

When a guy comes in who has been - let’s say in a vehicle explosion - or a fire fight - and he is covered in grime and he’s wearing his body armor - and he’s got
30 pound of combat gear on and he’s got his boots on. And maybe he has taken a grenade hit and there are shrapnel wounds. None of these things is necessarily - life threatening - but the ability to do a good survey - and identify the life threatening wounds for bleeding to death - for hemorrhage - is a skill. And you have to practice it - you have to get in - and you have get comfortable with getting things off people, finding areas that could give you problems, looking for exit wounds, looking for those kinds of things - so the way you do that [prepare] is to do emergency medicine -- you get the car wrecks.

Health went on to describe the need to shift past “the shock [and] the “speed of lethality,” once a being is ‘in theater.’

There’s also a time where you have to say - ok what am I doing - I’m still working a problem - I’m still taking care of someone whose hurt - I’m still gonna go from head to toe - I’m gonna find out where they are leaking at - try to plug the holes, try to put the tourniquets on, try to get a helicopter inbound, try to get them to combat support hospital, to get them to a surgeon - I mean - it a very strange process.

It occurs to me how very human his endeavor is – how the presence of a body, [and I am imagining his hands – extensions of his being – working as furiously as his seemingly “rational brain”] in care of another body is so very necessary to our existence. Because, amidst us all – even in the presence of medical finesse, record numbers of OIF/OEF vets are committing suicide and struggling in profoundly acute ways with the complexities inherent in a diagnosis of (or lack of) PTSD (Grieger, Cozza, Ursano, HogeMartinez, Engel and Wain, 2006).
Wise is a Marine vet. His unit suffered significant casualties, as they were regularly engaged in direct combat. He paints a compelling picture of returning from combat to home.

When I first got home a lot of - like I really don’t remember the first three months I was home. . . . My brother said just about every single night I would go in my -- I had the whole basement, and he said I would just go down there with a case of beer and just ---I . . . I don’t even remember doing that once - and he said I did it all the time. And my parents would be upstairs . . . just sad that I was like that. I had a girlfriend for probably about five years at that point . . . and . . . . were we just getting -- we had never fought before hand, but I would just flip out over the stupidest stuff and one time we just got in the biggest fight and --- we talked about it afterwards . . . . and that’s pretty much why I started going to the VA.

Radar led a combat mental health unit in Iraq, and he is also a Vietnam veteran. He speaks to accumulating fragmented body experiences, and lived/ing stories that run through time:

Those coping mechanisms that you use for battle, they still work - you go and do your job; and in a lot of ways you can continue to do that job. When you come home, you might not only have some old stuff that comes back, but now you’ve got some new stuff to add to that so it might even be worse when you come home the second time.

For April, the spouse of an Iraq vet, this partial-being- come back is indeed a real fear. Speaking through her experiences, she reflects,
They left 100 percent, they came back 50 percent maybe --- and then if they’re sending them back over - what if they’re only 75 percent back up to normal to where they were. How do you send somebody into --- you know the same situation again - when they’re not back to 100% - and maybe they never will be. You know they’ll never will be but. Part of me thinks that, um you know. . . . I guess I would worry that [my husband] would come back - even worse than he was then he came back this time -- because he’s definitely not himself - he’s grown into the new him (laughter) but, - I’m . . . that makes me nervous - I don’t know how people done it with multiple deployments, I just can’t imagine . . . .I really can’t.”

Sorie talked about the state her son was in when he came home with the prospect of another tour in his immediate future.

I mean you’re taking somebody who’s been in the situation for over a year -- and then you’re going to tell them you’re going to go right back, it’s just, you know you didn’t even get your grounding in terms of being home. And he did not want to go back -- at all. He – I don’t think it was fear per se –he-- just, he wouldn’t have been of the kind peace of mind and stability to actually really be able to think through situations calmly. It was just way too much he had seen, he had had no time to pull back and think about it. No time to sort through his feelings. Uh and a variety of other things.

Knowing how broken he was. She feared, “I just -- if he had gone back I did not expect that he would come back home.”
Both Kip and Troy spoke to the shift in body-being, one Kirmeyer (1992) explained as necessary. Ultimately he told us, “the body insists that we finalize our temporary mental constructions, committing ourselves to some view of reality” (p. 325). His words resonate for me as I listened to Troy articulate, with clarity, the shift and the need for survival as he told me,

after we had our first couple engagements and people were wounded and everything else, then about the first week going out on missions, it took about a week to a week and a half or so for myself to accept death, I guess, and not worry about it and just do - you know - what I was there to do - because I remember – I remember the feeling of just being kind of like the walking dead almost, just not really – I don’t know, but so when we – that’s how, you know, most of the deployment went, and that’s the way I was able to do everything.

Kip’s telling strikes for its “matter-of-fact-ness,” and perhaps for the subtleties of trauma living in and speaking through a body-being at rest,

The problems that people have relating to dramatic experiences I’m sure are there for me but don’t seem to be at the forefront. I mean they’re there and I’m sure they impact - like the issue with mortar fires, the issue with getting shot at, the issue with finding a bag of heads one day; that was troubling.

Perhaps Pete speaks to the dilemma we face most directly, “But you can’t have it both ways -- you can’t have -- like this effective machine you know -- to create war and stuff and then expect that -- once their term is over they can just go back into the civilian
world like nothing happened.” Pete’s depiction of a military machine was planted
underneath a tree on the bottom portion of his map:

Narrative Map 3: The Military Machine (Pete)

It is indeed disconcerting at best that we continue to be stupefied with the
alarming rates of mental anguish, all the while emerging with superior technological
advances in medicine technology. We have yet to fully account for the ways in which the
body expresses trauma. While I am compelled to ask why and how, Roger spoke to the
juxtaposition of technology and body-beings, “We have all the technology” he told me,
“but the activity stays the same.” He continued, “We think because we have technology
that the activity is different now. Bull -- that’s bologna. It’s - it’s that -- the human - the
human condition is the same - the human condition hasn’t really changed -our technology
--is better - or more - and different.” Interestingly, he went on to add, “But our, our brain
is still the same. You know it hasn’t caught up with all the other stuff. So -- I don’t know
what I think of that. I, I really don’t.”
Finally, Pete’s narrative here is poignant and powerful. His words staggered me—and I believe, mark us all—in our social/civil/political effort—to “support our troops.” It is a reminder to attend to the body-beings of our warriors as Frank (1997) suggested through a dyadic relation, the recognition that even though the other is a body outside of mine [drawing on Buber, 1970], “over and against me” this other has to do with me as I with it” (p. 35).

“It’s just; it’s just kind of like lonely I think. Did you ever see -- that tree in Africa? That one that’s really famous? It’s like that {--} but I can’t draw for shit. . . . [he’s mapping here]. . . . It’s like this {turning it to me} . . . And it’s like a tree and it’s like really artistic and stuff and there’s nothing else around it, and it’s the only one . . . . it makes me think like how - how the hell did that tree get there, like how did - like how did it grow in such like a harsh environment and stuff. And it’s just like all alone. . . . I think that’s, that might be like my reintegration process.

Narrative Map 4: The Joshua Tree (Pete)
Body-Speaking: “Where are you going with my Battle Rattle”

Battle Rattle – It’s the gear; close to 50 pounds of military equipment: ammunition, weapons, a flak vest, Kevlar helmet, and gas masks. Attached to, worn on-with warrior bodies. Here a body takes up both physical and symbolic apparatus. Battle Rattle marks a warrior, the tools with which the body transitions from civilian to warrior and back again. Yet, it is the ‘back-again’ that seems to leave soldiers startled at the loss of what has become so fundamental to their body-being and survival. Early and consistent training is a part of every soldier’s story - Troy loved it.

Training. It’s an interesting relationship. Some people hate the drill instructors. And then by the end you love ‘em. It’s a really interesting dynamic what happens there…And they may be making you do physical exercises … breaking you down - and you’re hating it and hating it  and you just want them to leave you the fuck alone - and you realize they’re just making you tougher and stronger and there really is a reason for everything they have you do. And you find - you start to see that - toward the end. There just doing their job too. You know.
In contrast to this preparation, the transition of warriors exiting “the theater” seems far more abrupt. Deadlines are less specific, “Seven months in country… Well, we knew that it [leaving combat] was gonna be coming up. We knew it was gonna be coming up” (Troy). A RIP (Relief in Place), as Al described is, “The first big milestone [for departing combat] when that [replacement] unit hits the ground. It usually takes about 10-14 days.” Where basic training and officer training occurs over a period of months and years, nothing seems to quite capture or prepare the warrior for disengaging from those tools that have become extensions of her limbs, thinking, being, and surviving. Thus, while training is a critical factor in preparing the body for war, stories about leaving combat reveal a far more penetrating vision of the depth to which the body embodies a warrior.

Kuwait, an ally of the U.S. since 1991, is a small country (about the size of New Jersey) that shares land borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia and whose eastern border bears the Persian Gulf. Across the Gulf are (among other countries) Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, which make the relationship with Kuwait especially critical and strategic in matters (even beyond) these current wars. “Kuwait is where you go on your way in and out,” explained Rory. Coming across the terrain of Iraq, Raven put it like this, “we kind of get to Kuwait, and that’s where you feel like everything has been just lifted off your shoulders.” After waiting for about an hour to cross the border, relief set in, “it was like – finally - an end to this madness.” The U.S has a number of bases throughout the country. Importantly, these include large base-headquarters for the Army, Marines, Navy and Air Force. Each marks their presence in this county with specific goals for transporting
military personal and equipment, to and from the country via air, coastal ports and then across and throughout the terrain of the middle east (Terrill, 2007).

Warriors often have a marked and arduous journey from combat to Kuwait. Raven makes this clear, recounting that journey from combat to Kuwait, “I mean that drive is still heart aching, because the fact is -- you can see the end point but the thing is - you had to go through Bagdad still. You have to go these milestones where they were still wreaking havoc on our soldiers . . . But, it was just thank goodness nothing ever happened to any of us.” Hearing similar tales, I began to imagine Kuwait as laden with what Carr (1986) refers to as “temporal thickness” (p. 47). This he explains as, “an event [being] more than the mere difference between two states, at least for experience, for it must be experienced along with the two states it separates” (p. 47, original emphasis). Kuwait marks the middle of one journey, at the same time marks the beginning of journey home, and leaving that ‘theater.’ Stories are an ongoing series of beginnings, middles, and ends.

The transition here in Kuwait is where soldiers begin to shed fragments of what it means for a body-being to experience that of a fighting warrior. It is here in Kuwait where soldiers are relieved of the bulk of their gear/body - battle rattle. After sharing the difficulties of getting to Kuwait Troy explains,

Okay, so finally we made it there –though - but I remember how everyone kind of hated it -or were freaked out - you know, as soon as we got to Kuwait. Now, all of a sudden, we’re just put on a bus. We don’t have our ammo anymore. There’s cars passing us on the highway, and we’re just like, “Well, this isn’t cool,” you know, like, “I don’t like this at all.” yeah, we were like, “Whatever. We’re going
home,” but, you know, it really sucked. You’re just caught off guard. I’m like,

“This is the prime target right here.

Raven was likewise riveted in that terrain,

We saw a lot of our stuff given away almost - Just like our flak vest stayed in
Iraq; our weapons stayed with us; but our ammo went out. And, we saw the stuff
and a lot of us were like, aw man, I need this, but it’s like no -- no, you’re in
Kuwait now - you’re on the base and you will never leave again. You will be fine.
It’s just like, I lived with this for a whole year, give that back, where are you
going with that? But, a lot of that stuff your just like thank goodness, take it. I
don’t want it anymore. Especially that battle rattle.

Al, an Army Captain speaks to the further complexity the relationship between a
body and their gear. There is a stealth-ness to which those objects –emanating from
multitude of forces - move as freight- both bearing down on and lifting up a warrior’s
shoulders. The ‘battle rattle’ has a story of its own-marked as it is through vast “matrices
of power” having brought it to fruition (Foucault, 1978). Warriors have a relationship,
and consequently a shared story with those forces that bring objects into and onto our
body-beings. Al’s thoughts are a nuanced feature, a slightly different perspective of
turning over ‘battle-rattle.’ Here he melds the corporeal with institutional materiality.
“You can't hardly imagine - When you see the dollar amounts associated with everything
that we’re gonna own, it's just an incredible amount. . . .That's part of the deal . . . . you
gotta sign for all that property.” This “property” is not removed from the body of the
warrior – for with it – in it emanates more stories. There are silent stories here. Later in
the interview Al spoke with me about his responsibilities with regards to “property” and “accounting for equipment.” His supervisor wanted some numbers.

For a MP battalion with seven long companies and headquarters detachment, we had over $740 million in government equipment that we were responsible for. Over the course of the year, I wanna say that we investigated losses somewhere in the ballpark of $400,000.00. Which $400,000.00 is a lot of money - - but when you put that up against being responsible for $740 million -- it's a drop in the bucket.

The quiet got very loud for me at $400,000.00. As these warriors attest – equipment does not abide without a counterpart; those very material forces that come together and do so with a body and consequently a body-telling-story in the now silent hub.

More than expressing familiarity, survival mechanisms, or drops in a bucket, I believe these bodies mark both presence and the presence of loss. The shedding of body-gear seems to be akin to that of losing a limb. Like phantom limbs, the warrior body continues to converse long after his tools have been dismantled. They seem to induce a pain that cannot be fully accounted for, or articulated. Yet, those once, extensions of our body-beings speak to us, from us and about us. Consider work in neurobiology that suggests, “reactivated neurons devoted to a missing hand or foot become recalibrated by experience so that they come to signal stimuli on remaining body parts” (Kaas, 1998, p. 331, emphasis added). Warrior bodies have, indeed, been recalibrated through those objects that have, in turn, become extensions of a body and a self. Moreover, “no surgery involving severing of the nerves in the spinal cord or running between the amputation site and the spinal cord has been shown to be effective in reducing phantom limb pain”
(Sherman, Arena, Sherman, & Ernst, 1989, p. 271). No matter how much we attempt to intervene, bodies speak through the interventions. These authors report that, “virtually all amputees are aware of at least some feelings, which seem to emanate from the portion of limb that has been removed” (p. 268). The phantom limb calls, [cries out] to the speaking-through-being body; a body speaking beyond language is deeper still –where are you going with that part of my body. The world and a body-being in time space have been permanently altered to account for both presence and loss.

It was during the interviews with veterans in particular that this notion began its percolation. Troy had obviously given thought and attention to the ways in which his body-being shifted. He contemplated, “I did pick up on one time, though, that my arms would always be kind of - like that.” Sitting directly across from me, his corporeal shift to a weapons stance was riveting. “I don’t remember if I do it so much anymore … But it’s one of my most natural feelings; yeah… It makes me feel more punchable, as if I had my rifle still. But it’s one of my most natural feelings.” Through these veterans we can begin to understand, to recognize the ways in which culture through war infiltrates the body and consequently how the body continues to speak through that culture, beyond a contextual, geographic space of a shifting combat zone. His limbs operate through the extension of a being – a thinking, feeling responding being – a body presence marked, shifted from within. Once the realization was invoked from within him, Troy began to draw on other scenarios. For instance, he explained how running with his sister stateside conjured up his warrior body,

I stayed to her left side, and any time she’d be on the other side of me, it made me feel unnatural and not as comfortable, and I wanted to be – and I started to notice
that like [holding a weapon] – I don’t know – I kind of just had my hands like that, but I had my – [Still holding a weapon] and, you know, I’m right-handed. It’s more – it’s not as natural for me to carry my rifle with my left hand, but that’s the way I would be if she was on the left side of me… like I just naturally felt so much more comfortable.

Here narrative emanates from within – the body is telling us a story; one that demands attention. It is a story that lingers in and through a warrior. It is a body story that speaks to us as well.

Warrior bodies speak through a personal, social and political body. Like the phantom limb, the ‘battle-rattle’ may be gone, but a sense of self continues to emanate through the relationships that occur between a body and an object in space and through time. Perhaps we are hearing a kind of body-speak – narratives that progress across beginnings, slipping into middles and through ends that bump into another beginning.

Where Carr (1986) took up the configuration of narrative structure and the temporality of an experienced object, I hear warrior bodies speaking. An experience, he said, “takes its configurational character from its object, including its inner articulation, its external demarcation and its principle of unity” (p. 46, emphasis added). A relationship with battle rattle consists of three components of experience and narrative. The body is changed psychically, and psychically - an inner articulation impacts, for one, how I move through space and time in my battle rattle. The external articulations – mark (for one) their presence of a self as warrior. And finally the culmination of an inner and outer articulation with objects both practical and symbolic, mobilize the warrior and all its physical and symbolic apparatus. A warrior’s body-stories through experience – the
embodiment of a warrior - is thus configured (rattled) across a myriad of, ‘beginnings, 
middles, and ends.’

We experience, live through, our bodies across multiple and sensory texts, across 
time and space. Our bodies, if we can hear them, narrate back to us across these same 
plains. Grosz (1994) specifically regarded the impact of environment and space on a 
cultural body, “Relative to its environment, the body image separates the subject’s body 
from a background of forces; but also within the body, the body image establishes the 
distinctions, between movements of limbs, say, and the rest of the body- which provide it 
with its corporeal context” (p. 83-84). In the warrior, the “civilian” subject has not only 
been cordoned off but significantly [permanently?] altered. The revelation is clear to 
Troy:

The second – the second like I envisioned carrying my rifle on this left-hand side 
when I was on that side of her, it made me feel more comfortable again - that she 
was on that side of me. It’s like I’d feel like running with her or, you know - I’m 
protective.

Baylor placed a knowing in his own body, “I mean, it’s like -- multiple places you know 
- it’s in your heart - and it’s always like - right there in your throat – and, you got nose 
tingle. You know when your nose starts tingling --you know --You’re going to be 
leaving soon.” Once he started making the connections, Troy went on to describe shifts in 
his frame. “We noticed – it was just the way my body - how my stance had changed or 
maybe my structure, but my shoulder that I slung my rifle on – my shoulders weren’t 
square anymore… I was like { _ that - } so this one was higher.” Grosz (1994) called us 
to acknowledge the ways in which a body image is not one that resides in isolation but
rather the body, “in relation the surrounding space, other objects and bodies and coordinates or axes of vertical and horizontal... it is a postural schema of the body... Body image is the condition of the subject’s access to spatiality (including spatiality of the built environment)” (p. 85). There is a weighty culmination of stories in the landscape of a warrior’s body. Al speaks to leaving that space, “When those Chinooks – as soon as we felt the suspension recoil -- when the wheels came up off the ground -- everybody in there just bust out in applause – screamed -- "Okay, we're done. We're on our way”

Though the previous narratives reflect embodied responses to leaving combat, when I asked Al to identify for me a moment that would mark his homecoming, he too expressed the juxtaposition of presence and loss, not fully being able to extricate himself from either.

A single moment? I would say it is, for me, you get out of the ceremony, you drive home, and being able to take off your uniform....When you shed the uniform that you've been wearing every day, sometimes 18 to 20 hours a day over the last year, over the last 15 months - that to me . . . . it feels like . . . . I don't wanna say everything that happened just goes away. It's like you're kinda shedding – [searching for another word]. . . . it's hard to describe. I mean- I think the Army does its best to make sure that – there's regulations -- we all wear the same uniform, and we all look the same, and we all buy about the same foods, and you know. Just being able to shed your uniform and not have to – yeah, this sounds probably really superficial – but not have to worry about are you clean-shaven? Is my hair short enough? Are my boots glossed right? Especially being in a leadership position - I won't say even as an officer - but being in a leadership
position, just making sure that visibly you are squared away to the standard before you step out of your door in the morning because if not - no one else who's a part of your organization is gonna respect you. Being able to take all that away after a year of doing it all exactly the same day in - day out -- it's just a presumed relief. Kind of like you're – I won't say shedding your responsibility because your responsibility is always there -- but it's – just - to me - the equivalent of the weight being lifted off your shoulders. Not being contrived to your daily schedule which was made up by somebody else because if you don't somebody could get hurt (emphasis added).

Countless paradoxes rest within the body-being of a warrior. Zita (1998) reminded us of the paradox of a body both fragile and resilient having asserted, “The seeming sturdiness of our bodies is rendered more fragile, and the fragility of our bodies is rendered more physically durable” (p. 5). The proposition I forward here, that there lies within us, a wisdom (and great potentiality) in our most vulnerable moments - a vulnerability that implies great strength - is indeed a paradox; particularly for the warrior – her/his image, persona of duty, strength, power and protectiveness. Because it is through that strength of mind and might that our soldiers must, “soldier on,” and “shoulder up.” Radar frames this mindset as a “warrior ethos,” having told me, “so when you’re dealing with the warriors, as long as you can really instill that warrior ethos. Those soldiers are going to pull up their pants and soldier on.” The possibility that strength lies in our fragility rests paradigmatically opposed to our understanding of living in a body where the reasoned mind subordinates the body. Where emotion is considered inferior to reason; and might makes right.
There seems a persistent (and nagging) dialectical tension, in the ways in which we continue to disregard a body that speaks of trauma over and through time (PTSD) on the one hand with the persistency with which we emplot a Cartesian mind/body paradigm. Perhaps it is such a persistency that remains central to the ease to which we lead warriors into combat. Clearly we cannot own our most vulnerable self in the midst of a body needing protection – in the midst of combat/war. Yet the notion that the mind must master the body may very well be a precursor to the ways in which we decide how to use the/whose body/ies. Indeed, Grosz (1994) wisely asserted, “The body has been regarded as a source of interference in, and danger to, the operations of reason” (p. 5). These narratives then draw us to contemplate a dyadic body where Frank (1997) calls us to consider the “shared corporeality” not only of, “who we are to each other, but who we are for each other” (p. 35, emphasis in original). When we say we “support our troops” I fear we largely fail in our response to that dyadic body/politic. The Cartesian riff traverses our social political episteme; it speaks across - and up in-between- personal, social and political body/ies. Thus, like countless feminists (see, Fraser, 1989, Grosz, 1994, Lupton, 1995, 2003, Weedon, 1987) continuing to challenge Cartesian philosophy, the embodied stories of both our warriors and those who support them serve to call into question our continued reliance of a rational mind mastering an emotional body. These speaking-body-beings reveal the need for what Butler (2004) inspired - the ideal of an “ontological insurrection” - a desire to find ways to better hear, assist and attend to a traumatized speaking body. More eloquently stated, Kirmayer (1992) reminded us that, “through the pain and suffering that foreshadow its own mortality; the body drives us to seek meaning to take our words as seriously as our deeds” (p. 325). So it is then, when
we say, “we support our troops” can we fully articulate –across personal, social and political dimensions - what that commitment entails?

Bodies of Support: “Just Rip your Heart out and put it on the Dashboard”

I always told him "It feels like you took a lung with you – one of my lungs, because I can't breathe right." Like I had ... shortness of breath or like I just – you know how after a big exam you take a sigh of relief, like, "Hah, that's over"? Like I couldn't just be easy – I was just like tense all the time... And I just have like a knot in my stomach, a gross ache that doesn't go away...I was a nutcase... I felt like I was shoved into growing up. . . .
All these feelings were things I'd never felt before, and I just kind of sagged. (Jace, University student)

Clearly, it is not only the body and soul of the warrior that ages and endures, but those familial and communal systems that make up our social structures also bear profoundly deep wounds. Jace is a college senior and fiancé to a Marine, who, as of December 2009, is engaged in a third deployment. She speaks through a body that supports a warrior. Jace also explained, “I was sick for probably four days, just anxiety sick, like I thought I was going to throw up, I would kind of like dry heave --- it was just I couldn't catch my breath, I couldn't stop crying.” For those who teach, are her peers and/or roommates, the warrior comes unsuspecting - to us - through her; a storied being and body of a warrior entwined with her own, and consequently ours through a social body.

Others were also able to identify locations where angst marked their bodies. April explained, “I started having – actually - tremendous back pain in my middle back. I went to a chiropractor who said, “you are holding all of your stress right here in your mid-back.” One person explained, “to be honest when I hear things like that or read something specific in the news it's like -- I'd go to the restroom --it makes me ---- it's like a laxative.” Kate explained for her, “it’s almost like a physical reaction – in my stomach - and I just felt hollow. Like, I just felt hollow inside, and I just – it was just hard to fight

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5 On March 5, 2010, Baylor was hit with an IED while leading a mission through Marjah, Afghanistan. Because he carried the means of communication (radio), the (IED) device was detonated as he moved through a narrow passage. His body – neck, lower torso, and legs were battered with shrapnel and he was returned to the states for care in Bethesda, MD. And then home for 30 days to recover before heading back to complete his term.
from crying.” Rhonda was explicit. For her there was no doubt from where her body spoke. “My guts. Like crunching and gnawing [my] appetite disappears - [I] don’t wanna eat anything. I am a worrier and a stressor… I’ve developed stomach ulcers. She went on more thoughtfully, “it’s like I don’t even have the rest of a body - It’s just a really hollow feeling” she explained. Later in the interview Rhonda explained to me the physical toll Al’s deployment was having on her.

I went to the doctors and he’s like oh ok. Like he was almost nonchalant about it and I’m sitting there crying because I couldn’t stop crying. Couldn’t stop crying for days. You know I was so sick --- my stomach -- oh --- that was like the height of it. It was really bad. Because. . . just of all the stress . . . and all the emotions just took a physical toll -- Because I’d not dealt with them -- and I kept so much of it in that it finally manifested -- and I collapsed. Like physically -- was ill.

Like Jace, April, whose husband was deployed to Iraq via the National Guard, also described how she too felt, “on edge, all the time - it makes you feel a little out of control I think.” As we continued, April was thoughtful, “I think I had to become hard”... [can you describe that to me] ... “I don’t know -- again that’s the only way to protect yourself -- I don’t know -- was to become -- almost cold to -- so you won’t have to feel the pain or - the -- you know the worry -- which of course I still have.” Alice told me, “Deployment was like a black hole,” and Chester, Pete’s Dad explained, “You don’t talk to anyone, you don’t eat, you don’t sleep, you’re just full of concern.” He went on to share more,
Well, I did a lot of soul searching myself thinking about consequences -- and the direction he was heading -- and what could or couldn’t happen . . . . I felt a little freaked out about it. Especially after he left --- kind of like - - a nervous sick feeling. But you kind of get over that phase -- and it becomes fright -- apprehension and then you just learn to deal with it as the days go on and you don’t hear anything.

Like others, Roger spoke to the hollowness at Kip’s departure, “it’s a really empty feeling now,”

Narrative Map 7: “You just Watch Him Go” (Roger)
It wasn’t until we got to the mapping that Roger began to express some of the rawness of his son’s departure. When I asked what the “line of departure” on his map meant, he easily explained it in military terms. When I asked how he felt at that line – in that moment in time - he became very quiet and quite choked up, “You just watch it. And you just watch him go -- Helplessness. Just, just helpless you know.” Sitting quiet he looked up and went on.

You know what it’s like? I come back to its like -- just send them off -- and it’s like you can no longer touch, you can’t intervene. There’s no, there’s no intervention -- it’s-- he’s on-- he’s cast off. . . . .If you want to put it in a better light -- it’s like when you go up the hill on a rollercoaster. And you know you’re going to get to the top, and -and -you’re going up the hill -- and it’s kind of like -- and you go oh Gawd, you know this is going to start pretty soon -- and you -- but this is a bad news --- and I know it’s going to be awful and then all of sudden – RRRRRRRRRR-- And that -- I mean that’s kind of a funny way to put it -- but it’s -- you know that’s - that might not be totally appropriate -- but that --it’s -- it’s just goodbye. Goodbye. The bottom drops out.

AJ remembers that his Dad “Was never nervous. He was happy to hear from me.” He was however consistently sensitive to the impact his deployment had on his mother. He told me,

But my mom was the one that would wait up by the phone till like 6 am -- she did that for 5 months. She barely slept waiting for me to call because I’d always call at like 1 or 2 -- And she’d wait and wait and wait and my dad would be like its AJ over there he’s fine, he’s AJ - he’s going to be fine it’s not [our other son]
over there its AJ. And my mom’s like but he’s like -- you know he always calls at this time.

Though she didn’t worry on a daily basis, her body nonetheless spoke, “And I would wake up and think -- you know I hope I would see [my son] again - and I hope he’s ok -- and I wonder why I woke up -- is something happening to him right now that I just don’t know about?” For Sorie in, “the day to day life,” she told me, “you got to continue doing something, or else you - it just eats you up.”

Jace spoke to her personal struggles, and I am reminded, the bulk of her support/experience happens on a college campus. She explained, “we called them weepy fits and they've gone down in number recently because I've learned to harness my psychotic Marine fiancé feelings - but like my friends would just sit there wide-eyed and look at me like, ‘She'll stop in a minute.’” The juxtaposition of living and negotiating in space between her complex worlds came through as Jace shared other details, “I saw the weird number come up – and I think I saved all his numbers under like Iraq – Iraq, Iraq, Iraq, like I had six Iraq numbers on my phone. So of course I jump out of class and run in the hallway to answer the phone.” At other indiscriminate times she described how, I wouldn't be looking at someone and yelling at them - I was just yelling to the air, like "I hate Iraq," and I would just go on these little tangents, or I would see a Marine commercial out somewhere and just lose it. It was like "Join the Marines," I'm like, "Don't join the Marines," like "Why would you do that?" you know what I mean?

At this point I find it worthy to consider the disciplining of a public body/being. Perhaps even especially in this environment, such outbursts are not only difficult to
understand or comprehend in the context of a college life/experience of peers, but likewise, our institutional rationalities are frequently unaware of students in their classrooms, who may be supporting vets. In various institutionalize settings, “The body and its passions are viewed as disruptions to the flow of logical thought, as momentary aberrations or troublesome forms of deviance to be rationalized, contained and controlled” (Kirmayer, 1992, p. 325). Jace’s body-being was difficult even for her to understand or deal with, let alone contain. Over subsequent deployments, Jace was able to continue to confide in her Mom, but others she remembered, became weary,

I suffered in silence because I lived in a sorority house and those girls had no idea what to say to me because – and that's fine; they're living their college life and I chose to do this, so I know I'm not going to have people who understand that around me… And quite frankly I felt like people were sick of it.

Each support person’s story speaks to the ways in which bodies speak through us. They speak to the collective freight of what it means for us-in turn – to “support our troops.” Those physical manifestations in each person’s body, though seemingly “personal,” are nonetheless a socio-political body’s request to send soldiers to war. “Supporting our troops” entails far more bodies than we – collectively - generally account for. Rhonda described a conversation with her Mom,

That was a point my mom made that I thought was pretty interesting was -- she’s baffled -- like about what I’m going through, she’s like – “the rest of the country hasn’t a clue. They have no idea what is going on. They know that soldiers get deployed, they see a parade when they come home, they don’t know what’s going on while they’re over there. Like I mean they might get a news clip here and
there.” [And then Rhonda summed it up.] “But that’s not – it’s just like being lost in -- in a bad reality.”

Kara speaks to the details and life moments that are most often back-grounded when we imagine “supporting our troops.” Significant and celebratory important life moments for support systems mark the presence of multiple absences - among them, a missing bodily presence.

It was -- nobody really understands, I mean people can say oh that would be really horrible but until you’ve gone through it you don’t really know I mean until ---I was pregnant the whole --his whole deployment he was gone he missed probably the last 5 months of my pregnancy, he missed the birth of my son, he missed the first 9 months of his son’s life, he --- he -- it’s like I’ve done everything on my own … I’ve done pretty much everything on my own, since he’s been deployed, I mean I bought my house on my own -- I’ve done so many things on my own -- so I’ve done a lot -- I mean he loves his son but since he’s not here -- I guess it not as big of a responsibility.

Having marked those same life moments with a partner, I was indeed struck by a loss, by what was missing – physically, spiritually and emotionally – in all the countless ways we understand the presence of a speaking body-being. What Rhonda revealed to me – shook me silent.

It’s like – and then like - my personal story — I was going through cancer while he was gone. I dealing with cancer alone - my husband’s deployed, my family is [out of state – 10-12 hours], like it’s not normal -- and I don’t want sympathy for it --- But I would go to the Cancer Institute - I was going back and forth ---
three-and-a-half hours drive to the doctor’s. So that on top of everything a normal family has to deal with – cancer -- it’s devastating . . . . Oh - it was really bad for like a couple months in that deployment - but you know -- it’s just – those are things that you don’t think about when you’re a civilian.

Working through his narrative map, Chester explained what coping through the deployment was like for him:

So, when he gets deployed, what happens to me…you see, I go into this little box and I’m in this little box because he’s being deployed out here in this ship and I don’t know what’s going on in here. Then, as time goes on and I don’t hear from him then the box gets smaller so I’m more inside myself now where as maybe here you’re more talkative or active but as time goes by you become less active less talkative and then you end up here { -- } which is like a big desert and there’s nobody around and you just stay totally to yourself. You don’t talk to anyone, you don’t eat, you don’t sleep - you’re just full of concern. Then - all of a sudden you hear from him and the box starts to widen again and the more you hear - the bigger the box. You begin to express yourself more become more energetic. Depression is a big part of it. You suffer through a big depression here. I was depressed for a long time. Then, you start to feel better, everything’s going good and then he comes home and you just blow, you’re just all over the place, you’re confused, you don’t know what you’re saying because your thought process is just going so fast your mouth can’t keep up with it so you’re trying to express things and you don’t know what you’re talking about. I’d say that’s kind
of the way it went from family, to isolation, to depression, to just pure loneliness, then as you begin to hear then it reverses, you kind of go the opposite way back.

Narrative Map 8: Isolation to Depression to Pure Loneliness (Chester)

Technological Extensions of our Bodies: “No finality to the parting”

I ended up transferring my home phone calls to a cell phone. I didn’t have a cell phone before he left -- I felt like I couldn’t leave the house because, “what if he called?” -- I would be devastated. So, I got a cell phone. I learned to transfer my home phone to my cell phone. So, my cell phone was with me 24/7 even at work - I would take it to the bathroom -- I would take it everywhere. -- it was my lifeline - It really was -- and the computer was to a certain point - but the phone was definitely the thing that was my...that was most important for me to have ready to go and be here for him. April
In the face of multiple deployments, technological advances in warfare and health care, increased media attention/access, and overall far more grippingly detailed coverage both alleviated and simultaneously exacerbated the uncertainty and angst residing in support’s bodies. Almost all participants spoke of their relationship with technology and the media. Whether it was emails, cell phones, or “CNN” our advanced technologically enhanced communication embedded its presence speaking through the bodies of these participants.

Kip and Roger share their respective experiences with technology through the birth of Kip’s first son. In Kip’s explanation, because his wife had an emergency C-section they weren’t able to hook up the live “video-talk” and “the link couldn’t be made fast enough, but we did get linked up about 45 minutes later.” Roger talks about what the “45 minutes later” was like from his terrain,

He’s talking on the phone, and the baby’s there, and the mom is there, and the wife was there, and me’s there -- and we’re on the phone, we’re on a cell phone - we’re talking - like he was at the office. And then he says, “wait a minute they’re mortaring my position,” he says, “I got to go see and make sure everybody’s ok.” And he says, “I’ll call you right back.” So you know twenty minutes later the phone rings and I said did anybody get hurt? “Nope, everybody’s ok.”

What Roger describes to me, brings to mind the ways in which the terrain of our lives and our lives at war across the seas has to some degree, become murky, swampy.

“Telecommunications has really changed this process. There’s no finality to the parting,” (Heath). I am reminded of Butler’s (2004) discussion on international borders. A sense of liminality is evoked; “topographies have shifted and what was once thought of as a
border, that which delimits and bounds, is a highly populated site” (p. 49). Our technology seems to have created a space in between. Herein lies a paradox in being able to communicate with warriors and – yet not fully commune with them. Roger was clearly struck by the seeming ease of contact,

you know it’s like, you’re across the street at the office... That, you’re talking to your child, - and he says, “oh they’re shooting at me I have to see if everybody’s ok.” Never ever in history have we been able to, I mean right from the battle field. In real time!

There is indeed an odd disjuncture in slipping between these two worlds. We are at once dis/connected. Our bodies - missing from each other. And yet technology plays such a vital and equally paradoxical role our lives. For many, the cell phone was both essential to the relationship with its fragile hold on the potential for communication, the potential to alleviate, if only temporarily, uncertainty. The fully embodied nature of technological relational communion is evident in the relationship we have with and through such means/objects. Rhonda’s telling was immersed in humor – as she spoke about the phone and her body-being;

I mean I might get an email every other day and that’s really exciting. A phone call --- holy crap. Taking my phone to the bathroom with me --- like my cell phone had to be on my body for an entire year -- could not turn it off -- when he came home, I was still like holding on to my cell phone, because you miss a call and you don’t know when he’s gonna call again, it’s devastating.

The idea that she is still holding on to the phone, even when Al comes home, seems akin to that same phantom-limb ideal that resides in the warriors as they leave
battle. The phone, for many became an extension of a body and at the same time an
extension to a body-being. Without its presence on our body – an emptiness and
uncertainty seems to take hold. Our emotional attachment to these tools might be
regarded the objects in our lives [and I would suggest the technology of our times] as
having “causal properties.” Importantly she notes, it is not so much that, “we have strong
feelings for objects because of the nature of the objects. Rather feelings take the ‘shape’
of the contact we have with objects … it is ‘felt’ by the body” (p. 5 -6). As in battle-rattle,
the cell phone and often other forms of technology become an extension of the body
being in relation with another.

The news for many was a particular kind of angst. Kara remembered, “Its --its not
like on TV - I guess you have to experience firsthand how lonely it is -- and how - you
don’t want to watch the news.” Over multiple deployments she came to understand a
certain futility explaining, “Well, it took me the first deployment to realize that if you see
it on the news, it happened two weeks prior to that and if something would have
happened you would have already gotten a phone call.” Jace on the other hand, continued
to struggle with what many spoke to in regards to a persistent embodied dialectical
tension – both being drawn to and repelled by the news – and any potential news.

My roommates would see me do that and they're like "Why do you read the
news?" "Because I have to know." I just had to – it's like a car wreck – you can't
not look -- It's morbid and gross - but you still look at it. I don't know -- I was
worried about finding vague information about his company, I was worried about
finding something like that – or him not telling me stuff. He sugarcoats everything.

I recently ran into Jace where I found her engrossed in the computer monitor – “Baylor’s in Marjah – that’s his unit.” It seems as if we get twisted up and seduced by ‘a need to know’ and in truth we cannot even count on that which we are told to know. Beatrice speaks to that compulsion manifesting in her body when she described,

Of course you watch CNN until it almost makes you throw up. I had to limit myself because I got -- I felt toxic --I felt like it was too much. . . . [I] couldn’t get enough of it, but it was too much--I had to limit myself because I got too toxified - too involved seeking information --but didn’t want that much.

Kate expressed that similar push –pull-drain,

I mean -- looking up information and you’re getting e-mails all the time, and it’s just – you know, “Have you heard this?” and, “Have you heard that?” or, “My son heard this.” And in the meantime, the guys are, like, trying to squash us from talking because they’re getting in trouble if anything gets out ---But you just can’t help it, because being the parents back home --you want to know everything that you possibly can.

April too,

I think my nerves were so on edge when he was gone and the news just drove me nuts. I just, the news still to this day -- the fifth story is “four soldiers were killed today” and I’m like, “are you kidding me?” Michael Jackson trumps four soldiers being killed in Iraq? I’m sorry -- I know we’ve been in this war a long time --but being a military spouse, mother, anything --that just kills me. It really does.
Another less talked about story is the impact that these wars have and will continue to have on the children whose parents are either at war, or returned from combat. The news invades our homes and lives. April shared a difficult memory with me,

I stopped watching the news with [my daughter]. I had to be very careful about the radio. We would be going to school -- and to have your six year old on the way to school -- it caught me off guard the very first time it happened -- because we were listening to the news and it would say, “top story on the news today, four soldiers killed in Iraq”, and she looked at me --- she’s like, “mommy, you don’t think it’s daddy?” . . . . And, you might as well just rip your heart out and put it on the dashboard because it was so upsetting -- I’m like, “no honey, it’s okay, it’s okay.”

Here, heart ache and fear are embodied in both absence and presence.

Until recently, very little attention or acknowledgement has been focused on the burdens partners, families and communities also endure when our warriors go to combat. Sorie, mother of an Iraq army vet, did not learn of her Dad’s afflictions from war until her own son returned from Iraq. It was the talking through women, her daughter-in-law-sharing bits and pieces about her son, with her. She in turn sharing concerns about her son with her mother, her mother then relaying stories of her dad’s own afflictions returning home from combat. It was not until that point in time that she realized her Dad had been suffering throughout his life, related to his combat experiences. Here she recounts,

My mother talked about it. Because she was worried about how [my son] was doing, and that’s when I said, “oh [his wife] told me that this was happening” and

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she says, “oh yea I remember … you guys never knew it but your Dad was so sick for such a long time” … my father technically was disabled by the war, but it was just - he never -I never knew he was in pain. I never knew about any of this stuff. And likewise [my son] wouldn’t talk about it… But [his wife] talked a little bit, not much…she was kind of the conduit for finding out some things, but not a whole lot. And that’s when I would say something and my Mom would say, “oh yea your dad -this happened with your Dad.”

In these the OIF and OEF campaigns it is not only the stories of soldiers that illuminate a weight we have asked young women and men to bear, but perhaps more poignantly, the narratives of families, institutions and other loved ones, clearly indicate an increasing need to address the ramification of war/engagement across the wide terrain of a warrior.

April shared:

I definitely think that I’ve made a lot of sacrifices because - no matter how emotional I was on the surface - I almost felt like *I shut my heart, not shut my heart down - but I did*. I was protecting myself; I was protecting myself from -- maybe the overwhelming feelings of what could happen. So being a military wife - or anybody that has to do with having a soldier overseas - I think - I had to become hard.

Military bases are frequently located in remote areas so when a spouse is deployed their partners often find themselves far from family. And because military personal are frequently moved, establishing friendships can be a challenging affair. I was fully unprepared for what Rhonda shared with me.

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I had a bout where I was going through -- I had -- I mean -- it’s like an episode of depression. Like I went through a bout of depression and -- Went home for over a month -- my parents came up to [our town] -- they came and got me. Oh my gosh I felt so helpless. And it was like so defeating but I needed my family then and you know they got me turned around from it -- so it was just kind of an episode in my life and it was what it was . . . . I think I lost focus on the things I would do for myself while he was gone this past time.

The sense of helplessness and powerlessness infiltrate many of these narratives. They draw me to what Frank (1995) says about “chaos narratives,” “Those who care for lives emerging from chaos have to accept that chaos always remains the story’s background and will continually fade into the foreground” (p.110). Just as the previous narratives attest, Kate likewise speaks to the utter helplessness that presides over and through a body-being of support.

And that’s the biggest thing: you feel helpless, completely helpless. There’s nothing that you can do to stop this train from going. I mean, you’ve taken care of him your whole life. That’s been your main focus, you know, for 20 years, and then all of a sudden there’s just something like this, and there’s nothing you can do. And it’s not an illness, it’s not an act of God or anything like that. It’s people who are -- you know, I mean, it’s just -- you know, it comes down to it’s people that are -- you know, taking him away, and there’s nothing you can do.

Thus it is that when a warrior responds to the call of duty, so too – does her family, loved ones and in varying degrees, her community. The distinguishing states of uncertainty brought on by these wars profoundly afflict the lives not only of the warriors
but those who seek to support them, those whose lives become unwittingly, sometimes un/willingly inculcated. It was first through April and then Sammy and then the rippling through of a succession of participants that served to reveal the deeply personal aspects of supporting a warrior. Importantly, those personal moments are not untouched by the social, cultural, economical or political factors that are also a part of what it means to be an American citizen. When Michelle Obama reminds us that both soldiers and their families go to war - the narratives of these women and men, spouses, mothers and fathers embody the essence of what that means to live such a life; here through the lived/living body. April explained,

I do think the spouses definitely have to have a little bit of [PTSD] because it was so dramatic for us too. It’s funny because I think with the spouses -- people don’t look at the spouses, and they feel bad for them or they feel sorry for them-- but they do -- I mean we do go through a lot.

Kate told me, “I went to five funerals while he was gone, and I could not do any more after that.” April talked to me about how she continues to bear that speech in her body. She described how even now, some four years later, “if he goes somewhere for a training or - whatever, I just still worry about him – like - is he going to make it there? Is he going to this?” For April, this is an acquired body-speak for her, “I don’t think I would be that way as much if he hadn’t been overseas and I hadn’t worried about him so much before. So, I definitely worry about him.”

Chester also spoke to that synchronicity of a lived and living experience as well. So, I think he kind of understands that every time he goes through something, I go through it, just like I used to tell him that every time you’re hurt I can feel it and
it’s probably worse than you do. I think it’s -- that -- a distance thing -- not only him but me too because like I said - some things happened that I carried deep down --- and that kind of brings it up again. I think that’s exactly what [I] look at when he goes away -- is the same thing gonna happened?

Importantly, Haraway (2004) called us to attend to the language of the body in all its forms and articulations. Language, she said “is the effect of articulation, and so are bodies…Nature may be speechless, without language in the human sense; but nature is highly articulate… [and] to articulate is to signify” (p.105-106, emphasis added).

Listening to body-speaking of warriors and their supports is to listen for the signification through the lived, storied experience of bodies expressing trauma to and for the collective body-politic. While these stories seem to reflect the deeply personal they equally reflect stories of our collective selves - ourselves as cultural beings. Within Kate’s memory-telling of helping Wise prepare for war lie vast layers of socio-political structures that further serve to construct the story and experience of warriors and their families.

Listening to Kate, I am profoundly struck with a sense of a powerful current that compels us into the tide of these wars. She started by telling me how her “maternal instinct took over.” And this I clearly understood, in my bones, as a mother I, too, possess that fierce internal fire of protection for my children. I feel it in my bones, and yet I know, too, that “motherhood” and “maternal instincts” serve a far larger purpose. They are easily tapped into for the needs of state (See Fraser, 1987). Kate went on to explain,

I’ll never forget it -- building up to the deployment, I was busy – you know, it was kind of like getting a kid ready to go off to college or something, ‘cause I was really working to make sure he had what he needed, and you know, doing
They don’t give them the supplies and equipment that they need to make it over there. We literally had a list of probably 200 things that they suggested that you supply them to go to war. . . . . We spent – and you look at this list and you think, “Well, yeah, I want him to have that.” It’s not that it’s required. You know, the military doesn’t require it. But you look at the list and you think, “Well, yeah, I want him to have that, and I want him to have that,” and, you know, anything – as a parent, anything to give them some kind of edge over there you’re willing to do. So we put out hundreds of dollars, and I had – like my husband’s work and my work, they took – you know, they helped pitch in.

So it is that we are drawn through our personal relationships to stretch toward larger social networks in attempt to create a measure, space of safety, “to support our troops.” The networks of the seemingly personal extended to the social, is yet further merged with those deep political forces that serve to inculcate us all. And yet Kate wisely reflected further,

Some of the people there- I mean – some of these kids are going over there without this stuff just because -you know - a lot of kids that sign up for the military are more – some of them are kind of lower-income and that kind of thing, and we’re no means –well I guess middle class. But, you know, we don’t have a lot of money to throw around -, but it was just like, “No, he has to have these things, and he’s gonna have” – you don’t want your kid to be ill-equipped to do well in educational life.
Drawing on Goffman (1959), Holstein & Gubrium (1999) reminded us that, “the self is a locally interactive beacon of experience and it takes shape within, not separate from, the various situation of everyday life . . . each and every one of us has many selves, pertinent to the purposes of daily living, always part of, yet also reflexively separate from the moral orders we share with others” (p. 27). Wise went to war with a community; some went with less. The war rests with/in each of us.


“And then this is like the what-if bombs. I’m like -- what if . . . what if . . . what if . . . . . . That’s like -- all that goes through your head” (Rhonda)

Narrative Map 9: The What If Bombs (Rhonda)

The last call that he made right before the ground war kicked off he called me and it was a 30 second call and he said “Mom I love you. I want you to give
all my guns to Lucky and give this and give this and give this. I can’t tell you --- I
can’t tell you anything other than I love you and I’ll see you in heaven. And I was
like -- my heart felt like it flew out of my chest and he hung up. . . . For the next
two or three days we knew nothing. I’m watching TV and nothing’s happening, I
said something’s happening but I don’t know what it is. (Beatrice)

Of particular interest here is the role emotions play (and have throughout) in
terms of their communicative, connective strength and presence. Beatrice never expressly
articulated a specific feeling as in, “Marie, I was petrified, afraid, and anxious…” or
culmination of any other emotions, yet, namelessly an emotionally laden presence spoke
through space both in and out of her/our body (“my heart (in) flew (out ) of my chest.”)
Clearly, then, however frequently under-acknowledged or otherwise disregarded
emotions are, they take up the space in-between us all. The embodied nature of emotions
innately connects us to one another; they are indeed a fundamental, social function and
matter of being (Lyons, 1996; Morris, 1996; Turner, 1987; Williams & Bendelow, 1996).
Indeed, Lyons (1996) drew us toward recognizing the embodied nature of emotions as “a
theoretical articulation of the social, structural contexts, subjectivity, and bodily being”
(p. 71). In this way, emotion might be perceived as a conduit of/between the body and
ourselves as relational beings. Emotions take up space in much the same way as
narratives do, their presence is marked in those forward and backward winding trail
traversing relational terrains.

Throughout these narratives, as in life, emotions are sometimes explicitly
(expressly) acute, often implicitly present and frequently peripheral, extending beyond
our ability to fully account, encompass or articulate. Beatrice speaks to what most of us
recognize as the ways in which acute fear is both a worry and a reality pulsing through the hearts of (all) warriors. The actual words might lay dormant but clearly, emotions took up considerable space and time. She was riveted in them. I was drawn to her through them. We sat in their presence. I likewise share them here, now – an/other presence and time beholden. The narratives of these warriors and their supports continue to attest to the presence, space and contextual temporality of emotions spanning the realm of us all.

For Alice, dealing with her daughter’s distress was a constant tension of what is and what might be and what we might want it to be because, “for [her daughter] staying next to me meant that her life was going to be safe - and you know for me it can be an annoyance because like I couldn’t move two feet without her. Like you know she just seemed very needy.” Yet Alice was acutely aware of the physical toll her husband’s deployment had on their daughter’s health. This little one’s body clearly spoke of an angst that words could not conceptualize.

She’s always had like stomach issues -- that I would say in that time it was horrendous -- she lost 7 pounds in a month -- because you know she just couldn’t keep anything in - I know that there was nothing that -- well it was what it was you know -- and that was my saying it just is what it is -- and you know I would say - you don’t have to be okay with it, you don’t have to do anything but you just have to accept that it just is what it is. … but you also, you have no control to change it. And so I think that when you get really super stressed out it’s because ultimately what you’re wanting to do is change it, like you’re wanting it to be different -- you can want everything that you want - but it’s not going to make a difference.
When Radar wanted to provide me with a conceptual framework for the trajectory of deployment he inserted perhaps the bedrock of all “what-Ifs”- angst. Later, Kate addressed its presence for her as well. In either case I was transported to the very time, moment and space - that body hollowing - when we had this conversation with Levi. My lungs tightened with a residue of fear once I understood what Radar was saying,

Then you start working on the preparations to deploy and you have to work on your finances, your will, your power of attorney - you have to think about a contingency plan for a whole year and in essence not just for a whole year but maybe for your whole life because you kind of have to bring into the equation that -- I may not be coming home. You have to work through that as well. What you’re going to do with the children and how you’re going to work that, schedules and etc.

Kate’s embodied memory is thickly wrought with those corporeal and material forces that come to bear on a soldier and his family. Once more, the heart bears central angst, the weight of depression, tears and mind-numbing responses all stake their claim and presence on/in these bodies and consequently ours.

I’m thinking, “Here is my 19 year old son doing a will.” -- It was heartbreaking for me to think that he was dealing with these kinds of issues -- because honestly - I didn’t think about that kind of stuff until I had kids -- and what would happen to them. And here he’s, you know, a 19 year old facing his own mortality, and just – I mean, just the thought of your child going before you do, I just think it’s hard to deal with. And knowing that it really could be a reality is mind-numbing . . . It just – I mean, it made me cry because he’s just ….it’s a really depressing
thing to think about. And he would tell me things, like – he made – he gave everything to me in his will, but he said, “If anything happens to me, I just want you to do something really cool for my brothers, and you know, give my best friend some money for his kid for school,” and you know, just – it was – it was really depressing.

She went on to describe how after he was deployed she’d found traces of him working out the details of his will; “he knew how much life insurance he would get if he was killed over there, and I’d find little notes where he was trying to figure out, you know, like, [so much for each person].” The threads of “what-if” - embodiment course a trail in and out – over and through our lives and our bodies. Some moments blast us out of whatever homeostasis we might have accomplished in that time and space; others moments silently creep up, a presence of angst begins to more fiercely pulse through our hearts. We are reminded that “bodily being and experience are always social, always a function of persons in relation” (Lyon, 1996, p. 71).

“Look Around This Room . . . . Cause Not Every-body’s Coming Back”

They are not gone – haven’t crossed that “line of departure” - before we are ready for them to return. Roger watched and waited,

And so you look ahead - you know - you know there’s all kind of dangers out there but you watch, and you -- you adjust and you have to assume that he’s doing - the same thing. And, and then the objective is to get him home. So, that was the thing. You got there. You watched - I watched - the line of departure- you know that’s when he left.
And there is the harsh reality, the bedrock buried in our bones, will they come back?

Experience told me the possibility was present. Kate took it up on the day of the company’s departure,

I couldn’t get out of my mind that his friend had told his mom that – they were all sitting in the gym before – you know, when they found out they were being deployed, and they were talking to all the guys. And he’s like, “Look around this room,” he said, “‘Cause not everybody’s coming back.” And I just kept – you know -I was looking around at all these guys, knowing that they’re not all coming back.

The end of this journey for warriors is at hand. It is in site and yet, at the same time it is not. “It’s our job,” Rory told me. Raven talked about his job when I asked him what it was like to leave combat,

I remember coming home as far as that goes - as far as like when we got to an, “okay I’m coming home kind of deal” -at that time it was still like infancy because the fact that they -- like the day we came home, we were in Kuwait and we drove all the way from the top of Iraq all the way to the bottom. I had to do the whole thing -- I was the last vehicle every convoy we went on - on the whole way home. The fact that I almost -- people did stupid things to me because I was the last vehicle for convoy. Or I had to take care of people that were broke down - It was my job. I didn’t tell people that because I didn’t want them to have to worry any more.

Troy did the same thing when I asked him about leaving combat. He wanted me first to understand what it was like to be there. He told me stories and this one bears the
freight of a warrior. I listened and heard how it was that his days would stretch on in timeless tedium. Tedium could be instantly throttled by mayhem and terror that seemed to strike before the heart knew the pulse was ripping through a body. Troy talked about being on a last mission, they had been lured by a fake IED when a suicide bomber had floored through their line, “we put 700 rounds into it and it kept coming.” About 25 yards from a comrade’s humvee the vehicle detonated itself. Troy explained,

I was unfortunately in a position where I couldn’t fire on the vehicle at all, because I had Marines on the other side. I would have been putting rounds over them, so that’s kind of how it went. … Everyone opened up on it, and then it got inside the cordon where we couldn’t really fire on it anymore without shooting at Marines, and then the explosion, and then, you know, I couldn’t see the Humvee at all for two minutes because of this huge dust cloud and everything, and I’m sitting there thinking all my friends have just died, you know, two weeks before we’re going home. We go over there, and there’s – the casualties were light, you know, fortunately, but, - it was just - you’re there until the last day. You know -- you’re there until the last…

It’s important to note here the textual telling/re-presentation of this story. In listening then, we can only use our imagination, to draw from obscurity- where noise reverberates through bodies. Dust chokes the lungs, the nostrils, the vision. Sand and heat pressing, firing on bodies, and the light of explosion ripping through the brain as well (Singer, 2008). Unrest. There is a culmination of angst harboring. It’s an angst that nestles down and settles in the bones. It’s all that overwhelms our sensory laden, vulnerable speaking, body-beings.’ Tad shuddered “To this day I can still smell that smell.” The visceral,
experience/d cannot fully be accounted in the language/texts of our time. Our bodies must speak through us.

It was on her younger son’s birthday that she received the word that fourteen of the Marines in “our” battalion had been killed in one of the largest explosions they’d had there.

That was the most awful day -- it was near the end of their deployment -- we had heard -like -at around 7:00 a.m. . . . I don’t even know how I functioned that day - because I went to work - and then I got an e-mail that nine of those killed were [in our company]. So I’m thinking . . . . Okay, of our little group of 150 - that’s nine guys . . . I mean, odds are not good. And I just kind of – my friend at work -- I didn’t even remember this - but she said she came in -- and I just – like - looked sick in my office. And she came in - she was like, “What’s going on?” and I just said -- “I’m just waiting to hear if Wise is dead.” . . .

Kate went on to tell me, “and then we start learning one by one – we didn’t learn the last person until, like, 8:00 that night. So it was a full day. I mean, it probably took five years off my life.”
Wise spoke to that moment that for me harbors THE huge “what if.” They are waiting, expecting to leave combat finally,

But like we were all just waiting on top of the dam -- we all took pictures of all who was still there -- and just --- we were waiting on the helicopters to come get us and like mortars were going off and it was like – “we’re gonna end up dying waiting for this helicopter cause we were sitting up here all damn day” -- and then we finally got out of there.

Kip’s attempted to make distinctions. I hear and feel freight-

But, like I said, I never got - we had IEDs hit our convoy but I never had them hit my vehicle or never physically personally injured myself so I’m not dealing with that. I’m just dealing with the chance of it happening and the closeness. So, that weighs on you. So, I don’t have quite the trauma but the things I saw were dramatic just nothing ever physically happened to me so maybe that’s the reason why that’s not at the forefront of when I think back to the experience. I know that it’s there.

Through his memory I am drawn to the significance of context and the disruption of a self-sensing being. Where one of these events alone might alter a life significantly – the accumulation of countless acts of terror seem to dull the senses. They have indeed reduced and distorted a sensibility – disrupted attempts to distinguish or identify any sense of “normalcy.” In their work on combat PTSD, Wilson, Harel, & Kahana (1998) explained this phenomenon, having suggested that “Individuals actively pursuing war or caught up as protagonists in warfare must for some period of time cease to exist in a
normal developmental sense” (p. 42). The previous narratives, the “what-Ifs” and those that follow profoundly speak to an alteration of a self. We ask bodies to know it, to live through it, but nonetheless, we all struggle to fully articulate, conceptualize and/or to ultimately live with it.

On the home front, combat has a resounding presence, particularly when those fears manifested through a potential-possible come to settle home. Remorse seemed to emanate through AJ’s memory of calling home one night,

And I call … “hey how you guys doing” my dad’s like “hey good how you doing” --- “oh yeah you know I’m alright we just got back from a BAS [battle assessment mission] “what does that mean? [his Dad asked]” “We got overran we had to go back and take the guys down and blow them up we almost got killed it was so crazy” --- and my mom’s all flipping out on the background -- my dad’s on speakerphone. I didn’t know she was awake -- it was usually one or the other --- I didn’t know they were both up that night he picked up -- I didn’t know she was waiting.

The realities of war live through us all. They continue to echo beyond the terrain of combat, meandering through our living experiences. Worlds meld in time. In an attempt to keep this war at the forefront of a public’s waning interest, National Public Radio has worked to keep issues, stories, and people alive. The emotional laboring involved in “supporting our troops” impacts those troops in paradoxical ways. Kip explained,

One thing that is really difficult for me, NPR will occasionally do a spot on the soldier that is killed and they’ll talk about the family and the feelings. I can’t
listen. I shut off the radio. I think about my family. I think about my son and my
dad and my wife and how they would cope had it been me and it hits too close to
home, I can’t do it --- I guess I just think about the void -- that I would leave --
and the feelings that my children, my wife, or my dad, or my mom would have
should I have blown up and come back in a box and that is probably the most
troubling thing to me -- so I have a really hard time listening to the radio and the
stories on that. I’ve got to shut it off. It just hits too close to home. I’m glad they
do the stories though. (Kip, p. 11).

It is a vulnerability of self and other – not necessarily termed as such. We rarely attend to
[i.e. hey, I’m feeling vulnerable today] but the ways in which our being speak to
unpredictability harboring in our hearts, in our psyche, and ultimately in our very beings.

Kips thoughts on coming home in a ‘box’ hit me hard. I felt the weight of it in my
own heart. “Box,” the word transported me. ….

Because my memory can’t reach the color of that box – that one detail escapes
me. [and I wanna say pinkish.] Solid. Heavy – surprising and yet not – for all the freight –
the anguish, the loss, the terror and horror bound up in its corners and lid. Frank.
I’m seventeen years old. My mother and I are standing knee deep in the river. Crisp clear
northern eastern waters gurgle and rush around our legs, over through and under the
residue of glacial deposits - eons past. Rocks – some large, solid, granite and some
small; together they work to create sound, turbulence and paradoxically easy shallow
pools.

A monumental tide, stakes its presence. Grief pours from her. With every handful
of ash, with every fragment of a past life – disconcerting chunks of bone - she casts
across the water and downstream - tumultuous grief flows. It is not the place for my grief – her presence has never been. But it is hers, this grief cast on – waters, tossing and churning – this grief lifted through power of that churning here on the anniversary of Frankie’s death. Here, on an August afternoon casting remnants of a body once tucked in her being, in her arms - her first born. A body-being I once followed. Brother, son, friend, comrade, and lover (maybe, I was too young to know). Yet, one not destined to be husband, father, old man – aged warrior.

The experience of pain – the feeling of being stabbed by a foreign object that pierces the skin, that cuts you into pieces – is bound up with that which cannot be recovered, with something being taken away that cannot be returned. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 39)

Narrative Map 11: Grief (Marie)
Rhonda’s laughter continues to manifest its central poignancy as she told me, “the only thing certain about the army is its all uncertain.” Uncertainty is effervescent, ever present, ever bubbling and churning up worry, fear, hope, and breath. I similarly understood Sorie’s stance regarding her son’s return, “even though I knew he was leaving [combat] – we didn’t know exactly when until he was on U.S. soil and they touched down -- at any point something could happen to that flight -- you know honestly - I’m not celebrating until I know he’s. . . [home].

Narrative Map 12: Happy Home (Rhonda)

And for her, the unpredictability continues to take up space and time in her body. “That’s the thing that worries me now - about if he goes back. It’s that you get in some car and
you’re driving some place and there’s a suicide bomber or something, and it’s just totally unpredictable. So, that’s the part that worries me now.”

Coming home is indeed another matter. The angst does not always or easily diminish. Alice described how her daughter had been so very distraught when they went to pick up her Dad because in the sea of green- she couldn’t recognize him. She struggled to help both her daughter and BJ to understand. For her, it went like this, “[She] cried for probably 45 minutes in the car.” BJ confused, “what is wrong, I don’t understand what’s wrong with her I’m right here?” Kate attempted to explain, “she didn’t recognize you and that got her completely distressed.” As much as her daughter struggled to settle she sounded overwhelmed, “well I don’t mean to make him feel bad. I just - I don’t - I can’t stop.” Kate struggled to help her understand that the worry was over now,

Well you have got to get control of yourself because he’s home we are taking him home it’s over it’s done. And she was like alright. But I think she, for her, it wasn’t done yet – like what was gonna happen next. I think it was like he was gone for so long and she didn’t - she couldn’t figure out any way how, what to do with it.

The ‘What-Ifs’ call to the centrality of a centripetal and centrifugal (Bakhtin, 1981) force in the culmination of all these narratives and the ways in which they move through the personal, political institutional. The ‘What-Ifs harbor narratives, the stories turbinate, rest and function to uphold the shores- sometimes eroding, sometimes encroaching or encroached upon. The harbor represents all those personal, political, socio-economic and historical functions of time, space and place. It is the cultures through which we live, emerge and shift over and through time.
I was always left with the feeling ---- now what do I do - now what do I do- now what do I do- and I didn’t know what to do - for him -- I had no instructions. What are we supposed to do, for them how do we handle this you know? it’s like they were sent home and there they are no instructions -- there was no instructions no counseling they should do this or here’s this group and it was like the heroes are sent home-- it was wonderful - - it was like they were dropped -- just dropped and it was a scary feeling. (Beatrice)

Given the previous stories shared, clearly the “what-Ifs” stake their terrain over bodies and across the seas when continents separate warriors and their loved ones. Yet, homecoming is likewise filled with juxtaposition. There is no doubt abundant joy on a warrior’s return and yet that joy rises and falls amid a myriad of “what-ifs” and continued uncertainty. Rhonda and I heartily laugh as she talks about the reality of that one moment – the public portrayal and perception of that moment of homecoming joy.

I’m pretty realistic about it - and I’m open to recognize (laughs) that we are human. Cause there are so many romantic notions about homecoming -- like the jog through the field of daisies (I’m laughing) you know (I’m really laughing) you know (she’s laughing) getting swept off your feet and spun around – and you know -- he hasn’t showered for five days and he smells -- and his mother is right behind you.
Beatrice truly speaks to the shifts the U.S. military has attempted to make in helping warriors integrate. Her stories are hard reminders of the fear, angst, loss and isolation that previous generations have experienced (Wilson, Harel & Kakana 1988). Concomitantly, Rhonda speaks to the tensions that emerge when a wealth of information and advice is at hand. We have maps, that show us where to go and yet, as anyone following a map knows- we can still get lost.

Well it’s just--- they tell you -- its like little red flags to look out for – domestic abuse – things like that . . . . but I mean it sounds like -- to someone here -- I might get - you just you need to fear your spouse when they come home, because you don’t what has gone on  and . . . . you don’t want a fear of your spouse -- they’re your spouse, and – I remember Al’s first deploying going to - for redeployment briefing – Redeployment they’re coming home -but the chaplain comes into speak, and they talk about -- abuse, and verbal abuse, and spending money, and things to look out for, and there’s so much of that kind of prevention mode - but I think just reconnecting and building that relationship back up kind of gets pushed to the wayside, because you’re so -- it’s so focused on looking for triggers. Yeah. Watching for them, like there’s gotta be something wrong, so look out.

Beatrice shared a burden her son shared with her. This, she has been bearing since the early ‘90’s as her son is a Gulf War vet. Her story speaks to the subtleties, perhaps silences, which serve to further disrupt any imagined sense of “knowing” what is ‘really happening.’ On a deeper level she speaks to the embodiment of shared turmoil between
supports and their warriors placed in our homes, via multiple networks and “matrices of power.”

He got up one morning … the first week he was home and he said, “mom can I talk?” -- I can remember vividly -- exactly -- and I sat down - and he sat down and he told me all of the -- you know -- about killing people and how it made him feel and you know -- “what’s going to happen to me?” … he was afraid … to tell because they told him not to --because they were told they weren’t going to take any prisoners … so they didn’t bring anybody back - so that’s what happened … They came back and the war was over, so here you are with a person who’s been in an intense military fight war and they come back with all these visions and things in their heads with no instructions because – [they’ve been told] “no it really didn’t happen”… because CNN made it look like they took all these prisoners and then let them all go like it was this good thing and that is not how it happened -- that is not what happened.

Dreams are another body-story taking place through a warrior. Indeed Raven told me, “My dreams are a whole different world… that’s a whole different nightmare.” Jace and Kara, Beatrice and Kate all have compelling perspectives of how they experienced those dreams. Sometimes April had dreams too, even after her spouse had returned.

And, I know that the military, they had always said they would come to your house, so I would have reoccurring nightmares and I still have them every now and then -- that I would open the door and it would be a man standing there in uniform with something in his hand like a paper telling me that my soldier wasn’t returning -- and you’ve seen those movies where that happens but when it was --
it’s right in your face -- so even to this day -- I would always -- every now and then I would have those -- those kind of dreams that -- that was such a scary thing. I mean in an instant he could have been gone.

Though I was unable to meet with her, Raven recounts some stories his wife shared with him.

I don’t remember this of course, but my wife remembers me kicking her in the chest -- kneed her in the chest barking orders at her -- and she’s like, “I don’t know what you said” - so I started saying stuff and she was like -“yeah, that’s what you said to me.” ---- Or, there were times I’d grab her and try to push her off the bed and say were getting a mortar attack, get down, get down -- or just different stuff --- just really wicked stuff --- and for some reason I’d repeat -- more or less a lot of the same -- like reoccurring -- I’m in a fire fight -- which I never really got in to over there -- but I had no weapon, in my dream I could not find my gun. People are throwing stuff at me, I could not find my gun, well not gun, but my weapon, where’s my weapon? I cannot fight back.

Kate spoke to the fear she had for her son Wise, and for the rest of her family. She watched her son peruse the house at night describes,

I mean, it can be scary. I mean, you just – yeah. It’s kind of freaky to get up and see your son patrolling. Like - he’s literally just - you know -- It’s just – and you’re thinking -- Oh, my gosh, is this a safe situation for the rest of the family -- or . . . . They’re just not – it’s not like, you know, having your kid come home from college or anything. It’s . . . . You’re like -- you know -- what triggers are there? You know, is – Is he gonna, you know, beat up his brother because – you
just don’t know, and it just seems like they should be more mentally stable before
they have to be integrated back into their families or the community.

The first night her son returned home from the Gulf War Beatrice, Like Kate, was
full of uncertainty, “I thought do I leave the lights on? -- How do I handle this? What do
I do? because I knew that there was this person that had been through --- I thought how .
. . . I have no clue what to do.” For Kara the fear was acute, she responded, “he came
home and was very aggressive and very violent –It was really bad for several months
when he came home --- it was really bad.” Throughout the whole of the interview, Kara
acknowledges the toll combat has had on her spouse. She goes on to explain what the
dream nights were like for her – the lived experience of pain and suffering hovering in
the body.

It doesn’t leave their head-- I mean he had nightmares --he would get up in the
middle of the night just screaming at the top of his lungs  ---  he would jump out
of bed like he was grabbing his gun --- and that’s why I wouldn’t let him have a
gun in the house --for those reasons--he wanted a gun because he was gone so
often and I was by myself so he wanted me to have a gun in the house and I
wouldn’t let him --because he would jump out of bed and look for a gun --and -- I
mean if there was one there. . . . Who knows --he might have shot me because --
there was somebody beside him ----

It was if she was lost in herself here, her body – telling remembering, “He would wake up
and just start shaking -- wake up screaming - and it was – he-- you could tell that it took a
big toll on him.”

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Listening, I envision combat-terror dropped an anchor in her home – and that terror now harbors in her own body as well. In this harbor, I am drawn to both the presence of angst in the screams of sleeping warriors, and of the/those silence/d. Morris (1997) told us, “a scream is not speech, but the most intense possible negation of language: sound and terror approaching the limits of absolute muteness” (p. 27). He further explained that, “the impossible project of giving “speech” to silence is important especially because it exposes how we simplify and betray suffering whenever we ignore its power to elude every linguistic and conceptual tool that humans can marshal to understand it” (p. 27, emphasis added). Many of those who addressed this issue also spoke to the fear they had for the warrior and for themselves as well.

Kate speaks to the shifts and duration of these episodes over time,

I mean, even like six months ago, he was home and had a nightmare and was upstairs screaming. And I didn’t – I didn’t even hear it . . . but he was like, “Mom, did you hear me screaming last night?” And so he told me about it, which is a huge – I mean, before I don’t think he would’ve just – you know . . . . They came home in October of 2005 -- so it’s been almost four years . . . . It’s a long time.

These narratives reflect a critical reality. In order to “support our troops” listening over and through time is indeed a necessary and full-embodied commitment.

Tad spoke to nuanced levels of embodied listening when referring to PTSD:

There is obviously without a doubt some kind of injury there – you know? You can live with it – and you can cope with it. . . . And – hell you can suppress it – easily – and all I have to do – is when you come in my office and approach me –
is say no I can’t do this -- and I don’t do this – you know . . . . but I knew when
you brought up the subject – that that would be good for me – so I kinda
welcomed it -really. . . .
And when we talked about why, I asked, “why do you think that is so – is it about the
anonymity you think?” He did not hesitate, “Yea, oh yea sure. You’re not connected to an
Army study - or my medical file – you know - it’s the stigma again. You know you’re a -
you’re a -- source that I--” Tad paused and here we both start laughing, “-- I’m using you
right now. You’re a source for me right now!” We laughed even more – the poignancy
and irony in the essence of his framing. He then got quiet, and more seriously pressed on,
when you asked me I knew this subject was something I was going to end up
crying about for an hour. And that’s alright but -- and I’m gonna feel good when
its over…I mean I’ve been thinking about this all day. . . . I mean I’ve been
thinking about this interview all day- you know?

Summing Embodiment

I think that being strong and even confident, more confident, in myself, came
through - - That reminds me of a story -- My good friend and I who became really
close in this whole process of the guys being overseas, we went down to
Charleston. They were going to have this kind of like a little fair bake sale for all
of the units that were deployed and they had a rock wall there that day, so kids
were climbing the rock wall and my friend and I kept looking at each other like,
we have totally got to climb this wall. . . . it was great - we both started on each
end . . . . and we both made it up to the top- and we both pushed that button and
the first thing I thought was --my husband’s in Iraq and I’m here climbing walls,
like, I’m so strong to do this, I can be here and I can get through this. And, she kind of felt the same way. We both had this connection -- like this is so awesome. We’re climbing mountains while the guys are fighting the war, so it just made us feel, I don’t know, that we were able to get through anything ... we have these pictures of us climbing the wall and how exciting and it looked silly with us up on this wall but it meant so much more to us than it did. And, not saying I wasn’t independent and strong before but it just gave me this new sense of ... you know?

April

Only after reflecting on April’s story was I able to draw more meaning from a conversation I had with another scholar who, in dialogue regarding my son at war, suggested that we were all warriors. It is with this frame that I conclude my thoughts on the body of our supporting warriors. I am compelled to acknowledge the profound sacrifices that women and men bear on behalf of our combat warriors. Often their contributions toward healing and support reside silent and peripheral to our collective vision of healing in the aftermath of war. Their bodies both harbor and bear silent wounds of a different nature- one that has yet to be fully accounted for. These wounds manifest in countless nuanced offences, tacit losses that speak across the personal, social and body politic. I believe their wisdom speaks to the power of vulnerability by drawing us in, to listen more closely to an angst that harbors in their bodies and consequently the collective whole as well. Each realm calls us to account for the stories which resonate, and plot meaning for us, as warriors and as support systems, as civilians living in a democratic society. It is indeed a call to probe the ontological and epistemological ideals bound up in not only health and healing, but with our notion of freedom and duty as well. Support
warriors embody a patriotism that defies traditional definitions and larger cultural (and more distant) acts of flag waving, yellow ribbon bearing and Star-Spangled-Banner singing. Like warriors, they too sacrifice significant and complex portions of their body-beings.

Through each participant’s story I believe the body offers an intricately layered language, one we have yet to completely fathom. In attempting to bridge the ontological divide between body and mind, Lyons (1996) suggested we listen to the body through the language of emotions. Here she described, “that the social context of emotion, its social ontology, is crucial to the constitution of emotional being in the individual” (p. 70-71, emphasis added). Grosz likewise compelled us to yield in that, “both physical and social dimensions must find their place in reconceptualizing the body , not in opposition to each other but as necessarily interactive” (Grosz, 1994, p. 23). Similarly, Lyons (1996) further suggested that because emotions can provide the terrain through which we can explore health and healing as it is socially constituted, we must broaden our view of emotions to explore our, “intercommunication in the widest sense, with our very being in the context of relationships” (p. 73, emphasis added). Both authors have challenged us to be fully present, to listen and to hear in new ways. In this way, recognizing vulnerability as a complex interplay of emotions, we can indeed more deeply explore our intercommunicative potentialities. However, in order to hear through this vulnerability we must first acknowledge that such a language speaks to, speaks from and speaks with social contexts and social constructs. War is a such construct with vastly expansive contexts.
Consider the elements of war these narratives bridge. Al’s uniform is ultimately a matrix of social constructs that take up the space over and through the body. His subordinates hear the uniform. He too hears the uniform through the very fibers of his being; it is a presence that takes up space even as he disengages from its power. Similarly, every component of those 50 plus pounds of “Battle-Rattle” speak to social constructs of meaning. Each and every body/narrative speaks with and through those 50 pounds. As Troy, Wise, and Al attested, bodies are permanently altered. As April, Kara, Chester and Roger regarded, their bodies likewise carry that “battle-rattle” from across the seas, in multiple stateside contexts/constructs. We change each other and are changed by each other in and through our mutual vulnerabilities. Each person’s story These disruptions are thickly imbued with layers of meaning and contingencies. Across familial, social and political realms their stories have served to illuminate the ways in which poststructural, feminist and narrative sensibilities merge in a culmination of centrifugal and centripetal concentration (Bakhtin, 1981), the body at its nexus.

Marked through stories and institutional structures, countless products, objects and relationships, a warrior’s body calls us to identify and claim our roles in both her being (coming into being) and consequently her healing. How s/he comes into being is indeed a potent and critical question for we are all complicit in both a wounding and healing of bodies/warriors. Thus in the next chapter I explore the social construction of a warrior identity and ethos. Here I continue to traverse the personal, social and political development of vulnerable warrior-beings and warrior supports. Following the lead of Frank, 1995; Lindemann-Nelson, 2001; and Lyons, 1996, I want to trouble the perpetuation of individualized wounded self and instead turn our attention toward the
recognition that, “the role of the structure of society in the bodily and subjective life of individuals and groups cannot be denied” (Lyons, 1996, p. 72). I find myself pulling at the cultural threads we spin in our attempts to name the experience a self and of the nature of PTSD, as it takes up the liminal space that harbors us all.
I’m telling you, there’s nothing that was more impacting on me than understanding who I am in society because again, the things you talked about, putting on a uniform and feeling your identity there, taking off a uniform and having to be a civilian, wondering, “Why am I away from who I’m supposed to be?” Who I’m supposed to be is one of many, many people wearing the same uniform with the same flag on my shoulder and we are going out to do damage, to protect our constitution and the people of this country. That’s a powerful theme inside of us and let me tell you something, when you’re not doing it, you’re kind of empty in some ways and it’s hard to explain to people. I don’t desire to see combat ever again. I don’t. It’s a brutal business. It’s a horrible thing to see people’s lives destructed. There’s nothing more horrific than it, but at the same time - the contrast of - if someone’s out there that needs to be dealt with - I want to be there and I want to do it and I want to get it done because it’s what’s got to happen. (Interview, Heath)

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I couldn’t imagine ever having a daughter and having a guy like, you know, if he ever touched her, raped her, anything, I don’t know what I would do. And that kind of scares me, because, you know, I would hope that I would still always be able to control myself. So that really was my answer was, you know - myself is the only thing that scares me, I guess - myself. I mean – Because there’s control and everything, but when I was coming home I could – I had a lot more rage, I
guess, maybe on the surface. It’s still there. It’s just more deeper now - I think. And I don’t know - I don’t think it would ever go away, but it’s almost like a thing that you would – it’s also a thing that makes me feel, I think, kind of secure, too, because I know that it’s – because I know – you know, I think it’s – if we’re always – if we’re ever in a situation where someone needs to stand up and do something, I don’t think I would ever have the issue with not standing up. (Interview, Troy).

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I think it messed me up really - the military. I - not messed me up personally - I think their version - that’s still in me - is pretty dangerous I think. (Interview, Pete)

Listening to and through these bodies is undoubtedly a critical factor in attempting to understand how it is we might more fully address issues of trauma and healing. Importantly, listening allows us an opportunity to hear more than the person; we hear our collective selves through each individual as s/he in turn works to construct identities through each of us. This chapter navigates a myriad of avenues through which we come to understand the warrior self and other. Cultural ideals regarding strength, individualism, and meritocracy trouble a subterfuge of personal, political and a gendered nature of choices. In this case I trouble how it is we (the masses) participate in the construction of a warrior. In Reluctant, Recalcitrant, but Ever Ready Warriors, the narratives of support warriors further address issues of disciplined/ing identities of a
gendered self in flux and inculcated into a myriad of institutional, social and political rationalities. In *The De/Construction of a Self and Other* I trouble the consequential nature of choice, notions of both agency and identity by default are called into question. Those centripetal and centrifugal forces that move us across multiple and diverse spheres are further explored. In the *Consubstantial Difference between Us*, I query the internalization and socialization, the silence, stigma and angst of warriors with a/the collective self and being. In *Limdu: The Liminal Spaces between Us*, I take up the returning warrior as a disrupted self in our midst. Here I explore both the storied and disciplined nature of social and institutional structures and those gendered ideologies in the confluence of health and health seeking warrior-beings. Reification of cultural ideals of masculinity, health and stigma are explored in and through a disrupted identity.

**The De/Construction of a Self**

To begin, narratives link both the intimate and seemingly indistinct through institutional structures; scripts like Troy’s tattoo narrate well beyond the picturesque embedded in his flesh. The tattoo tells a story of being marked both from the outside in and inside out. I see Troy’s tattoo as yet another narrative – harvesting the corporeal, embodied lived experience to the surface of the flesh. Is it that rage, I wonder, come to the surface? Our body-being is inseparable from the identity of lived experience and that through which warriors come to be understood. To this end, I am fond of Lindeman-Nelson’s (2001) definition of the construction of identity where she suggested, “Identities consist of a connective tissue of narratives – some constant, others shifting over time-which we weave around the features of ourselves that matter most” (p. 73, emphasis added). She went on to specify that, “my identity is constituted by the stories other
people construct around the things about me that seem most important to them” (p. 73). This is an especially critical point given the relational reciprocity of a nation, warrior and those who support them.

Our perceptions are not stagnant. They traverse the intimate realms of personal and familial relationships and beyond, so we come to understand and be understood across political and institutional boundaries as well. Identity then serves as a means of not only understanding the “I” but rather coming to know a collective “we.” As Burke (1937) suggested, “the so-called ‘I’ is merely a unique combination of partially corporate ‘We’s’” (in Putnam and Pacanowsky, 1983, p. 126). The narratives of this project attest to the veracity of how it is we come to understand our selves enacting identities as we move into and up against each other. As narratives are invoked they shift across the body’s own temporal, historical, and spatial planes. They do so via a culmination of diverse schemas, scripts and querulous plots that all serve to comprise our collective selves in vast “webs of significance” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). In this chapter I probe the ways in which the identity of a warrior and (sometimes by default) their support systems are co-constructed (Harter, 2007). We are, indeed, shaped from both the inside out (personal to socio-political) and the outside-in (socio-political to personal). Through these narratives, warriors and their supports reveal how it is we shift through vast hierarchical, sometimes oppositional, but ever communal stratospheres (Buzzanell, 1994; Cheney, 1983; Mumby & Stohl; 1996, Stohl, 1995).

In synch with a poststructural feminist agenda, I probe how those constructions of selves serve purposes beyond the identity of a self, and rather mingle with larger collective and institutional bodies. Wrestling with the concept of embodiment in the last
chapter, I sought to articulate how it was that the body spoke through us and with us. Moreover, I suggested that adopting both an ontological and epistemological shift in the ways in which we view the body might begin to allow us to hear *what the body has to say through us*. In this way, PTSD might be perceived as a corporeal language speaking specifically to and from a body invoked by trauma. Where McKerrow (1998) forwarded the notion of a “corporeal perspective” and a “sense of rhetoric as embodied” (p. 325), I too want to listen through the body for the interplay of cultural systems that might be subtextually contributing to the manifestation of the language of PTSD. Bodies are, he suggested, “trapped inside cultures, and exhibit those acts promoted within the culture” (p. 319). Lyons (1996) further solidified this frame for me. She summarized the work of Brown (1994) who argued, “the study of depression must look at the conjunction of biology, attachment, support and what he terms as ‘bad luck,’ that is negative consequences arising from social, cultural, and economic components of individual’s lives” (p. 73). Clearly the corporeal is manifested in and through multiple spheres of knowledge and experience.

Here, tugging at the fibers that serve to structure those “vast webs of significance” I query beyond the blasts and explosions we most frequently associate with combat trauma and PTSD. Those fibrous threads are spun across gendered ideologies. They traverse the body through institutional discipline and particular instrumental rationalities, all of which form a tight web. This is a language soaring back and forth through the body across staggered arcs of temporality and space. I am prone to trouble what comes before the ‘P’ (“post”) in PTSD by further exploring the discursive coalition of normalized, rationalized and silent forces that contribute to invoking the language of PTSD. In this
way, Burke’s (1969) framing of a most tragic irony strikes me as resonating through this project. Burke suggested that in the process of both identification and division, “Men [humans] are brought to that most tragically ironic of all divisions … wherein millions of cooperative acts go into the preparation of one single destructive act.” He continued, “Modern war characteristically requires a myriad of constructive acts for each destructive one; before each culminating blast there must be a vast network of interlocking operations, directed communally” (p. 22). Indeed, the scope of these narratives attest to both the intimately micro and indistinct macro, revealing a million cooperative acts as they are invested in a being. Such “cooperative acts” are instrumental and disciplined/ing. They are rife with profound ironies and deep paradoxes, particularly as we strive toward healing in the aftermath of war.

*The ‘Me’ in ‘We’: Coming to be a Warrior*

Narrative Map 13: Medic Tattoo (Hal)
The narratives of this project indicate some of the vast landscapes across which warriors come into being. Through each telling a close listen (presence) reveals subtleties that merge up through their retrospectives. Such nuances, spanning the familial, social, organizational and political, serve to reveal elements of a far more complex self. Bruner (2000) depicted selfhood as a culmination of, “‘verbalized events,’ a kind of meta-narrative that gives coherence and continuity to the scramble of experience” (p. 73). Coherence and continuity are not only critical elements for understanding how it is we come to understand a self, but they are equally fundamental concepts of understanding how a warrior self comes to be through organizational means as well. Kip reflected this truth.

There’s kind of an anchor that comes with the military as far as who you are. I had a big identity crisis for a while when I was searching for a job because up until the time, in the Guard I was at least able to keep a little bit of my identity but I had a period of time where it’s like, who are you? You know I’m Kip S. I’m a captain in the United States army, that’s who I am and then I had to kind of redefine myself when I got out. A lot of guys struggle with that.

Schein (1993) noted two critical factors that contribute to the soundness of an organization culture. These he regarded as “structural stability” and “patterning or integration.” Structural stability refers to cultural components that are “not only shared, but deep and stable…less conscious and therefore less tangible and less visible” (p. 372). Patterning or integration he specified functions as, “a larger paradigm or gestalt that ties together the various elements that lies at the deeper level. Culture somehow implies that rituals, climate, values and behaviors bind together into a coherent whole” (p. 372,
emphasis added). The coherence of the military culture relies on the integration of a person through foundational values and premises. This premise is reflected in Kip’s experience. The inherent rituals, climate and behaviors appear to provide the structural stability he terms as the anchor.

The army gives you an environment where you know two things about everybody you meet, one you know your position relative to theirs because there’s a rank and you know their branch, which is their job, so ultimately every time you run into somebody or you deal with a new person those knowns’ are there and it makes for a - you know how you’re supposed to respond immediately. Either you call them sir, or they call you sir or you’re peers. Or you call them sergeant or you call them soldier or specialist or whatever. Whereas in civilian world that’s not as clear cut. So that is something that there’s a lot more kind of the formality or informality of relationships you have to figure out and the environment in the Army, it’s set. You know it going in and because you don’t have to figure that out, you can get beyond it real quickly and get to what you had to do which is a mission or a job.

The integration and consistency of values further serves as a form of connective tissue for those in the military realm. Every branch of the military touts a fundamental value system that provides the foundation for service and character of that particular corp. Commitment and discipline thread through each branch. Indeed, commitment and loyalty undergird a warrior ethos. For instance the National Guard’s motto is, “Always There, Always Ready.” The Navy and the Marines share the three core values of: Honor, Courage and Commitment; and the Army grounds its Corp members in seven “Army Values” specified as: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and
Personal Courage. Dedication to these values is at the heart of a warrior. Heath spoke to the integral nature of these values:

The army core values are built around that [discipline] as one of those values – duty, honor, courage, self sacrifice, and integrity. I mean these are all very essential aspects of character for soldier I mean its Army core values. Society looks at that as kinda quaint but I’m gonna tell you something I don’t think society has necessarily changed - but I think there is a veneer over society in the appearance of these things. I think the military - not just the United States but most soldiers you’ll find - at least in western countries - have the same code of ethics in some variation - they’re built that way.

The culmination of each branch not only speaks to what is required of a warrior and her/his family, but equally (and critically) important is recognizing the reciprocity of such agreements and commitments. Listening with the forthcoming narratives, I am reminded that as each person commits service/career to the military, similarly the nation/state must commit. Crucially, the notion of “supporting our troops” is the understanding that the warrior self, once constructed as such requires that we as a nation must be, “Always there, always ready.” A function of healing in the aftermath of war then is threefold. In the vast interplay betwixt us all, we must account for the narrative intricacies of a past, present and future presence.

He was still in high school, seventeen years old when he signed the papers to become a Marine. The ‘scramble of experience’ can be heard throughout Troy’s narrative. At one time his father was a Catholic priest. Smiling he told me, “of course he met my mother and that’s pretty much why he left the priesthood.” Linking himself with
and through his Dad, he explained, “They weren’t in the military - but yah - he had that same feeling I guess - of making a commitment.” Though he went on to add, “No one in my family - my immediate family was ever in the military -- it’s something that interested me. I mean - my family was - basically more liberal -- I don’t think I was ever told by my family that I should ever hit back or fight -- or anything.” Troy distinguishes himself in multiple spheres. Across the personal, familial and political, he shifts between identifying with and distinguishing himself from others.

Baylor would be leaving in less than a week for his third deployment when we spoke. I had the impression that for him, the interview was somewhat timely. The impending nearness of another deployment seemed to allow for a good deal of laughter and an equally strong measure of reflective solemnity. Both were interspersed throughout our interview and in the process, I found his memories touching for the innocence and illumination simultaneously invoked. Like the others, he moved backwards and forward through time in the telling. In this way I am reminded of the importance Carr (1986) placed not solely on the sequence of events [in our lives – our lived experience] but the configuration of those sequences. Those “features of temporal closure, beginning-middle-end, means-end, suspension-resolution etc… [have] the reflective, deliberative character of a Beginning in which the larger-scale action or event becomes thematic of the whole” (p. 57, original emphasis). It’s as though I can hear Baylor working to make sense of himself through time. He takes up and moves through countless beginnings, middles and endings – all on the threshold of another pending freight-bearing time. Deployment.

Baylor was the only person who incorporated stories from childhood through adolescence to the present, and he began by telling me, “Well, basically it was just - it
was always something I wanted to do. It wasn’t, like, some rash decision I made out of high school.” He reflected, “I even found - drawings and stuff –yeah, like- when I was little, I wanted to be a fighter pilot - I used to draw airplanes.” He went on to talk about his memories as a small child,

My grandparents lived down by an Army base and there was always big helicopters flying around. I used to be scared to death of them because my sister - she was telling me they were coming to get me (Laughter). When I finally was old enough -you know - I was captivated by them. Like, I’d always run, through the yard and watching them as far as I could.

Much like my own son, I think this body-being had that sort of blood coursing through his bones. And yet the innocence he portrayed in revealing his childhood memories is especially poignant; particularly in light of April’s reflections that innocence is something lost for a warrior. However, for all his innocence his was equally undaunted, “I mean, it was always like that for me. I really had just --- like no matter what - I wasn’t – I had never once thought about going to college -- ever. That never popped into my mind – never once - wasn’t ever an idea.” He told me about growing up with his best friend whose Dad was a Marine, “And – me and him growing up with each other, you know- we’re, like, the same people.” He explained when the idea was finally cemented, “I guess when we were freshmen - September 11th happened. I’m pretty sure - me and him - like that day –the decision was made, whatever went on - when we get out of high school - we’re joining the Marines. And - like that just – I mean that stuck.” His decisiveness was evident, “That was that…. And as soon as I was eligible, which was just
as soon as I became a senior in high school – like - that first week of my senior year, that first weekend, I went and enlisted, and then we went in together.”

From Baylor’s perspective, “that’s the way a lot of us are. I mean there’s the people who kind of - you know - think they need to get money for –like - college and do stuff like that, but then - for the majority, it’s just like - there is no question.” Yet Pete (24) was just as adamant as Baylor, “College money - and if anybody tells you different they’re lying. It’s got to come to that, or I know you aren’t in.” He then broadened the scope, “You thought you were going to join the Navy, you were going to Taiwan and Australia and pick up all these girls - that’s exactly what you were thinking.” AJ was feisty, and I had the impression there was an element of baiting in his initial response; “Because I wanted to go to war.” He did explain further,

Well there’s -- a lot of mixed things. My mom wanted me to go [to college] so I kind of owed it to her for helping me out with all the trouble I was getting into - I really wanted to join the military right out of high school but my parents wanted me to give a try at least for a year – and I went- and it wasn’t working out you could say -- kind of getting myself in and out of trouble there too. I was like - I need to get myself whipped up into shape so I went and I joined. I wanted to do the infantry thing.

Heath, like Baylor had an internal inclination that would not be denied, having told me, “I mean ultimately I think some of its maybe genetic some of its just who you are.” Heath took this conviction further still, “but to me - there’s a - I have a very strong conviction that at least men have an obligation to serve their country;” elaborating,
And I don’t think I would have felt really like I had fulfilled my duty as a man if had not served my country as a soldier. I - still feel very much that way. And I want both my boys to both be in the military in some capacity - because it changes you as a person and it makes you appreciate I think - a little differently the country you live in.

Al, on the other hand, did not seem to possess any inkling or early predilection for a military life. He explained, “I think it was largely based on not knowing what I wanted to do.” He explained, “it was more a kind of curiosity thing 'cause I'd heard about ROTC. I was never really fully decided until I spent two years in ROTC and then I signed the enlistment contract my junior year.” Yet, Al added in reflection, “I think a little bit of it was what happened September 11th, 2001.” Unlike Kip or Heath, there was not a strong familial link with the military for him, “I don't think my immediate family had a lot of knowledge about the military and kinda how things work. Obviously, they know it existed; there was some family history in the military - different branches of the service.”

Heath and Kip both have strong familial ties to the military and with it a potent sense of the contextual, organizational and political value of military purpose in their own lives - and the life of our nation. Kip remembered, “My father was a guardsman, so when I was growing up I knew about the National Guard.” At age 32, Kip remarked, “I can’t really remember myself as a person before the army.” Heath gave a detailed accounting of his rationale for opting for a life in and through the military. He explained, I joined the military when I was 25. I did it because I came from a military family and strangely enough -- I came from an air force family but I didn’t have much regard for the air force in regards to being warriors - and I still don’t…the air
force has great golf courses and lively family campgrounds - but there is a certain detachment from - um -- from the reality of combat that - I didn’t - that didn’t - still doesn’t - appeal to me in the air force. There’s no lack of respect – [for all my relatives] but I - I wanted to be where things mattered. So that’s why I wanted to be a –soldier.

In terms of his own ideals, Heath went on to address other factors that influenced his decision,

I wanted in the National Guard because … I had always liked the National Guard system over the active Army because - I knew I could go in the active army when I was done with school. But I - The National Guard is built up like more of a British model of regiments where you grow up with the same units and you know people. And so ya - the active army has a lot of transition and change of stations. There are a lot of individual things that happened there that don’t keep you connected to folks.

Kip’s sense of commitment did not solely stem from his familial ties. In this regard he described a deeper, more compelling altruism and connection to others,

But to give - you know as far as why I joined the Guard - I believe in the Cognizant’s business order. I think that the National Guard has a very important role to play in turn of the fabric of the nation’s history. I believe in the concept of a force that works for the governor - you know the states. I’m a proponent of state’s rights and I think there’s a long history of that regard in the United States and I think especially disaster relief side is a very valuable part of having a force of people that are trained soldiers that the Governor can call upon should a
disaster occur. I think that’s a really necessary thing for providing defense and safety to our citizen. And then sometimes you get called up - and send us overseas - because the federal government provides 90% of our funding so that was just part of the job.

Though he had no intention of returning to service once he did his four years, Kent is currently a General in the Army National Guard. Ultimately, he told me, “I missed it and the opportunity to make a contribution.” His uptake sounded like this,

It was a pretty easy decision for me. Back when I was 17 years old, I’d just left New York City, moved to Illinois, and realized that I didn’t have the financial means to go to college. So, the only option that I saw at that particular time was to join the Army…. And I also didn’t think I was mentally mature enough to go straight to college. So, joined the Army, and only thought I was gonna do four years and get out. And that was it. And I did my four years, got out of active duty, went back to college. And once I graduated college, did some other things, and before I knew it, I was back in uniform, and I’ve been in uniform now 31 years.

When I asked Kent what it was he missed he didn’t hesitate,

It’s the camaraderie, the ability to work a lot of different things simultaneously. I’m not a person who likes to have one job and have routine. Unlike most people, I do like change. And with the military, every day is something different. And it also gave me an opportunity to work with other people, and to see them develop, along with myself. So, it was always a challenge.
Raven was expecting his first baby when we met, and like Kent, he was not quite ready for college either.

Pretty plain and simple actually, the reason I joined the military is because I felt--well there’s two things, the fact that my grandfather served and I was really honored by that [and] a big deciding factor was the fact that I wasn’t ready for school. I knew I felt like I would waste my time and my parent’s money and just be in debt for no reason at all because I wasn’t ready.

Not being ready for college and without skills he saw the military as his only option telling me, “I’ve got no choice. This will give me my livelihood.” I was also drawn to the memory he shared with me regarding his grandfather, “we actually visited some of his [my grandfather’s] friends when I was young. We went out to Wyoming to see my uncle - we stopped on the way through.” Raven spoke of the awe he felt, “and I was like, wow, all these years after this, they’re still friends. That’s pretty amazing. I was only 10 or 12 years old - but I still realized that.” Indeed, every warrior I spoke with regarded the bond they share with their comrades as a lifelong commitment, an unbreakable link.

These narratives reveal a complex interplay of time, space, and a being. Consider the personal history of Baylor and the stories that came to and through him. The notion of what it meant to be a Marine was a powerful influence. That particular influence traversed time, space and people in seemingly unpredictable ways. These narratives reveal the ways in which we not only connect to and through others, but those ways in which we distinguish ourselves from others. Pete described a far different perspective on joining the military than Heath and Kip. Yet they each, consubstantially, adhere to the fundamental values espoused in their separate but similar branches of the military.
Ultimately, these narratives illuminate how it is that warriors come to understand ‘self’ across a myriad of relationships and through familial, organizational and political spheres. Centrally they speak to the veracity of culture and the fibers along which we are pulled into creating this vast web.

*Construction through the Masses: Troubling Choice*

Clearly there are deep and wide gradations in how it is that warriors come to be. A host of opportunities, ideals and means converge to influence the decisions for those who opt for a military life. So it was that, though wholly unsolicited, the ideal of a voluntary service and “choice” frequently emerged in conversation. Importantly, those decisions, while they may seem independent/personal “choices,” also serve to reflect subtextual remnants of our own culture. Patriotism, laden with the complexities of meritocracy, gender, class, family, and loyalty, also churns amidst a host of equally thick socio-economic, historic and political influences. Choices, then, are not so much about the dichotomies we resurrect to reduce uncertainty (a right/wrong choice), but rather always unpredictability consequential. Outcomes are inevitably unpredictable; consequences are frequently difficult to fully reconcile or conceptually anticipate.

Both the content and the context of these narratives are indicative of the national scope of those who come to military life. The aftermath of 9/11 certainly inflamed a particular patriotic response in the U.S. and inspired many young women and men (and the country at large) to service. A number of participants reflected that influence. Others “choose” to go into the service by way of escaping (re-channeling?) difficult life circumstances, limited opportunities, economic hardship and or floundering communities.

According to O’Hare & Bishop (2006) “Among employed young adults (age 18 to 24)
only 24 percent of those in rural areas are working full-time year-round, compared to 29 percent of those in cities and suburbs” (p.1). The figures reflect the decline of industries and particular ways of life that once supported rural economies. As disparate communities sag under such losses those educational systems supported by taxes and levies suffer significantly as well. Importantly, these authors address the impact that the OIF/OEF campaigns are having more specifically on rural communities. Inadvertently, they speak to some of the participants of this project as well. Thus, beyond the familial, a host of factors coalesce to impact the choices we make.

Kara and her spouse married right out of high school. Both grew up in one of those aforementioned (Appalachian) communities of West Virginia. As Kara explained, “Well, he was not very good in school, and he wanted to make a better life for himself and myself.” For this young man, the military seemed to offer a reputable opportunity to lift them both beyond their present means. Like many of those I spoke with, Kent (as previously noted) and Tad both referred to “not having the financial means to go to college.” Tad, who also lived in a rural Appalachian community, explained that when his mom and step-Dad divorced, “I went from being a normal middle class kid in school to being the kid with the free lunch card, having a meal card, and on welfare, and just living in a trailer and - the entire deal.” He went on to tell me about his first semester at college.

So, I went there on a baseball scholarship. That’s the only way I got my tuition paid for. And so, I was student loanin’ my room and board - I had $50.00 a month to spend - this was 1987, [my aunt] would send me $50.00 a month for spending money, and that’s what I had. By the time the end of that first semester rolled
around, I knew I was gonna go off to the Army, and thought I would spend four years and get out. It kind of grew on me.

Stories such as these reveal elements of the subtextual at play, those many influences involved in the “choices” we make. Tad’s story about divorce not only addressed the speed at which life circumstances can shift, and consequently the pool of choices, but significantly, the larger political and less apparent realities at play. For one, gender maintains a subtextual presence across the narratives of family, divorce, socio-economic and historical elements of any given time. Indisputably, gender is a considerable and complex dynamic integral to the military project (by design or default). For some, choices are defined in the turbulence of a life moment. Life moments are both personal and political. They are indeed complex matters, situated in the confluence of powerful forces, seen and unseen. A culmination of uncertainty, ambiguity, “creativity and constraint” (Harter, Japp & Beck, 2005) are some of contributing threads that serve to comprise those sticky fibers across our culturally bound, vast webs of significance.

Kate was quite adamant concerning the notion of choice. “It made me angry – you don’t know how many times I heard, ‘Well, he volunteered to go in’ - Yeah, he was – he was talked to for three years while his brain is not nearly fully developed.” From Kate’s perspective, “You know - he made a decision that was – he had no comprehension - no way to get his arms around what he was doing.” Perhaps Kate’s words might give us all pause. For the purposes of this text troubling the notion of “choice” does indeed warrant attention particularly in light of a self comes into being – in and through others. Both Beatrice and Sorie spoke of how seemingly personal “choices” might also be disguised in the murkiness of a larger agenda. From each of their perspectives, their sons were misled.
Both had strong mechanical skills, both were “promised” that those important and much needed skills would preclude them from having to fight.

In this way it becomes clear that the “choice” is bounded within perimeters controlled by others, further troubling both the notion of choice and commitment. Sorie explained it like this, “So he joined, he checked things out -and I guess the army kind of lied - because he says to me, “well mom, they promised me I would never have to go into fighting, I could do mechanical work,” you know all this, and the other thing.” Beatrice remembered, “He was supposed to do something in electronics and he went with a recruiter to the City and he ended up - he came back and he said, “Oh mom guess what, he said they have these tanks that will rattle 60 mph” and I said, “oh you didn’t” and he said, ‘oh yeah.’”

In a culture grounded in the ideals of a rugged individualism and meritocracy the matter of ‘choice’ are often both paradoxical and ironic. For all of Troy’s commitment to the ideal of the Marines and service, the realities of war were not something for which he was prepared.

You know as I found out soon - nothing can fully get you ready for combat experience - And just comparing the two - Boot camp is nothing - absolutely nothing compared to combat - and mortar hitting right above you at four in the morning - and getting opened up - and getting fired upon.

Laufer (1988) would have us understand the significance of Troy’s words. No matter the vast attempts to prepare soldiers for combat, “cognitive preparation, even if it is accompanied sophisticated simulation, usually is not designed to overwhelm the self-system” (p. 40). For Jace, it was simply evident, “I know they go through training, but
you can't train someone to see that kind of stuff; you can't train the human heart and feelings to accept the terrible things that go on.” Heath was equally cognizant of the inability to fully anticipate the extent of those choices, “there’s nothing you can prepare yourself for psychologically, when you go to combat because you don’t know what you’re gonna see until you’ve seen it. There’s nothing that really replicates it -- even if you have a gunshot wound here (stateside) - or you have a car wreck.” Despite his extensive experience in emergency medical care and a medical practice of his own, he referred to this shocking of the system in its “speed of lethality.”

The reflections of Kent are especially noteworthy as he conveyed issues of narrative temporality intertwined with a socially constitutive being. Kent’s reflections remind us that the ramifications of choice manifest material outcomes well beyond our understanding at any one given time. As a general, Kent is/was responsible for hundreds/thousands of warriors. He held a critical leadership role in the logistical implementation and transportation of troops in both Kuwait and Iraq at the onset of the insurgency in Iraq. In discussing the health of his warriors, those not in combat, he retrospectively spoke,

I think, had I known then what I know now - I would have been a little more concerned. Because it’s really not just the combat piece in regards to mental health. People deal with isolation; people deal with just being in unfamiliar territory for so long, not being around loved ones. And even though we say that the military has high camaraderie and teamwork, there’s still some people who feel left out. So, I would’ve paid a lot more attention to those things then, especially when we were going through that demobilization.
Sori also found herself contemplating the scope of her familial inculcation with war. She thoughtfully added to the conversation, “And my father in WW II never talked about WW II he said you don’t want to talk about times you’ve seen your best friend die in your arms or other things. You -- this is not glory. This is something that you needed to do.” Reflecting further she then added, “And in all three cases - they were all volunteers.” [The three she refers to include her son who served in Iraq, her brother who served in Desert Storm and her Father in WW II]. Kip and Roger, independent of each other, shared their ideas and reflections on some historical contingencies that gave them pause. Roger drew on an earlier era, “In World War II everybody went. I mean everybody, everybody’s drafted in the military - we don’t have a draft anymore - I’m not so certain we shouldn’t have a draft.” Kip referred to the Vietnam War and the experience of Vietnam veterans. Reflecting on issues of the ways in which the draft was manipulated by many who had the means,

I personally think we probably ought to have a draft because I think we would be much more careful in deciding how we’re going to apply the military forces -- Because all of a sudden the constituents and the children of the people making the decisions are part-and-parcel to the decision making.

He went on, “I think of CCR and Fortunate Son, you know that song - Credence Clearwater Revival? Kip prompted me – remember? “It ain’t me, it ain’t me, I ain’t no senator’s son.”

So it is that a person may “choose” to serve her/his country and by doing so agree to go to war, have a binding (legal) contract that assures her/his presence in the service of her/his country, but still will never to be able to fully anticipate, articulate or comprehend
the choices and implications made for and about her/him. Laufer’s (1988) words are critical to understanding not only what happens to warriors, but how convoluted the notion of choice is. He specified, “In the actual context of warfare, there is an interaction between neurophysiological and psychosocial mechanism that produce changes in the self-structure…stated simply, there is no preparation for immersion in death and the exposure to catastrophic stress” (p. 41). The narratives thus far, in addition to those forthcoming, might then be contemplated as through reflecting pools in the matter of “choice.” I may see myself (the warrior), but as these narratives attest, myself is a vast culmination of us all. In a reflecting pool then, we are each present. Regardless of who “chooses” to go to war, for whatever personal, political or otherwise altruistic inspiration – in reality, one way or another, we all go too.

Reluctant, Recalcitrant, but Ever Ready Warriors

Narrative Map 14: “It started with a Heart” (Rhonda)
Though those who enlist do so with a host of convictions, goals and dreams in which they aspire to/through the military, those who love them are frequently inculcated as if by default. Rhonda’s laughed, “For me it started with a heart. That’s how I got sucked into this hot mess.” Al and Rhonda and I sat, her map at the nexus of our tiny congregate, “I think for me it was like all connected. Like how all this connects.” Turning to Al she noted, “Regardless of whether you’re here or away. The heart has a little scar on it because deployment is inevitably hard and - they’re heartbreaking. And the scar keeps going through it and it becomes the threshold for a house.” Here Rhonda reveals a speaking body as she pulls this angst from the body (her heart) right through to the material/symbolic - her home. Moving the angst from her body in this way and placing it on the threshold by which we enter, her home becomes bathed in the corporeal. The military enters her home/body – from both the inside out and from the outside in – over and again. Further demarcating permanency and texture of this presence, she wrote through the shingles, “Happy Home,” and alternately, “What is your Happy?” Where our “home” is fundamental to our sense of self, Rhonda clearly depicts her identity wrapped in and through and by the military/her spouse’s choice. The military she said, “I think it’s just - it’s a lifestyle that you would never know what you’re getting into, until you get in it. It does mean a lot of different things I think.”

No fair warning, no inclination, she had no idea how drastically her life was about to unfold. This lifestyle brought about a wholly unanticipated disruption of her world and for Kara the reality was entirely heartbreaking. She and her spouse had been dating since they were teenagers. Still, she hadn’t anticipated his choice; “He went down to the recruiter and signed up for the military -- without talking to anybody -- he just- signed up
and I was like - okay? [Her tone, expressing hesitancy and disbelief in his decision].”

Their time together was interrupted by multiple deployments and stormy redeployments,

“We got engaged after he’d been down there probably 6 months or a year - first, ‘in-love-
long-distance.’ I just didn’t want to live with him before we got married. But we’re kind
of - we’re getting a divorce right now.” Over the course of a ten year relationship, she
explained, “We’ve been living together maybe 8 months - and we’ve been married almost
three years and out of those three years we’ve been living together maybe eight months.”

Kara speaks to the number of women whose spouses are undone by multiple and
repetitive deployment cycles:

He took a long time to get back into civilian life, it took a long time for him -
probably almost until he deployed again to tell you the truth, almost the whole
year. He would take it out on me; he took it out on me a lot. We would have fights
they were usually when he was drunk and he was drunk a lot. And when he was
drunk he would just start spouting off about everything and it would cause a really
big fight to where, the neighbors were scared for me so they would call the cops.
Narrative Map 15: Fighting Constantly (Kara)

Narrative Map 16: Distance & Divorce (Kara)
She struggled trying to explain, “It was very violent, because it was - I don’t think he realized - because once he realized he stopped immediately - he wouldn’t talk about it anymore. It was very - it was very hard.” She endured:

I kept clinging onto who he was before deployment and that’s what kept me for so long, *I knew who he was, but I didn’t like who he’d become and I hoped that one day he’d go back to who he was*, and I told him that. I was like, “you’re not who you used to be,” and he said, “I never will be who I used to be, I’ve just been through too much to be that person again.” I don’t know, so I clung onto who he used to be, who I’d fallen in love with.

Narrative Map 17: When we were Happy (Kara)

The layers were thick, complicated and difficult. Having had a miscarriage in their first year, she explained, “For a while - it was just like with the baby - at first I feel like I failed with that too. I don’t like to fail so - that’s why I’ve pushed so hard to make
everything work, I didn’t want to be a failure.” Ultimately, after one miscarriage, a baby boy, and a ten year relationship it was a life/style she was neither able nor willing to sustain; “Its better - it’s for the best right now - I am so much happier and he’s so much happier.”

Knowing, living and experiencing the difficulties of multiple deployments with her fiancé, Jace was mindful of the difficult predicament of choice.

Yeah I mean in different ways like I'm setting myself up for the worst heartache you could ever have by being with him; by agreeing to wait and be with someone that does this type of stuff. I mean people think I'm crazy. I don't know how many times people are like, "I couldn't do that; I couldn't wait. I don't know how you do it. How have you not gone crazy?" - You don't think I've gone crazy? Like I chose to do this - as much as I hate it sometimes, but if we weren't together I would still feel the exact same way I feel – you can't control who you love – I don't think you can.

From the onset Alice told me, “I didn’t choose the military – but it is who he is.” She possessed an assured clarity - a groundedness; BJ told me she was his, “Saint Teresa.” Not wanting to be defined by the requirements and responsibilities (expectations) of a “commander’s wife” she worked to chart her own territory. Consequently, she was frequently referred to as “non-compliant” by ranked military officials. Up and down the (micro/macro) hierarchical ladder(s), the sometimes vocalized, but ever subtextual translation read: “a non-compliant wife is a non-supportive wife.” Hearing Alice, I am given to contemplating the churning juxtaposition of multiple (micro/macro) identities (and roles) at play through narrative constructs that work to
discipline the reluctant and the recalcitrant. I am likewise reminded of those counter
counter narratives that serve to disrupt power regimes – resisting the imposition of a suitable
identity (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001). Alice seems to take up a liminal space between the
two. “I’ve said to BJ before - just because they salute you at work don’t mean that we
have to here.” I quite liked her feistiness!

Cora possessed a clarity and humor long earned over the course of her life as a
military spouse. “When he got promoted I said to the Action General, ‘I’ve always been
the general what the heck am I going to be now? - Oh I’ll be the Two-Star-Genera, that’s
what I’ll be.’ Humor, blending with pride, Cora explained the symbolism behind
“pinning,” “In the promotion ceremony when they pin (we say pin but it’s all Velcro
now) When they do it - they hit them – [hard on the chest she showed me] and it goes
back to the pin and the blood from the piercing that’s kind of what the thing is behind it
all. It’s who you are.” Such events are significant within the ranks of military and the
home as well. Indeed it was a big deal, “It was at the armory, where he got promoted,
someone said to me ‘so I’ve been coming to these for years and years and I’ve never seen
it so full as to watch Kent get promoted’ - and that was just so awesome.” The person
who does the pinning is held with considerable regard. They are generally chosen by the
recipient for the significant role they hold in that person’s life. Cora went on,

I was the one going to be pinning him with his rank. I went up to do the rank and I
hit him in his chest - somebody took a video of it - the Action General drew them
to attention when they do the announcement - and Kent didn’t know what I was
doing [here she showed me how – with him standing at full attention – salute,
chest out, body stiff - she whacked him. Wacked him so hard his chest buckled]
and he goes, “ahhhh,” the Action General goes, “ahhhh” - and then you heard people in the back just roaring laughing, “yeah you’re the general.” So that was fun.

*Memory.* When Levi graduated from the military academy, he asked his Dad and I to “pin” him. I remember holding those bars in my hand. For the whole of that ceremony, I sat rolling them over and over - praying over those gold Lt. bars. I prayed for his safety. I prayed for wisdom and courage and more safety again and again. I was both proud of him and for him. I was proud of his fortitude and accomplishments and afraid for him and all of us at the very same time.

Parents offered still more varied aspects of a self in relation with an adult-warrior-child. As was true for partners, so it was with parents; love and concern, pride, fear, hope and a myriad emotions were evoked throughout the timbre of these narratives. Despite Roger’s own long military career Kip’s involvement in the military evoked a culmination of paradoxical emotions and thoughts. First he remembered,

I was nagging him, and you know he’s a senior in high school and he finally looked at me one day and he says, “Dad, I want to go to Ohio State and be in the Army just like you.” Touché. … He shut me up. He wanted me to shut up. … So, wow - you know. So at that point I never said anything else about that.

Later Roger stressed, “You know, he’s in war – [but] no - I didn’t - that’s not what I wanted for him. The war is not - that was not what I wanted for him.” He, like Baylor, drew on cherished memories,

When he was a little kid, I used to look at him in bed when he was sleeping - you know, and I’d think of him - I’d be out in the dirt somewhere in the night - in a hole
in the ground. And you know, I’d [be thinking] - Gawd that little cute baby he’s still sleeping and I don’t ever want him to have to do this.

Roger, bearing freight of his own, sorely expressed his fear, frustration and angst, “Damn he still had to - that kid! Sometimes – [I think] ‘what have I done’ – Really - And it’s like, ‘what have I done to my son. What have I done to my child?’ You know, ‘did I do this to him?’”

I think how it is that we cannot help but draw on our histories, the temporality of our being together, the shifts of our/self and other. These “backward- looking” stories are sense-making apparatus. They serve not only to define/explain who we are as individuals, but clearly as these narratives indicate, they serve to distinguish, who it is we are in and through our relationships with others. Sorie similarly spoke to the presence of awe, a deep and profound love felt for those beings eons before they morph into our now-warriors. She reminisced,

When my son was born I remember just falling in love with him - just absolutely falling in love with him … I would just talk about him and my eyes would light up apparently. You know I was just amazed by him. I was amazed at all the little the little things he would do -- I thought now I understand why people never get over the loss of child. I - how would I continue if something happened to my son?

Though she and her spouse wanted her son to go to college, he was a reluctant respondent. At a loss she remembered, “I thought I don’t know what to tell him to do because he really needs to find himself, and more importantly he needs some discipline. And, he wasn’t getting it from us.” “But - you know,” she told me, “He asked me what should he do - I finally said maybe the military is a good response. He decided on the
Army so I thought ok. I’m not going to stop him from doing and being what he thinks he wants to do.”

He was ‘the world’ she told me; “a McDonald’s worker as a kid, only child, only son, only everything. So he was it - the world.” Beatrice was a single mother raising her son in a small rural Appalachian community. After high school graduation she cajoled him, “you got to do something. You got to go to college, you got to do something.” She hadn’t an inclination he would choose to join the military. At first, when he returned from meeting with a recruiter she reflected on the nation’s peacetime status and so chose not to worry so much. However, “by the time he got out of boot camp - they had invaded Kuwait [and] that kid went from McDonalds to boot camp - to the dessert.”

He came home and put the Marine coffee mugs on the table, hadn’t yet graduated from High School. Those mugs were his way of speaking his choice. Kate was first shocked and then angry. Unbeknownst to her, Wise had been having extensive contact with a recruiter over a few years. The recruiter even attended his football games. Her own heart ached, “If I could have just gone in his place, even though I wouldn’t have lasted two days, I would’ve done it in a second, especially after everything they went through.” She reflected on her spouse as well,

And it may even be harder for the men, just because men are – you know, hide their feelings a lot. I mean, my husband cried when he left, and I have never seen him – we’ve been married for 21 years just the day before yesterday, and he – I’ve never seen him cry. And he couldn’t help it that day, and I know he said the same thing. “If I could go over there for him, then I would do it in a minute.”
Constructing a ‘we’: Emotional Labors of Love

Rhonda reads from the backdrop of her journey map:

I do support my husband. It’s his duty to defend our nation. Every moment he’s gone I have to ask - what-if- today’s the day. Will he come home safe? What’s he doing there? How do I help him how will he help me? I look at the sky knowing that artillery is falling under the same stars that I gaze at and somewhere somehow a family is affected. And then. That says love loss. And in the flag I put proud to be an American. Prouder to be an Army wife. Proudest of those who serve and sacrifice. It’s my duty and I pray to God every day for strength.

I was unable to meet with Radar’s wife, though he often spoke of her. In one of those moments he remembered that her theme song during his deployment was “Like a Rock,” by Bob Segar. I add it here as a testament to the strength of “reluctant,”
recalcitrant but ever ready warrior.” In their stories I heard fragments and the presence of an emergent strength. Each visit was paradoxically filled with remnants of sorrow and joy, laughter and a resonating strength. It was indeed strength honed in and through their own lived experiences on this side of the ocean. The density in words in this song often wove a fine thread through the textured stories on home front terrain.

I never felt that strong - Like a rock …
I was leaning solid everywhere - Like a rock …
My hands were steady my eyes were clear and bright
My walk had purpose my steps were quick and light
And I held firm to what I felt was right- like a rock
Like a rock - I was strong as I could be –
Like a rock – nothing ever got to me –
Like a rock I was something to see - like a rock
And I stood arrow straight…

Narrative Map 19: Ebb and Flow of Deployment (April)

April’s strength spoke through her like the tide. It came on and pulled back. Her map reflects the ebb and flow of her self, of deployment and reintegration. She starts with a “normal life” and moves to finding her spouse is being deployed, “You’re going to
Iraq!? WHAT!?” “How will I do this alone?” she wonders. I’m struck with the broken heart she used to represent his departure, “The day he left… Broken Hearted.” April weaves, back and forth across the page, taking us with her, “Complete Sadness – Lost – Fear – Anger.” She used a phone to represent her “Lifeline” and moves on to mark, “The Long Year – FRG/Media/Good Friends” (FRG-Family Readiness Group). On her spouse’s return, “Life is Wonderful – We talk about the Lost Year.” Questions begin soon after, “Does he have PTSD?!? – Is anyone else going through this?” Then on to, “He has PTSD! – What do we do now? – Who can we talk to? In military? In FRG?” April ends her map, “Six years later…life goes on.” It has taken this long for her spouse to begin to seek help. Clearly, there is no finality to the question of trauma and vulnerability, only more questions. This has not been an uncommon response from those I spoke with.

Indeed it stands out, the wondering and waiting if “I/WE” can get back to something that seems normal. Most often life becomes what April referred to, “our new normal.” And the time he was gone, as “the lost year,” perhaps the year of the difficult “we.” Like so many participants, April spoke to an emergent inner strength, through the challenges (as opposed to, in spite-of). In a classic postmodern stance of “both/and” we are dissuaded from any dichotomy that leads to the summing of our experience as “good/bad; right/wrong.” Instead, through so many of these narratives I was moved to contemplate the juxtapositions and paradoxes. Strength and grief, fear, anger, courage and bewilderment, lie in our midst all at once (For relationships enduring time apart, see also, Zvonkovic, Manoogian and McGraw 2001). Here, April remembered,
The feelings of being a strong provider and caregiver for [my daughter], and then for [my husband] also, because when he would call, I would try to be you know, everything’s okay, we’re maintaining. I wanted to be the solid spouse at home so he knew we were okay and he didn’t have to worry because I didn’t want him to have to worry on the day-to-day what was happening at home - so when he went on his missions, I wanted him to be clear and focused on what the mission was and not worry about –well - the furnace has blown up and the car is broke down and she doesn’t have any help.

Cora’s was more reflective during the journey mapping session, more present through her entire body. Embodied. It was during the drawing/mapping and talking that her thoughts emerged up from her; less guarded. A concerted effort in working through her thoughts, attempting to make sense she hadn’t quite yet grasped was evident. As she shared, I heard the similarities between both she and April,

I think because - to me it felt there was a lot left up to me, even though it’s not a physical thing - I wanted to make sure I did it right. I guess maybe because I wanted him to be proud that everything was still going. For me, I’m working hard to keep it going, not that it’s a simple thing because it wasn’t - even though I was used to it. Maybe I wanted him to be proud of me - maybe some families feel that they’re so proud of their soldier doing what they’re doing, maybe you just want them to be somewhat proud of what they’re doing too. You’d have to feel that way - I would imagine. We want some kind of recognition - thank you.

Cora also strived to explain the state of being while Kent was deployed. She seemed to want to capture and frame that liminal space:
I’m trying to think of the in between where we were just so happy and loving to have him home. What I’m trying to think of is stability, do I just write stability? After the initial thing [his departure] then things become stable. I think at some midpoint there was some kind of verification that this is how it was going to be. That what we’ve already experienced for several months just the way it was going to be for the rest of the time. I don’t know what I expected. You’ve got that little stuff and then your stable - you’re stable for awhile. I don’t know if that’s stability or acceptance.

Rhonda retrospectively considered the challenges she managed over Al’s deployment, “I mean I’m - jumping through and I’m proud of myself. I feel like I can handle anything.” She went on, “I mean that’s the thing - that’s what helps make marriages stronger or collapse … And not that I went through it like with flying colors. I mean I had a breakdown - but.” More soberly she reflected,

I think the Army makes the best marriages and the worst marriages – it’s a continual battle for some people … I think to be successful in the Army - as a couple - you both have to be really independent, and really strong, like you really have to work together. I mean you really have to be strong as a couple. That has to be one of your objectives. It has to be one you work on. Then you see couples that don’t communicate, mismanage their money, they’re unfaithful when spouses are deployed, both the soldiers and the spouses … It’s just there’s so many avenues of temptation - with the Army there’s so many more opportunities for relationships to go sour, but it’s just like a continual battle for some people, and I
know it’s like one way or the other, either you’re doing really great, or it’s not really great.

Jace shook her head and laughed at herself, “I was so uneducated about the war; I had no idea why we were there.” Baylor left and, “the next day was September 11th and I walked through [the campus center] and there was a flag for every person who died in 9/11 and I lost it trying to walk to class.” She told me, “I think that day I became like the biggest patriot I will ever become in my life, just because he was over there and that's terrible to say that you don't love your country because you don't know someone at war, but it changes how you feel.”

For Alice, the year BJ was in Iraq was the year she, “held up her end of the bargain for him.” Like others, freight took voice at the onset, “CRAP, what am I going to do if something happens?” There were times of feeling in a constant state of “frenzy;” a persistent sense of “anticipation, what is tomorrow going to be like?” Alice spoke to the well intentioned friends, and yet ultimately she was more compelled to do this on her own. She remembered the strong sensation, (determination?), perhaps compulsion to press through the challenges. Despite the “well meaning” intentions of her friends and the days she felt like, “a shrieking maniac, always on edge,” she remembered telling her Mom, “My life sucks right now but I need to do this.” Her inner core was insistent, “I am stronger than I think I am. I don’t want to be taken care of.” I am reminded of April’s story, when she and her friend climbed the rock wall – climbing their own mountains while their spouses were at war. Yet Alice was concomitantly sad she told me, anguished about, “the big chunks of time BJ lost,” especially with her son. “He grew seven inches and went through puberty.” Here, her map reflects the freight, a black hole she bore in
BJ’s departure and absence, “He just left,” she explained. She depicts that “frenzied” state of being before, his arrival home, when the sun came out.

Narrative Map 20: The Frenzy of Deployment (Alice)

Kara was thoughtful about the extreme challenges she faced over the course of multiple deployments,

I think I put up with stuff a lot longer then I probably should have - than most people would have. I’m not going to say I should have - cause I tried, I wanted it to work, but um, I think I put up with it for a lot longer than most people would have.

As she reflected on the sum of her journey she shuddered,

Its like how did I - go to work, go to class and still manage to go out? And then get up in the morning and go back to class?? How did I even do that? I can’t - it’s like I go home, I get off work, I go home and I work on it [her new home] a little
bit, I eat dinner and I go to bed and I can barely get up the next morning, how did I do that?

Lamenting she said, “I told my mom the other day, ‘I just woke up and I’m exhausted! How am I exhausted?’ Her Mom responded, ‘yeah you’ll have that. Stress takes a lot out of you.’”

Like Kara, Rhonda contemplated the road of trials in the face of two deployments. I think a lot of it has to do with my training as a teacher - is always stopping when you do your lesson. You stop and reflect. I’ve been trained to reflect. I think that’s really been a skill that I’ve needed and used a lot - And I don’t think everyone has that because I mean you have to be taught how to stop and analyze and make changes and move on. And not …at least recognize the mistakes why you made the mistakes you did. Without that skill I would be so miserable – I would be really sad about what I’ve gone through. I definitely look at everything as a learning opportunity. It’s not like I can make it better. I don’t want to end up where I was. I don’t want to end up in that bout of depression. I don’t ever want to do that again. So I’d rather - I mean it sucks to look back at it and analyze - and relive those feelings again - but in doing that - now I realize how I got there.
Narrative Map 21: “Wake Me up When September Ends” (Kate)

*I mean, you’ve got – You’ve got gold star times – And then you’ve got times when you’re just stepping in poop. (Laughter), So then hopefully over time, there’s – and I think this is true with Wise, there is a little less poop and more – Bigger gold star days. But to get there, there is a lot of – I guess a lot of blood – and sweat. I mean, a lot of hard work. I think you – I’ve just seen how hard he’s worked at – and I mean he has really worked hard to get where he is.*

Kate’s defining moment came via popular music. During her journey mapping she remembered, “‘Green Day’ had that song – I think that was defining for me.” ‘Cause I didn’t even know what it was about, I’d never seen the video, and the – that “*When September Ends,*” and that was when our deployment was over, was the end of September.” I was struck by her use of the word “our deployment,” reflecting the embodied nature and co-commitment of “supporting our troops.” She went on,
The song says, “Wake me up when September ends,” and it was like, that’s what I wish - you know - you could just go to sleep just wake me up when September ends. Yeah, there’s a part of that’s like just not functioning. There’s just – like, part of you is missing or dead, and then, like, when September ends, you’ll become alive again. I mean, when that song hit, I was just like, “Oh, my gosh, this is exactly how I feel.”

Kate’s map more subtly reflects the presence of (a juxtaposition) joy and mourning in the homecoming. Her sun message read, “Hope – experiences weren’t too threatening in the beginning” and again, hope was followed by grief, when in May, “the caskets started coming home.” She contrasts the dark mourning cloak, the joy of coming home and the happy/sad clouds as they rain down. Kate reminded us here of the intricate complexities of emotion and trauma all at once.
Beatrice’s story speaks to remarkable courage and tenacity of those who support a warrior.

When he got to come home he called, “we’re going to be at Fort Stewart Georgia on this date and this date, will you be there?” I never traveled, I went to [the next town over], but I never traveled anywhere in my whole life and so I said, “of course I’ll be there, me and grandma.” I called my brother and said, “How am I going to get to Fort Stewart, Georgia?” and he said, “I’ll draw you a map.” and he did that and we left here. I had no clue how to get out of [the next town over]. I
prayed, but I was driven. I was driven to go there and I prayed and I got in the car and I took that little map that he made for me and I drove and I drove and I drove. And he made landmarks so I would say “oh! I’m not lost” and we drove in driving rain and I had no idea how to do interstate changes and it seemed by the grace of God totally - by angels that we arrived and we were one day ahead of time.

Roger’s presence in the aftermath has been consistent and a source of solace for both he and Kip. Roger explained,

As time went on, you know - we, talk a lot. We talk a lot about military things. We talk a lot about political things. We talk a lot about some life issues. He told me one time I was the only person he could really talk to. He says, “I can talk to you.” He says, “I don’t have anybody else I can really talk to.” You know, have a conversation with - other than a superficial, you know. . . It’s just like he knows that he’s got somebody who absolutely understands and thinks like him. We think the same - and if have a problem sometimes we get a little angry at each other, or upset with each other, and he, we’re not afraid to say, “hey, you know you got to be honest here, we got/ I got to tell you.”

Warriors come into being through vast and complex webs and are further revealed through their commitment, discipline, sacrifice and willingness to serve. Familial members are unique warriors in their own right. Not only do they bear the burden of those with whom they fall “into this hot mess,” but they bear a collective burden of the nation, one which takes a considerable toll on the body and psyche. Moreover these Familial warriors speak to the necessary and undergirding function of emotion so essential to our lives in general and healing in particular. Indisputably, emotional intellect
has guided this project from the onset. Countless emotions, emotional states and emotional controls resonate in the presence of each participant and the contexts through which they function. Varying emotions were equally overt and subtle in our encounters, sometimes like a hurricane and at other times a scepter, contextually fractured through the limits of time, space and place. Their stories reveal the labor of emotional beings attempting to function and make sense of the seeming non-sense. Illuminated are the rigors that military Corp members, partners and loved ones seek to cull out (re-define) relationships in the liminal space of multiple deployments and the aftermath of war that becomes their “new-normal.”

*Constructing a Spouse: Non- Civilian, “Army by default”*

While her spouse was moving up in military rank, Rhonda struggled to find satisfying work. She quipped, “One of the other great benefits of being an Army wife - like really crappy jobs.” More seriously she explained, “I’m an individual, and even though - I mean - and I’ve had a hard time explaining it to my husband, because he’s in a different boat - I’ve given up my career as a teacher - picking up and going out of state, to change your life.” This is indeed a difficult “choice” to make. The choices we make regarding both our education and occupation are additional modes of identification. We find a sense of purpose in work that draws on our strengths and talents. Clearly our work serves to both identify and define (for us and others) who we are on a personal, social and political terrain (Buzzanell, 1994, Fraser, 1997, Schein, 1993, Weedon, 1998). At the same time, our professions both reflect and invite varying degrees of socio-economic status, (further) education and other opportunities. The voices traversing through this project clearly reflect the rigor of this testament. Those who joined the service were
drawn to the culture of an organization and all it represented. They were drawn to their potential ability to reflect a higher self as well. Rhonda’s experiences reflect the need to probe more deeply, into the seemingly peripheral dilemmas (like decent jobs and career) that impact the health and also well being of those who maintain the trenches here in the U.S. In discussing her fall into depression with me, she explained how she just stopped doing things that she enjoyed. A decent job was a significant factor.

For Rhonda a teaching career would mean attempting to re-secure a teaching position in another school/state with every move or “opportunity” the Army initiated for her spouse. “Teaching is really competitive,” she told me, “I’m an art teacher - so there’s only one teacher per school. So there’s a lot of effort to go into getting a career quote, quote, quote, here a quote. A career is hard. It just wasn’t worth it.” It wasn’t worth it for her to attempt to continue to find meaningful employment from the dis/advantage point of persistent uncertainty. If her spouse wished to make a successful career in the Army he makes those sacrifices and is encouraged to do so. Indeed, from his mentor, friend and battalion commander Al was told,

Anytime you have the chance to deploy to combat - as hard as it is to leave your family and go through the separation - deal with the anxiety - everything else that comes with it - it's a good opportunity for you as a professional soldier to gain experience that you wouldn't otherwise have.

At the same time, Rhonda was struggling. As she put it,

I was really having issues dealing with not having a job that I thought – like that I was proud of. I hated working in retail. I remember - I was - and I know this sounds pompous but - I’m - I went to school - I have a bachelor’s degree and I’m
working for ten dollars an hour selling underwear. Like this is - not it. And I’m not above the job -- *I just know that I am so much more capable.* Like there’s so many other things that I’m really talented at - that I’m not utilizing. So that’s been a really hard struggle the past year is trying to find and avenue where I can - utilize what I do well - And still fit into this army -  wife -  mold and try to - what it means to be an army wife.

On a practical level, frequent moving around makes it difficult to find a job. “Employers don’t wanna hire you, because you’re military. They’re trying to fish that out, because they know you’re gonna be leaving. They know that you’re gonna need special circumstances, because you’re husbands gonna come or go,” shared Rhonda. Indeed, in our conversation she shared how shocked she was about the ways in which she was openly asked about her military status and simultaneously denied jobs. Yet at its core, the choice of a “career” is not only reflective of a self, but of a culture as well. A dialectical tension exists in how she identifies herself and how she in turn is indentified. Consider Rhonda’s military status/ID reads, “Military Dependent.” Both practical and telling particularly in light of the relationship between a person, an ID and stigma that Goffman (1963) addressed. He believed, “Biology attached to documented identity can place clear limitations on the way in which an individual can elect to present himself” (p. 61). The very term, ‘dependent’ is an imposition on her own sense of power and autonomy, her sense of self. Moreover, the term not only impacts how others will define her, but ever blurring the personal, political, organizational boundaries, their definitions limit her opportunities.
For Rhonda, the decisions are somewhat by relational default or default by relationship. She went on, “Well it’s just – Well I think - like if we had a normal - like non-military relationship - we would make choices together. But we have choices made for us that we have no say in.” Arguably, the process of coming to a decision is in part a matter of relational maturity. Yet relational maturity does not happen in a vacuum; even intimate relationships manifest through cultural forces and grand master narratives traverse the terrain with equal dis/harmony. What draws me to the intricacies of these narratives are the subtleties through which powerful forces work to inculcate beings into the larger intuitional ‘machine.’ This speaks to the blurring of boundaries “between the organization and the organization of society” (Mumby and Stohl, 1996, p. 66). Moreover, I contemplate Lindemann-Nelson’s (2001) thoughts on the power of master narratives, “In power arrangements characterized by oppressive forces… identities are constituted in part by master narratives that pick out a sub group of people who are to serve the interests of dominant others” (p. 140). Master narratives entwined in layers of power, gender and politics tread through these running scripts. For both Rhonda and Al career pressure is guided by a host of institutional, social, political and hegemonic forces. Frequently active under the radar, these realms are heavily laden with expectations and ideals that influence the “choices” we make.

Having visited my son on a number of military bases, I can attest to the often desolate and disparaging communities that encompass military bases. Grounded in hegemonic principles, the military institution has been silently supported through those “traditional” familial patterns. Mom satisfactorily stays at home, takes care of kids. Dad comes and goes as needed. Such patterned behavioral responses, expectations and
traditions have been hallmarks of the military experience. Indeed, in their 15 years of marriage Sammy, (Tad’s spouse) remarked, “the military infiltrates every ounce of your life.” Shifts in contemporary lives of women and men and the construction of families, complicates the notion of “tradition” and home. One attempt to respond cultural shifts in the lives of women and men, marriage and families has been to attempt to provide jobs on base for officers’ spouses. Rhonda regarded those opportunities here,

I know I contribute to my husband you know. I feel - like great about that. But I know I can do other things too. That’s not what I thought I would be doing. But I can’t complain about it, it just took me awhile to figure it out. And like maybe that’s one of the resources I wish they had was like, “Hey army wives! Let’s figure out how to make what YOU do work with the army.” I don’t - Like they help you get a job on base. But it’s an office job. You’re doing - you’re supplementing the soldiers - and you’re like, “Ya, do you really wanna be around soldiers all day and follow their paperwork?” And they’re usually kinda menial jobs - but not like they’re not important but its routine work.”

There is an undertow; a sort of patriarchal/paternalistic response in finding a place that not only serves the spouse but ultimately the military at large. Problematic at its roots, pulling at the threads allows for an opportunity to more deeply trouble the ideals of and responses to gender, particularly as they shift through such potent hegemonic institutions. In Rhonda’s story we are gifted with an eyepiece for contemplating and responding to more comprehensive needs of those who support military personal. Moreover, troubling the placement of women closer within the structure, to serve the structures may shift the look of inculcation, but inculcates nonetheless.
Deeper in the subtext yet another silence lingers. In listening with Kara, issues of class resonate through the timbre of her story/life. Her spouse was “enlisted” (ie – lower on the hierarchical ladder/rank) and thus, her opportunities for education and employment were even further constrained. Kara provided another perspective and especially as there are far more enlisted personnel than officers, her words deserve heed.

Very - almost depressing, especially when I first moved down there - It was right when he got back and he was working. They worked like 10-12 hour days. I didn’t know the area, I didn’t know anybody. I didn’t have a job so I sat in our apartment by myself all day long. I mean that happened the first couple months and it was - it finally got better. I got a job and started making friends and I met some of the other wives and it got better - then came the second deployment and it went back down. It’s like a roller coaster, a big roller coaster.

As her life became increasingly difficult and complicated with her spouse’s violent outbursts related to PTSD, she returned back to her hometown and familial fold. There she began attending college and is now teaching in a local elementary school.

These narratives reveal numerous relational patterns in and out of organizational and familial contexts. Their stories traverse the (micro) personal and (macro) political as lives become intertwined with the larger project of the state. As part of a feminist agenda then, probing a hegemonic regime for the underpinning of multiple and complex gendered components of choice is imperative. These choices materialize traverse the personal through political spheres. They press from inside out (a self) and, importantly, from the outside in (a collective ‘we’). Here, tugging and pulling at those cultural threads, the gendered nature of choices within choices are revealed. Gardiner (2005) challenged
us, “to make masculinity visible as a gender rather than allowing it to retain the prestige of being equated with economic or scientific law” (p. 45). As such, the complex matter of ‘choice’ reveals more of its roots. We have ‘choice’ and choice by default. Not only are these choices inherently gendered, but they are equally reticent of class, power and discipline. Such choice further exposes the vast complexities and deep gradations of “supporting our troops.” How it is that those on the periphery (divided perhaps) become consubstantial and inculcated in the process of a military life are complex matters.

The Consubstantial Difference between Us: Social Identity & Internalization

One particular bruise emerged in the course of these interviews regarding the question so many combat warriors are asked upon their return from the battlefield, and concomitantly resist - “did you kill anyone?” As I reflect on these words I am drawn to the heart of what I suggest PTSD is. This is a language emerging through bodily means.

Narrative Map 23: “Sand and Fallen Soldiers … I call it Lost Love” (Rhonda)
From the corporeal, this language speaks to a violation of our innately understood and articulated social contracts (implicit and explicit). Having understood this, Roger simply stated, “I mean that the war - the army - we ask them to do things that they really weren’t designed to do.” The reality of this becomes evident for us all in the combat stories that emerged in conversations with warriors and their supports. The stories Beatrice retrospectively conveyed were observably arduous for her to share. They had been difficult for her to hear, and it seemed as she spoke those stories moved through her very being as well.

And you know he saw lots of people killed - he killed a lot of people and he said -- they were real angry - and chaotic - and no one knows who’s shooting who - and people dying - and when it’s all over there’s all this smoke and dust and dead people everywhere and gunpowder and he said it’s almost like it’s not real -- it’s almost like you’re watching a movie or you’re not really there - it’s a strange - and when its over - you leave, he said it’s like, “did that really happen?” … so he talked about how it was so surreal.

As a commander, Tad spoke of the freight he bore,

And I would notice when soldiers would have – we had the close house-to-house fighting several times. And that is much more personal than shooting somebody 200 yards away. So, I’ve watched guys struggle with that, and I don’t know - it’s just hard. I mean, you’re the responsible party, I guess, as the commander.

However seemingly paradoxical, we are nonetheless an American public intent on seeking to raise up both individuals and structures that are deeply grounded in the cultural ideals of a democratic, civil society. Such ideals are foundational to the very fabric of our
social order. Consider the founding of this country in a dominant Christian
philosophy/religion that has not only grounded, but continues to course through our
cultural foundations. The American judicial system, medical and political institutions all,
to some degree, profess the value and sanctity of life - that we, “should do no harm” and
“shall not kill.” Reared in this American culture, we have each been grounded in and/or
have been influenced to some extent by the structural infiltration of these ideals. Thus an
important consideration of the role of the warrior lies in Laufer’s (1988) assertion that an
individual’s psycho-social development is one dynamically, “emerging through social
systems … [and] … requires the “internalization of the dominant values, norms and
behavior patterns of society” (p. 39). Moreover, Goffman (1963) drew us toward that
“internalization” by probing the “social identity” and the ways in which we impute the
color of an individual on her/him. In essence how it is and by what criteria we
confirm or disconfirm a being and a place for others in our “virtual” and “actual” social
identities. In effect – how it is we come to know self through other. (See also Buber,
1970; Burke, 1969; Dewey; 1916; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Lindeman- Nelson, 2003;
Mead, 1934). Grounding the significant relationship between body and warrior in the
context of this culture, Grosz (1994) added additional insight having pointed to
intricacies of power whereby, “Human subjects never simply have a body; rather the
body is always necessarily the object and subject of attitudes and judgments” (p. 81,
emphasis in original).To this extent, Roger was reflective about the job of military
personal,

You know, your job is to close with and destroy the enemy. Take a whole
territory. Destroy … the other guy’s army. And, you’re not a policeman. You’re
not a - you’re not a civil servant, you’re not a - you know - I mean we do all of that - And then they, come back here, and it’s like - “move on.”

Roger’s words/thoughts acknowledged both the disruption and disjuncture of a self as understood through and shaped by the ideals of an American culture. Moreover, in our time on earth, we (humans) have come to regard that war is indeed a part (function?) of the human experience. And yet, while war continues to remain an imaginable potential horizon for the majority of Americans, it nonetheless persists as experientially unfathomable - an un-embodied referent. For warriors, our seemingly unfathomable becomes the very real – lived/ing - life long enduring experience.

Contemplating these influences in synch with the growth, development and historical contingencies of our nation, we might then be poised to see/understand how it is that in the mutual constitution of narratives, a warrior self comes into being over and again. We might more deeply probe how it is then that we construct narratives so intricately entwined with the world at large. An important link as Bruner (2000) suggested lies in understanding that the development of “ourselves” is “as much matters of cultural concern … as of individual concern” (p. 69). More specifically, he determined, “the self is a public topic and that its “betterment” is regarded not just as a personal matter but as meriting the care of those charged with maintaining proper moral order – the church, the school, the family, and, of course the state itself” (p. 69, emphasis added). In a process so essential to how it is we come not only to identify ourselves but how it is that others identify us, it is indeed imperative that in approaching matters of healing with U.S. warriors and their supports, we account for who we have asked soldiers to be, and what we have had them undertake on “our” behalf. Kate saw firsthand the
disruption of a past and present-future self (a sense of self and community) with her son and the other young Marines in his company. She wondered, “You know, maybe for so long the future was such an abstract concept that it’s hard for them to get back into – come back to civilian life and think about the consequences of things they’re doing and how it’s gonna affect them down the road.” Kate’s thoughts are reflected in the issues of distress Lindeman-Nelson (2001) explained, “If our self conception marks us as morally defective, we will mistrust our own capabilities and so treat ourselves with suspicion or contempt, or exempt ourselves from full responsibility for our actions” (p. xi). Herein lies a deep and profound paradox for a warrior, and the consequences for a nation – the juxtaposition of returning warrior/hero.

**Social Identity: “It’s an Army! It’s Called War!”**

It wasn’t a boastful arrogance, but more an acknowledgment; a reflexive forthrightness. There were certainly no illusions when he contemplated the project of war,

> We send these guys out to do things, you know -- an army is designed to do certain things. And it’s basically - kill the enemy. That’s why when people say, “What’s he do in the army,” [I say] “kill people” [and she says], “No, no he doesn’t.” Well what do you think he does? It’s an army! It’s called war! (Roger)

In these words, I hear Roger calling us to more fully account for what it is and who we have asked our warriors to become. In neglecting such an accounting further damage is, has been, and will continue to be incurred. Laufer’s (1988) work forefronts this imperative having implored us to recognize that, “the most fundamental structural alteration we impose on soldiers at war involves the reorganization of the basic societal
objective from life enhancing to life taking and life threat” (p. 40, emphasis added).

Engaging our citizenry in war disengages portions of selves we (thought we) understood (or came to understand). Kate’s memory directs us to the corporeality of this concept,

It was terrible, too. It – I mean, of course you’re just thankful they’re home, but it was really hard to watch, ‘cause I really don’t think he smiled for about three weeks. And obviously there was just a huge wall up. And you think about all the things they had to do – they had to put a wall up to protect themselves, and they can’t just take that down when they come home.

Coming home gives rise to (embodied) tensions between the warrior, the citizen and the citizenry which wants to accomplish those tasks of reintegration, yet reticent in dealing with some of the hard – more difficult realities in the project of war. One such challenge lies in the composition of stigma which in all its facets works subtlety through the lives of us all, and ever more so in the returning warrior beings. Link & Phelan (2001) have offered a conceptualization of stigma that encompasses the spectrum of previous contributions and influences to this topic as well as more specific distinctions. Primarily their work drew our attention to the “relationship of interrelated components” (p. 366). Their definition regards stigma as applicable when “the co-occurrence of its components – labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination … [and] for stigmatization to occur power must be exercised” (p. 363). Stigma mingles in the constitutive body-being and social realities of everyday lives.

At times the underlining labels and expectations were forthright, at other times barely noticeable; most often their presence took up space in the silence. Consider my field experiences: Having concluded its meeting, the university veteran’s support group
was dispersing when a psychologist leaned in to those of us still seated at the table, “something I’ve noticed is that people seem to be afraid of these returning vets. They don’t know how to handle them” (Fieldnotes). I was struck by both the revelation and the nature in which the information was shared. Though words were spoken, the silence resonated. And I wondered if in part that might also be identified as fear. Even in the midst of those so ready to assist and develop resources necessary for reintegration - in this venue compelling truths lay dormant. We too are afraid. Though we might not speak it, the warriors I met with were able to intuit a space in the imposition of a silence.

Wise was able to discern its presence, having sensed it both from the inside out (intuit) and, the outside in: “I mean you’re just always afraid that everyone’s thinking you’re a wacko, you’re afraid that you’re not going to be a normal person again, I guess. … At that time - like there’s definitely a lot of fear.” On the other hand, AJ, having only recently returned from Iraq was outspoken and quite furious about the “kill anyone?” question, “You come home - you have all this pride, you know and [its] – ‘did you kill anyone man?’ Like it’s none of your f-ing business! If you want to know - go sign up, grab a rifle and go to war.” He shook his head, “You know if you were in firefights - you would never ask that question.” For AJ the very presence of the question took up space larger than the words. Through the eyes of others (outside, looking in) “killing” seemed to fore-front the sum of his effort, loss, and sacrifice – the whole of his experience; perhaps even the whole of his being.

At this point it might suffice to asses these responses in terms of Cooley’s (1959) notion of the “looking glass self,” where by what we imagine ‘others’ perceptions of ourselves and in turn incorporated into our being, our developing sense of self. In this
light Mead (1934) suggested that not only particular individuals, but a larger, social structure of the “generalized other” impacts our sense of self. Indeed both these aspects hold merit here. However, healing in the aftermath of war requires a pensive accounting - a commitment toward a deeper, far more reflexive exploration of our collective selves.

If society is gonna – if we’re gonna have a standing Army - like we’ve had since 1776. And we have one – Great. As long as we understand, as a society in a country, if we’re gonna send people for an extended period of time on these kind of deployments and missions, then you gotta take care of these people when they get back.

Rhonda attested to this as well, “I mean hanging up a flag, how does that - how does that help? Well, what action is that? So there’s that whole patriotic buzz - but really -- what’s behind it?”

Indeed, part of taking care is both understanding and acknowledging where our warriors have been and all of what they have experienced. In troubling the presence of silence, Lifton’s (1988) work on post traumatic stress is useful in seeking to grasp more of what lies between us – and potentially within. He pointed to important lessons (we have yet to fully comprehend or apply) from Vietnam era veterans. He opened a way toward a deeper reflexivity; “we know that trauma involves some of the immediate and painful nitty-gritty experiences and we know of some of the symptoms as post traumatic stress disorder … there is also a dimension in posttraumatic stress disorder that involves larger human connectedness” (p. 8). His words bear significant weight in the context of the unspoken; of residual stigma that emanates across multiple terrains. In its wake, behind the “patriotic buzz,” a stream of confusion, isolation, neglect, and fractured
relationships resound. It was about that wake, the complex interplay of wanting/needling in the midst of an imposition to be ‘other than’ that Troy spoke,

Sometimes - I don’t want to always be talking about it -- But it’s good to be able to talk to somebody, and especially if you have you know, like me, having a girlfriend or something. My last girlfriend, though … I would tell her occasionally, or mention it like once or something, twice maybe, that you know they might be going to Afghanistan an - like saying how, “man, I really wish I’d be able to go with them.” She would just get really freaked out and mad at me - and like -- she never was able to let me be open about anything. Or she’d get kind of upset because it scared her. I’m like, “all right - I’m not trying to scare you” - but, I don’t know. I didn’t know what to do and eventually, I just figured we’re not a good match – you know -- maybe it was too young of a relationship.

Perhaps those fears regarding ‘who’ our warriors may be or have otherwise become are bound up in our own fears – making their presence known in the silence – shifting a collective social self. We, each of us, has a need to have our warriors return, whether that is as a spouse, our adult child, friends, siblings, a community or as a nation. We all speak to the profound need to have them return back into our (collective) fold. At the same time, fear, worry, awe hovers in a complex mix of uncertainty, “Who are you? Who have you become?” “How shall I know you now?” “Will you be OK?” Here, the “What-ifs” stake out another territory in this vast terrain of healing. Again, Troy alludes to the “what-if” potential on the home front - “to know that your family is there - that if I ever needed to go somewhere, I could go - live with my sister or brother and have them
babysit me - if I needed it. Or just be there - just to be there. So, someone to talk to or wrestle you know, [like] my brother.”

Once again Lifton’s (1988) words resonate for me, and must, for us all, “One of the most poignant and difficult struggles that accompanies the recovery process,” he suggested was, “the struggle to reinstate a larger human connectedness or a sense of being on “the great chain of being”” (p. 9). During our mapping session Troy was able to more fully articulate both what was at the heart of connecting and what fears resided within, “I feel like, that at least - like if I have somebody close in a relationship with me, then you’d understand some things about me, and not just see me as some crazy – [he stopped there].” AJ, for all his tough bravado also spoke to this need as well, “It really is comforting to be with your parents - that’s why I still love going to my house - because it’s that sense of comfort, you feel so safe - I don’t know what it was - I always feel safe with my dad and my mom.”

Hovering around these body-beings another kind of silence, an unwelcome specter, stakes its claim. When Kate spoke to me about Wise’s homecoming, she seemed to illuminate a presence that was difficult to articulate – either in grasping for the right words, or the residue left once conveyed.

Once you hug him and everyone says – you know, there’s a little bit of awkwardness, because you know what they’ve been through - and they know that you know what they’ve been through, and it’s just kind of like everybody’s wondering, “What are they thinking?” I think some of them had a lot of guilt. And I think that’s just because of that whole experience, because - ‘I had to face things that I’ve never’ – you know, ‘I just never dreamed I’d have to face.’
As I intently listened, I thought I heard Sorie hover - and the specter mingling,

He had a troop he was responsible for - and equipment and he had done all of the
training on the equipment and everything - So he - I still think that he was not
involved in any fight. I still think he was never put in the position where he had to
kill - or think about killing someone -- I don’t know 100% that that’s the case. But
I think that that’s the case. And at one point he said to me, “Mom I’m going to
tell you what you want to hear,” and so he’s never really told me a whole lot.
As Roger suggested, “It is war!” - on some level we know the actions of a warrior
do indeed involve not only the taking of lives, but the harshness of witnessing valued
lives being taken. On some level each of us know this is what s/he will likely encounter,
by inculcation or default, what we have asked them to do. Of considerable significance in
our attempt to makes sense of warrior body-beings and their return into our fold, is that as
Laufer (1988) suggested a, “fundamental reality of warfare is that the veteran is
systematically stripped of his public identity as a warrior, whereas the experience of war
is permanently burned into his psyche, no matter what the character of nature of the war”
(p. 36). Regardless of the profundity of her/his wartime experience, those returning from
military service have incorporated another culture into their psyche. Given the
constitutive nature of our beings, we might consider how it is as a citizen/ry we are
changed in, through and with our warriors. For Tad, the questions were present. He
specifically addressed those that far more often tend to hover in the space betwixt us all:
Well, I think – I mean, there’s duty and legality and, “Did you have the right?”
“Yeah, absolutely,”” he suggested, “And morally is it right.” You know? That’s
for you to decide. But, “spiritually is it okay?” That depends on your religion, I guess. And soldiers fight with that. And I don’t think anybody enjoys it.”

The “kill-anyone” question hovers. In all that we think we know and that which we can/not fully comprehend, an encompassing angst continues to turbinate, to churn in our midst. Kate took up silence in sharing a memory of a documentary she had watched before Wise’s return. In her telling, it was in responding to those desires of the community to welcome and re-engage our warriors that this particular young man had been visiting schools and speaking with students. During the course of his presentation, “this kid – some little kid asked him, how many people he killed - and, like, just this sick feeling just – I mean - a sick look on his face. And it’s like, oh - you know, he is just not ready for that.” Clearly, this question has a persistent vitality; questions and angst mightily resonate with us all. Some questions rise up from the inside out, “what did I do to my son?” while other questions bear down from the outside in.

Rhonda was able to articulate those fears at length. Her ability to bridge the information and counseling she received from military programs with her instinct to reconnect is telling. She began, “You start to worry about, well “what’s he going through?” “How is that affecting him?” “Is he going to come home different?”” These worries then became more prevalent with increased exposure to the possibilities, separation (space) and time, the cumulative impact that war/deployment would have on warriors, “they give you these books to survive deployment - things to help you, and it’s always talking about Post Traumatic Stress … [Reading them] … can be terrifying - ‘cause you think you’re husbands gonna come home a wack job - he’s gonna try to stab you or something.” She paused before going on, “but I mean it sounds like to send
someone ---- I might get -- Like you just you need to fear your spouse when they come home, because you don’t what has got into them, and you don’t want a fear of your spouse -- they’re your spouse!” Additionally, counseling from military chaplains added to the arsenal – the paradox of being well informed,

The chaplain comes into speak, and they talk about all about abuse - verbal abuse, and spending money, and things to look out for, and there’s so much of that kind of prevention mode, – but I think just reconnecting and building that relationship back up kind of gets pushed to the wayside, because you’re so, it’s so focused on – looking for triggers. Yeah. Watching for them, like there’s gotta be something wrong - so look out.

Much is happening in this micro-dialogue. First, I’m struck with the way Rhonda paused over the question of war in that fraction of a thought, “sounds like to send someone --” briefly, barely questioning. Yet the question is one so critically linked to this healing process and our need for a collective responsiveness. Acknowledging what happens before they come home – back up a step to what happens before we send them— all the way back to –that a decision was made. Our hovering in both recognition and acknowledgment serves to illuminate the magnitude and persistency of harsher realities. Unquestioned, the consequences of war persist in taking up a silent, stormy space. It is a palpable presence, akin to that proverbial ‘elephant in the room. We can hardly move around it. Yet, contemplating this from the personal to political, perhaps we might consider it as ‘the herd in the nation’ (?) Addressing a presence demands a reflexive response, one we seem far more reticent to approach. As her story continues, Rhonda’s voice joins with the culmination of previous narratives; the evident chasms, the grand
silent spaces in their telling speak to the imperative for enacting healing relationships. Healing requires acknowledgement. Acknowledgement requires that we both listen and speak. The sort of deep healing needed in the aftermath of war requires our ongoing reflexive presence. I am drawn to the strength and vitality of Butler’s (2004) words,

If I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the “we’ except by finding a way in which I am tied to “you,” by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know. (p. 49)

Herein lies a vulnerability of healing. We require courage in confronting the complex intricacies and diverse consequences of this project – war. Stepping into healing (yielding) relationships requires both courage and the willingness to relinquish our tight hold on what we think we know, pieces of ourselves, in order to create other complex intricate pieces of our collective selves in this aftermath. Yielding makes way for a deeper understanding, to create, and be an intimate self-relationally and responsively with other/s. (not: ‘at’ or ‘for’ others).

The reflexive presence requires a reckoning of what lies between us and how we see and understand ourselves reflected in and through each other – and evermore so in the residual aftermath. Where a number of vets spoke about the ‘killing question’ - how it affronted their sensibilities and pride, parents and loved ones felt the angst of knowing so much destruction was a part of their warrior’s lives – and that it would be for years to come. Institutional and communal structures likewise reverberate in this aftermath with
disrupted body-being and the subsequent need for greater resources of response (increased suicide rates, domestic violence, homelessness, etc). Frank’s (1995) conceptualization of a restitution narrative and the ‘restorable body’ are useful in contemplating a move toward healing the mutually constitutive self. He explained this body is one seeking to return to, “its former predictability” (p. 85). It occurs to me – perhaps ‘we’ as a collective want this predictability back as well; we want to be restored to our sense of civility – in body, community, and nation – the one we understood. Perhaps it is in an inability to “allow my own language to break up and yield” (Butler, 2004, p. 49) that causes us to interrupt the healing process. And yet, those languages that constitute meanings for and about a social self are potential entry points by which Butler (2004) suggested we yield. For instance, though the checklists Rhonda referred to are indeed worthy and useful devices for identifying symptoms of disease, healing requires more. Her response – and those of us who ‘watch’ seem to be one of “aboutness” (Ahmed, 2004) - it keeps us looking from the outside – in. Perhaps then it is more a matter of ‘what we do with what we have.’ We have tools; Frank regarded some of them, “diseases, rights, education and empathy are seen as properties of specific persons and not as expressions of a persons’ relationship to others” (p. 85, emphasis added). We may have a doctor, an illness, we an education, yet it is the tenuous bonds of our relationships, the relational enactment of those tools which enacts particular responses to healing. Healing in the aftermath of war resides in the way we come together to account for what lies between us – to acknowledge our mutual participation in the process.
Narrative Map 24: Relationships as Resources (Mack)

Mack’s map clearly reflects the centrality of relational response, a theme that was reiterated time and again as I met with warriors and warrior supports. Warriors want and need people to understand. They want and need people to listen with them. In drawing our conversation to a close, I asked Troy what he thought was most helpful in the healing process,

Just being able to listen and to be there. I think for guys it’s – I think for the military guys - I think it’s important that someone is always like - it sounds lame with everything they’ve been through and done - but it kind of - feels like it’s important to know that someone’s always there that you can trust - your family.

Regardless of the kind of stigmatizing that happens, whether or not it remains covert or expressly overt, stigma, labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination, as Link & Phelan (2001) described, interferes with our ability to fully heal; it consists of barriers of un-accountability. Moving toward accountability requires
reflexivity and willingness to more thoroughly examine what it is we most often prefer to look away from. Sometimes it requires we let go of what we think we know. It is indeed both worthy and just for us as a nation, and each of us as individuals, to consider more of what lies between us in this fragile space.

*Internalization: “Deployment is like a home away from home”*

Though the full implications for which are well beyond the scope of this project, it is sufficient enough to recognize that fundamental to its mission, the military needs warriors to function as a unit. Over and over again participants spoke to the unique and unbreakable bonds of camaraderie and trust built between them. Pete spoke to how the

Narrative Map 25: Deployment, Home away from Home

Though the full implications for which are well beyond the scope of this project, it is sufficient enough to recognize that fundamental to its mission, the military needs warriors to function as a unit. Over and over again participants spoke to the unique and unbreakable bonds of camaraderie and trust built between them. Pete spoke to how the
unit mentality had become embedded in his sense of self, and the difficulty he had in reorienting through this cultural shift upon reintegration. He attempted to explain it to me, emphasizing how important it was:

Like - something’s happening. You know brass doesn’t want like one person figuring this out - they want everybody to figure it out. And it’s like – but in the civilian world it’s so - like individual. You know? Like I go to my class and - I take one single exam - I’m the person who studies for this test and - my grades will reflect how I did on this exam. It’s not like that in the military. In the military it’s like if your team messes up - it’s a team thing. You get that kind of like unit mentality. And that’s something I really miss, about the military too.

In order to form such strong bonds as a unit, the communicative, cultural practices that once grounded an individual as the civilian, daughter, son, spouse, parent they were before entering the military, are all now called into question. A disruption. Thus tearing at the fibers of a self born out of specific familial communal forms of understanding and relational body-being, the military project works to create what Radar terms as, “a warrior ethos.” In terms of a developing psyche, Wolf (1981) would have us understand that, “as long as a person is securely embedded in a social matrix that provides him with a field in which he can find the needed mirroring responses and needed availability of idealizable values, he will feel comfortably affirmed in his total self with its ambitions and goals” (p. 128). This is especially useful in linking the ways in which warriors are both drawn and hold on to the veracity of those instrumental values harbored with each military branch. This is especially illuminating when contemplating both the disruption and development of a warrior self.
Thomas Rick (1998) in his book, *Making the Corps* further solidifies this connection. He spoke directly to that process having described what lies at the core of a cadet’s basic training/boot camp. In the liminal space between high school or college and boot camp those who enter the military succumb to the re-identification of a self. Cadets do not learn, “soldiering …which comes later at combat training or infantry school.” Instead there is a fundamental, “emphasis on behavior and language” He clarified, “Marine Corp basic training is more a matter of cultural indoctrination” (p. 37, emphasis added). Communication scholars understand the critical role language plays in making sense of our worlds. In the Marines, “identities evaporate” (p. 41) he explained. A re-structuring of language and behavior serves to eliminate the centrality of “I” in an adolescent/young adult self. The “I” ceases to exist. Troy spoke to me about his training at the Marine Corp’s basic training camp on Paris Island in North Carolina.

They may be PTing you or, you know, making you do physical exercises, whatever, breaking you down, and you’re hating it, and you’re hating it, and you just want them to leave you the fuck alone, but you realize that they’re just making you tougher and stronger and that there really is a reason for everything they have you do, and you find – you start to see that towards the end.

I was further struck with Hal’s recognition of (and) the internalization of language. He brings to light an important but understated role of language and time narrative scholars (Carr, 1986, 1991; Charon, 2006; Ricoeur, 1980) address. The culmination of time, language space and culture is noteworthy. Hal articulated this linguistic shift moving through his psyche and body:
It takes over your -- it really does take over your life - You learn military lingo. Say - we’re outside, and yeah it’s at night time. “Hey, Hal what time is it?” “Oh it’s 16:45. My watch is still on military time.” “Oh hey Chip, are you all squared away to go on the trip?” “What?” “Are you all squared away? Ready to go? You know, you have everything together?” You know, because you learn the lingo - that’s how you talk to buddies. Um, the military is a professional, but it’s also its own terminology, its own lingo.

The process of shedding and dividing one self for another self is an integral part of the inculcation. Rick (1998) reported that one widely held belief of the leadership within the Marine Corp is that society is deteriorating. This ideal further serves the role of division, separation from other in order to join anew. Thus, the work for those who indoctrinate Marines through boot camp on Paris Island then is perceived through the metaphor of a family, “the Marine Corp is like a family, and we preach family values” (p. 38). Baylor is a Marine. For him the notion of home has shifted with the scope of his service, “But that makes you realize you know, like, home is like – it’s usually not where you’re from anymore. I mean it’s where you’re at.” For Baylor the ‘at’ is a Marine.

Separating self from other, warrior from civilian was indeed a reoccurring theme as soldiers addressed the challenges of reintegration. The paradox of our consubstantiality lies in recognizing that “congregations” by their very nature are “exclusive” (Burke, 1969, p. 264). We continue to seek communion and concomitantly divide ourselves in the process. Hal was forthright in noting the differences between military persons and ‘civilians:’
I do think I’m, I’m better than some people - than most people. I mean if you look at only one percent of the whole population is in the military. You know, I understand that the military is not for everyone, and not everyone can join the military because we need people to do other things in life. But, I do think that I’m better than other people in the sense that I have that experience.

Once again, AJ expounded on the audacity of being asked about killing and further elaborated what set him apart from his peers,

A lot of people ask me that, I’m like, “dude, you don’t deserve –and the last person to ask me that was like, “did you kill some people AJ?” I’m like, “you don’t deserve to know that answer,” He’s like, “what? – why?” I was like, “you were asked to join and instead of joining you stayed here and sold weed,” I’m like - “So you don’t deserve to know the answer to that.”

Raven shared this story about marching with VFW in a local community Memorial Day parade with me. Meandering silently betwixt the spoken text in this narrative is the presence of vast plains that sometimes separate us even as we want/need to support each other:

I had a woman come up to me. I have numerous ribbons because of all my deployments, and I had a woman came up to me and said “you have to be a veteran of foreign war to be a member of this don’t you?” and I was like “ma’am, I’m - two.” She was like “what two?” I was like “Iraq and Kosovo.” And she had no idea what Kosovo - and this is a 30-and- some- odd- year old woman with a kid - and had no clue - and then I tried to explain to her and she still had no idea and it just puzzled me. And she asked if she could come over to the VFW and talk
to the guys about their war experiences - and that’s not what the VFW does so - just sometimes, it’s mindboggling. Like how many people are just so involved in their own world that they don’t even know some of the small stuff … …And just like simple things too like Kosovo, how do you not know about it? I mean if you don’t know the year, that’s fine but I mean - that was genocide going on - tons and tons of people lost their life and for someone not to know… I hear people complain about the simplest things in the world and I’m just like Oh, man, you people just take - electricity for example - for granted. Some of these people have no idea what electricity is or it’s a luxury. Sometimes people just have no idea.

The process of indoctrination contributes to both the ethos and identity of a warrior, yet war changes them altogether. War has/had indeed aged them. Indeed war ages and changes us all. Returning back to the everyday world of civilians became rife with irritation as warriors gazed from the outside, now looking anew back in to a civilian’s world. Sometimes it was a matter of gratitude. Raven chuckled, even before he returned stateside he wanted more of that unit mentality from his fellow Americans:

We would be in Iraq and we would see these games with stadiums with empty seats and we would be like, “man, if I was in America I would be at one of those games with all those people. You’re taking things for granted again Americans, c’mon and get out there and support your team!” We would stay at the outer inns at night just to watch the games. We didn’t care. Sleep - like you said before - is whatever. Worry about that later

Yet coming home proved to be fractious for him in countless ways. Raven was impatient. He remembered, “Almost - not to a certain extent - to looking down on them,
like I am better than them because I went to war. But I mean that the fact like - wow, *this*
stuff is heavy?!” For him, “the everyday stuff, the bitching and complaining – ‘Excuse
my language’ - but it’s almost like, are you serious? That was a little bit of a problem at
that time. It got a little bit worse as I transitioned out of the army altogether, my
resentment towards people.” Kip likewise struggled, “I had started my civilian job. I had
never managed a union before. I was in charge of soldiers and then they had their
charges. I had a lot of grievances to be filed and griping employees - and those sorts of
things.” He explained, “getting back after the second deployment, I was just like ok…are
you for real?” Yet in struggling to make sense he was thoughtful, “I guess that that’s kind
of the positive that came out of it, the negative and the difficulty is balancing all of that
stuff, and going on to a successful job.”

For those vets returning to college, the difference between them and their peers
seemed remarkable. For Pete, “It’s like you come back you know, you start going to
school, you start talking to people. But these, like they’re just like little like you know -
like a little kid.” The lived experience of combat had indeed aged him, looking at his
peers he noted, “And it’s like they don’t hold jobs and they don’t - they look to mom and
dad.” He assumed most were in college because of their parents which, for Pete, further
implied a lack of maturity. He reflected, “So - you’re put in the scenario and you just feel
like -- you have like nothing in common with these people. And like you don’t, like, you
really don’t get close to people in college.” For him it was just, “It’s always like drinking
buddies, or it’s always like somebody like, you know somebody you just like don’t really
know, it’s just like really superficial kind of friendship, I think.”

Rory explained it like this to me,
Most challenging for me when I got back - actually was just not getting irritated with people when they sounded stupid. I would have to say I was a little more judgmental of civilians actually because we’d go out to the bar and people would ask us that knew we were back from deployment, “how was it over there” kind of stuff. I didn’t mind answering questions like that at all - but just - if you wanted to ask a question I would be prefer you to be a little more informed before you ask a question. Have your opinion, but don’t have a BS opinion.

Frustrations encompass a broad span of intensity. They can fluctuate fast and hard, they are often unpredictable in nature. Yet the body also continues to reverberate – to speak through us. The body continues to reverberate with restlessness. That restlessness enters the space between us. In our midst is a person in flux.

I do remember thinking – it probably didn’t take me long to think this - about a month – about a month was a good time period of being home, then I was just kind of like, “I want to go back.” yeah, you miss the intensity of it. Everything else is kind of dull. Hard to get your, you know, your life back, I guess….Yeah, I was just – I guess it’s being out of that position, feeling like a target, not having the means to defend yourself anymore. I guess it’s not like you’re really in a, you know, environment where you need to be, but your mind still has that, and then, you know, what are you doing now? Just nothing, you know, no high value targets to go take down today, you know, nothing important to do, nothing. You miss that. (Troy)

Kip, too, was poignant in his thoughts about war and home:
I miss the simplicity of life that you have when you’re at war, and that’s a real weird thing to say but life is so much more complicated here. Emotionally interacting with your spouse, with your family, with friends, with coworkers, the challenge of my job now is extremely broad. I’ve got a lot of different responsibilities. There are a lot of politics with my job now in that I have to be mindful of … I have to be mindful as a city official fairly high up in the administration. Decisions that I make or fail to make, or make one way or the other will have negative responses from someone in the community, or reflect on my boss, reflect on the mayor, city council and such and such. That goes through my mind. The lack of “me” time - all of that. I look back and I say, “Man.” I don’t want to say it was easy to be at war because it wasn’t.

For all the mayhem induced on, in, and through a body in the course of combat, the hierarchical structure of the military rules and regulations paradoxically offered many both consistency and certainty in the midst of uncertainty and trauma. Kip’s map reflects the challenge of life without specified order. In war you know what is expected of you.
If you’re on limdu [limited duty due to injury] it’s like you’re in the middle of everything, you know because you’re actually on the base. So I liked that part of it more. But then it was like - it was really tough like sleeping - leaving the guys on my ship and stuff. That was one thing I really didn’t like. Because it’s like, you don’t want to, want to leave - you know. But yet it’s not your choice because like you’re getting kicked off the ship for a medical reason you know. [on the ship] You feel like you’re kind of a family. You’re family away from your - a family away from family. So it’s like, you kind of feel like your abandoning them, you know. And it’s kind of like, you feel like you’re a little guilty about it. (Pete)
There are a series, a seeming endlessness, of in between places for warriors and their supports through the reintegration process. The identity of a warrior seems to transition through multiple spaces, time over and again. Reintegration for a warrior seems to be an extended, persistent, transitional liminality. It’s one that stretches out and given the physical and emotional toll of PTSD and TBI, abruptly and unexpectedly smacks up against unanticipated barriers. These thoughts in mind, Troy’s seismograph map gives me pause, “your world is always shaking,” he told me. His map does indeed shake me up as well. I am moved to think about the disruption of a visceral being in search of a seeming unattainable ‘normal’ on that elusive horizon, all the while living in the midst of turbulent ‘new-normals.’ Imagine attempting to hang on in the turbulence of such peaks and valleys. Heath alludes to this lengthy transitional phase. During the mapping session Heath and I spoke directly to his frustration of dealing with incidental, frustrating moments that are a part of the home-again stateside terrain. He told me, “You have to find peace on your own.” “What do you mean by that?” I asked him:

It means you’re not surrounded by a band of brothers anymore. You’re a brother on your own and no one else has been there around you – usually. And you have to find your peace alone. You have to realize that okay - it’s not going to be every day that I get up and go to an inane staff meeting and go to another silly thing. … The silly things were what ordered your life and so now you have to say, “I do this every day. I get up, I find my identity and I go into a world by myself.” And then after you arrive home and then at some point down here, you reach balance. You reach your balance where you finally are able to put all this
together and say, “Okay, this is where I exist. This is who I am. This is what I’m doing right now.”

Yet for many, the “new-normal” is hardly where they want/need to be. The push and pull to return home to safety, comfort, to family and community are replete with the challenges of attempting to reestablishing a communal (civilian) self, a familial (spouse, parent, friend, partner…) self and reorient an institutional (military/work/career) self. Each of these selves is all at once, all in flux. In this section I listen with warriors through the turbulent liminal spaces that become their lives. Here we can contemplate Troy’s map with its rapid shifts in highs and lows, vacillating between a past, present and future self.

To begin there are the stories of self up against each other and a self up against oneself. These multiple (transformed) selves enter space, time and other beings. Another component in the disruption of self has deep and fibrous roots attached to our collective ideals of gender and ultimately interfering with how we heal and how we assist the healing process. Here, weakness and a warrior-being take up space in the spaces that compose our gendered beings. Finally, the leadership that worked to indoctrinate a warrior leads warriors through the debriefing and decompression phase. The ways in which warriors and those who attempt to support them enter this space merge through personal, political and cultural roles and expectations. These are the stories that move in, through and with a warrior being as s/he attempts to navigate once similar terrain, anew. Troubling stories. Disrupted spaces. Spaces in between. These are raw vulnerabilities.
Happy to be home: “I wouldn’t say that they were happy people”

I mean, they got off [homecoming bus] and they – they were smiling, but you could see that they were – it wasn’t – they were glad to be home, but I wouldn’t say that they were happy people. (Interview, Kate)

Narrative Map 27: Welcome to Normalville (Al)

With the reserves, it’s like you’re done, and then it’s like, “All right. You’re done. You can go.” I’m like, “Well, where do I go? What do I do now?” You know, what do I – take on all the stress and issues of the family, and I can just – I remember something about my relationship a little bit with my girlfriend. It’s like I thought about her, you know, every day. I was in love with her, and I came home, and it was just – as soon as she was there in front of me, it was like kind of almost too much, and I couldn’t – you know, I had to tell her – We worked
through things for a couple months, but, you know, the end result after about six months was still – it was like I need time to get myself figured out. I can’t take care of myself, and I can’t be in a relationship for sure, you know, because it’s like I just wanted to hang out with my guys still, you know. Just – I don’t know.

(Troy)

In terms of connection, Pete’s attempt to articulate reintegration was potent.

I feel like I have to resume to this whole - like individual culture again. I don’t even make an effort to go back to unit mentality. Like I feel like I have to conform to this ship now. Like the - being real individualistic again - and I don’t like it, you know?

Warriors shared the inner dialogue of turbinating body-being-stories. I share them here, as a reminder of what travels with/through a warrior in the everyday that we cannot necessarily see yet may sense. In matters of healing then understanding the juxtaposition of multiple terrains becomes critical for deeper understanding, deeper connections and ability to more fully articulate needs. As the inner workings of trauma move through the outer realms of the body in space and time, a presence now hovers in our midst.

There are complex emotions:

I just worried how much have I changed? Am I going to be the same person when I get back? Am I going to still be as much fun as I was before? Stuff like that or - is something going to happen, am I going to snap and have PTSD?

(Rory)

I feel like, I don’t know what makes me mad. One I’m fine, the next minute, like I just hate you. But like, I’m just pissed off, at how pissed off I am.
Like, you know normally, you wouldn’t be that mad. But you just – you are, and that’s just how mad you are at that particular time. You don’t know why.

(Baylor)

There are body memories (past) re-emerging in a present space:

Like a dump truck, this is one that gets me a lot, a dump truck tailgate because in this job we’ll be loading and in my other office we’ll be loading and the dump truck will dump, everything will come out and the tailgate will swing back, smack, and it sounds like a mortar round impacting and for several months just scared the crap out of me. (Kip)

An inability to letdown – hypervigilance persists:

When you’re over there, you develop not really a 6th sense - but you develop other sensory stuff that you have so you’re more aware of what’s going on around you and when you come back you’re still on that let’s get this done, we got to watch for everything, you’re still looking at everything. (Rory)

Every time I’d go under a bridge I’d swerve to the other lane and it was just kind of a reaction, but it goes away. (Kip)

That’s what I did with all my classes. I was always in the back and like able to view everybody and everything else. And that was weird, too, when I first started taking classes, I was just always running like tactical decisions through my head. (Troy)

I sleep with a pillow over my head now. I’d sleep with a pillow over my head there because sometimes if a mortar round was far enough away and that
would keep me from hearing it in the middle of the night and wouldn’t wake me up, so now I can’t sleep if I don’t do that. (Kip)

It used to be kind of constant, like wherever I was - walking across campus - wherever I was, feeling like the target of being out in the open, or, you know, if there was, you know, where would I be? You know, where would I be if I was, you know, someone that was gonna inflict harm on the campus or, you know, students or, yeah, like just always viewing. (Troy)

Those of us on the periphery, watching – looking in:

After he came home – for the first – he came home, he was fine for about two or three weeks, wasn't being very weird. He had trouble sleeping, but it wasn't like anything I thought should be checked out. And then he started getting really irritable, like – I mean he would snap at nothing, like he was always, always pissed - like "Why are you always f-ing crying?" I mean he just – it was like he wasn't himself – it was like he had a demon inside himself that was like – like he just hated everything. Like he was so uncomfortable or something. (Jace)

A couple of days after [my husband] had been home, and we were all sitting at this big table, a group of us had gone out to dinner, and this tray, somebody had dropped a tray of dishes and he just, I was right beside him and he just jumped, and it was so weird to see him. It would be me, like I would jump and it was so weird to see him jump like it was just I don’t know if he thought it was like a mortar or what but when they come back it’s definitely, you know they’re back into our world… (April)
So like a month after he's back he finally just snapped. It was like he had zero emotions in his body. He could not feel anything for me, like – except anger. He would feel angry or irritable, but then he had no like love or sympathy or compassion or anything, like I knew he was being weird, like he just wasn't being himself. (Jace)

So he didn't like windows, he didn't like to stand in front of windows in the hotel room – he had to walk in and like close the curtains and kind of like walk out and around the window, like he didn't – he just didn't like windows. (Jace)

He started becoming not angry at me but he would just be instantly mad, like he’s so mad about having to wait in line, or he’s so mad about somebody on the road, and it was just like, it’s ok, calm down. (April)

Over time, we can hear it in their words, “it’s gotten better but…”

Kip reminded me with clarity, ‘homecoming’ was not an event, but a process.”

These shifting liminal spaces are a testament to his words. Heath similarly remarked, “I don’t know if there was a defining moment, but it took a long time. It did. It takes a long time to put it in perspective, Marie.” For some, it certainly seems to be an ongoing (perhaps life-long) journey.
Ralf’s map speaks to the journey. It is profound for what it says and, I think, powerful in what remains blank. At the very bottom his map reads: “Theater” (combat). The line that runs through the middle is one that separates the civilian (left side) realities from the (right side) where he discusses military responses to reintegration. The left side reads: ‘reintegrate back into family as quickly as possible.’ The right side from the bottom up reads: ‘Preparations for deployment home’; ‘support of military peers and military counselors,’ ‘mental health professional;’ ‘back to stateside, want continued monitoring, continues counseling;’ and in that block, he ends with – ‘self healing as they train the next group to go.’ At the very top of the paper he writes: ‘Back home, better off for the experience’ beside a small box.
At first glance the map appears unremarkable in its simplicity. Yet, in sitting with Ralf’s map, attending to it, I was/am profoundly struck with the vastness between ‘self healing’ and ‘better off for the experience.’ I think of the immeasurability of time and healing, of all that rests in the silence between us, there in that vast white space. I try to imagine all the stories that might fill up that space. (some of them here) I am reminded of the isolation and distance warriors feel in ‘coming home.’ It speaks to me of perhaps what it is that we cannot name, of what we are unable to articulate with the vocabulary at hand. I think about the vulnerability in such a space.

I am moved further still to contemplate the implications of Ralf’s perspective. I noted that while he recognized the value of reintegrating back into family, there are no
specific markers to chart that terrain. This gives me pause as I am inclined to see this as another reflection of the propensity to contain (maintain) efforts toward healing warriors within the confines of military hierarchy, direction, and control. In this regard, there are striking similarities between Messener’s (1992) work with male athletes, their identity and bodily injury and those bodies and institutions that inculcate warriors. He suggested, “To question their decision to give up their bodies would ultimately mean to question the entire institutionalized system of rules through which they successfully established relationships and a sense of identity” (p. 212). Warriors are not meant to question, but rather to follow.

Finally, I am inclined to trouble the framing of “self-healing.” First, warriors whose selves are so thoroughly disrupted seem ill prepared for such a task. Rory’s words remind us of the need for multiple avenues of support, “The things you know with PTSD, you don’t really notice anything at all while you’re there because you’re not around your family the entire time - you’re not talking to people who have never been there the entire time.” And while I would not suggest that Ralf’s uptake is by any means an institutional response, it does nonetheless reveal ideals about healing with warriors. Moreover, I wonder about the gendered implications such a vision holds. Again I liken the realm of warrior to the world of athletics whereby Messner (2005) suggested this “homosocial” world does not happen in isolation. Though he speaks to the world of sport, I extend his claims to this highly masculine venue as well. “Men’s homosocial ‘sportsworld’ does not exist in isolation – men’s relations within sport … are integral parts of boy’s and men’s relations with each other, and with girls and women in schools, families, and workplaces” (p. 322). I am reminded of the need for deep and penetrating ontological shifts in our
understanding and response to warriors, bodies and healing in the aftermath of war. Thus far it would appear that such a strong reliance on our cultural gendered ideologies has largely kept a focus on women’s bodies and women’s mental health at the forefront, concomitantly relegating men’s health largely invisible (Broom & Tovey, 2009; Riska, 2009). Ralf’s seemingly inconsequential map reminded me that those of us who remain outside that realm must nonetheless be diligent in our care for returning soldiers within the realm.

Vulnerable Spaces: Warriors, Gender and Trauma

First, it bears attention to acknowledge the strides our country and communities have made with regards to returning warriors. OIF/OEF warriors have not suffered to the extent that their predecessors, the Vietnam veterans, did with regards to the misplaced maltreatment of an angry public. Almost every person I met with was quick to note the difference in warrior support specifically with Vietnam Vets. The duration of these wars have kept salient the health related consequences of war that their sisters and brothers of Desert Storm and Desert Shield have not fully benefitted from. Thus, having made such headway in this arena thus allows for yet further and deeper reflexivity; one that we have yet to fully query. Such reflexivity must move us beyond the imperative for fiscal response and communal attention. As Tad appealed, “You gotta take care of these people when they get back. And I don’t mean pay me for PTSD. You just gotta provide me somebody to talk to... Without me feelin’ like it’s the wrong thing to do.” I heard such a plea in the time I met with him, and as his words rest here.

Tad called us to account for a warrior’s angst, in a physical presence and deep acknowledgement. Lifton (1988) rightly reminded us that the healing process for warriors
required that we not “delegitimize the trauma.” Indeed he suggested that we must instead, “legitimize the symptoms and the reaction” as well (p. 11). In these words I hear an imperative for acknowledgment. And it is here within the frame of acknowledgement that the ‘reflexive turn’ sharply emerges (and must). So it was, that in speaking with warriors and their support systems about barriers to seeking help, time and again, the term and thoughts regarding “stigma” emerged. Ralf, an Air Force pilot, touched on the undergirding resistance with this dilemma and ultimately one critical factor in serving our troops as they return home.

Anything having to do with mental health carries a ridiculously archaic stigma.

And if we could get our society - the human race passed that someday - it would be wonderful. But you know - because of that stigma, you know anything that shows weakness - is hidden, guarded - because of the fear of ridicule - and that is not helpful.

This message cannot be understated nor underrated. Separation and loss of status (division) are indeed considerable fears of warriors. In the past, careers have indeed been jeopardized. Yet despite public efforts (and also on part of some military) to encourage warriors to seek help, the prevalent fear is that their careers will indeed be jeopardized. The culminations of narratives clearly indicate the potency of our livelihoods. Our work not only to contributes to define us, but further to ground ourselves as consubstantial beings. The power and discipline that undergirds stigma has been a potent force in inhibiting comprehensive address to issues of health and healing for warriors.

Had Kate and Ralf been in the same room, she would have agreed with him. In her role as a support person for her son Wise, she watched often peripherally, but paid
close attention to the journey of her son and his peers. She had a remarkable view, “I mean, I think a lot of these guys feel so much pressure to not be labeled and to not be, you know, looked down on - I think that was huge.” In conversations with April, it was clear her spouse wanted to distance himself from the very notion of PTSD. He took a number of years to seek help, before even admitting he was having difficulty reintegrating. As she reflected on the process, she regarded the system, “I also wish the military would be more understanding to people who have Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and not make military personnel feel like they’re not able to go out and be diagnosed.” She explained, “I think being labeled with PTSD is a weakness. I think military thinks it’s a weakness. I really do.” Over the years she has learned more.

I know now, but did not know at the beginning, when he came back that he is suffering from post traumatic stress syndrome. It’s hard for him - being full time military now to even say those words, because the military, I don’t say they frown upon it but if you have a problem, they’re not going to want you to go further in your career.

Kara was adamant in her stance and the prevalence of stigma, fear, and weakness of warriors.

It all goes back to the soldiers are weak if they get help, because it goes on their record - it goes in their permanent file if they -- which people look at and it makes them look weak that they came back and PTSD, and they had to get help for it. It makes them look weak - and it prevents them from going up in rank - I mean, it prevents them from getting promoted, and they want to get promoted, its promoting its higher rank, they work hard for that and if they get help their weak
and they can’t handle it, they can’t handle the stress they can’t handle what they’ve been through. I think they just close their eyes to it, because that’s more money that they have to fork out for the help, and that’s more money they have to give out so I think they just overlook it, until it gets to the point that their attempting suicide or their killing their spouses or somebody in a bar and then its too late.

From a feminist perspective, the imposition of ideologies that compromise the health of a gendered being (for instance the idea of men as weak) and the subsequent implications for health seeking, health care/response have become both increasingly and alarmingly evident. Consider April’s stance. For all she recognized about stigma and the implications for care, still she hesitated, “But -- to let people talk about their fears and their feelings -- but again - does that make the military personnel look weak?” Such ideologies grounded in rugged individualism and the veracity of the male body and spirit has interfered with our ability to fully address issues of PTSD. Given the lengthy history of PTSD in the military and war related trauma, it would appear that such masculine (military/hegemonic) responses have failed to address the gendered nature of health, health care and health response. Indeed, with specific attention to issues of mental health, Riska (2009) specified the implications of such a stance, “The cultural appeal of individualism and self-reliance and of repairing and shaping the body and mind for such challenges make men particularly vulnerable to such options because of an identification of masculinity with self-reliance and self-control” (p. 159). Continued reliance on the strength of men, may be what is most harmful to them.
Kara perceived the obstruction in very similar terms, “He - they don’t -- they make it out to be that you’re weak if you go to the hospital or if you get treatment -- and he had severe PTSD, he came home and was very aggressive and very violent.” Like countless women in her position, denial of such a weakness spewed out in a rage, then came down on her in fists. Tad and I spoke to the issues of PTSD and the difficult moments he had encountered over these four years, like, “losing it at the living dining room table,” or “going off” on Sammy and wondering at the same time, “who was this person,” responding, he choked up.

Well, I’ll just cry now thinkin’ about it. But I think when – I think men don’t want their family to think they’re weak. You know? So, so when you have that moment, I think guys are worried – I think guys are worried about what the reaction of the family’s gonna be. So, I – at least I worry. Maybe have – well, let’s say they reacted – let’s say my – let’s say I perceived my sons’ thought I was not as strong of a man as I should be. And they don’t --”

Having added that last part [and they don’t] rather quickly, I asked, “What would make them – what would make them think that?” Tad responded, “They don’t. I don’t – I’m sure they don’t.” “In your mind then,” I pressed, “What would make them feel that? “Well, I – when I was – when I was a kid, I don’t know if I ever saw a grown man break down and cry in front of me. You know? [he was quiet for a bit] I just never – of course, [starting to laugh] maybe I had some mean step-fathers. I don’t know.” Tad attempted to articulate some of what the weakness might be, feel, or look like. I heard the outside-in influence and expectations of masculinity (some of what masculinity entails) on a body-being.
I thought I heard something similar as I listened to Jace. She shared a story about being with Baylor in those particularly vulnerable moments for warriors - dreaming. As an observer, she was scared for him and at the same time, disturbed to witness his vulnerable self. She started, “I was up one morning doing homework real early – he was still sleeping, and - he sounded like a small child that was so afraid of something.” She described the noise he was making and how, “he was curled into a ball.” When she lightly touched him, “he just like looked at me, like woke up immediately - I barely touched him, he stopped and looked at me and went "What?" Of course he assured her he was fine and when she probed, said he was dreaming about, “a bazooka? Something terrible was about to kill him – I don't know.” She was thoughtful,

I mean he – but he just talked like – he talks about it like it was no big deal but I know that it was because of how he was acting in his sleep. And like I watched it and it was like my big Marine was so scared of something and I hated it. Like - it was so disturbing to watch it.

We went on to discuss this at length and she attempted to make sense of her own fear and explain it to me, “Like -- I don't ever want him to be afraid of anything – I don't like to think about him being afraid, which is bad because I feel like if you're – it just bothers me.” Finally she went on, “And I was so afraid that he was remembering something that happened over there. And I don't know what he was dreaming.”

The challenges of witnessing are indeed frightening. For Jace, such witnessing seems to disrupt their consubstantiality. Those dreams bring that place into this space and disrupts what she/they once understood about ‘being’ together. And yet I also had a sense that expectations regarding gender were also triggered in the undertow. Peeling back
more layers, the ways in which Baylor (and many participants) attempt to deny the vulnerability invoked, also speaks to issues of a warrior’s masculinity. Early on Radar spoke to that warrior ethos and how it was that warriors must be able to take a punch and keep moving on. Though we know the midst of combat is a place that requires measures beyond a self, still this reliance a specific form of masculinity has implications beyond the battle field.

From the perspective of a feminist health communication scholar I query these implications for health seeking and health career. Courtenay (2009) would have us understand that, “rejecting health behaviors [seeking help] that are socially constructed as feminine, embracing risk and demonstrating fearlessness are readily accessible means of enacting masculinity” (p. 19). April knew, “I think he tried to hide his post traumatic stress syndrome very well, but I would see it more than anybody else.” She explained, “He was never violent or anything like that to me, but he was definitely good at hiding it and I think most of the returning people were.” When I specifically asked Pete about vulnerability, he thought about it quickly and responded,

I remember - it was actually like the second or third day I was on the ship. This guy was just like mouthing off to me, and like everybody was laughing. And - I felt like - I felt like he was like trying to pick on me or something. I felt vulnerable for a second and then I ended up like punching him and I got in a lot of trouble so.

When I asked if it was a threat to his physical self that invoked the vulnerability, he was explicit, “No, I was just mad and I just hit him. Like he was a lot smaller than me, like I was like why is this guy talking to me like that. He needs to look in the mirror. He needs
to look in the mirror man.” Ideals of masculinity traverse the space of time and relationships. When I asked Chester how he felt when he got word Pete was coming home, he didn’t hesitate. Laughing, he remembered,

Oh I faked it. I was like yeah, okay, we’ll see you when you get home. *You don’t want your son to think you’re some kind of mama, so you just pretend that nothing happened.* So I was like, “that’s cool ya know, everything’s okay, yeah, you’re coming back when, yeah, well ok,” But inside you’re like, “Oh man thank God. So I’ll be glad when he gets back and gets home and gets back to a normal routine and me too.”

If, as Lifton (1988) suggested, we must work to legitimize the trauma, then I suggest we must also account for what lies in the spaces between us. Legitimizing trauma requires a deep and probing reflexivity; one that demands we (each of us) account for the expectations we impose on a being, particularly on a gendered being. I am reminded about what Goffman (1963) wanted us to understand in terms of a “spoiled identity.” This he regarded was the result of a “discrepancy between the virtual and social identity” (p.19). Importantly for the purposes of this project, he went on to explain that, “it has the effect of cutting him [/her] of from society and from himself[/herself] so that he[/she] stands a discredited person facing an unaccepting world” (p. 19). One is stigmatized when s/he moves beyond the realm of how others perceive us, and more importantly, what others expect from/of us. Penetrating the masculine requires that we also disrupt gender biases in prevalent in the hegemonic institutions, including the biomedical model (Peterson, 2009). Masculinity plays a crucial role in identifying elements of stigma with regards to the health of warriors. Moreover, this place-holding of men serves to maintain
a stronghold on ideals of masculinity that keep men at the helm and out of the ‘doctor’s office,’ compromising their own health and imposing a threat to us all. A reflexive stance requires that we, each of us, call into question what we expect and how it is we enact our gendered roles in the spaces between us.

Narrative Map 30: ‘Band of Excellence’ (Tad)

Liminal Leadership, Liminal Selves

Clearly, despite our long and tumultuous history of war trauma, as a nation/culture we have yet to fully reconcile the consequences of traumatized body-beings, their loved ones or the communities to which they return in the aftermath of war. Through these narratives we are reminded not only of the immensity, but the imperative for deeper, far more reflexive questioning before going to war. Reflexivity must take
place across wider spheres of influence, into the crevices of our very personal lives, through seeming disparate life trajectories, to move outward beyond ourselves connecting ourselves back to each other. We may not feel connected to the war, or a warrior, yet inescapably we are. When a decision has been made to embark through the means of war, we are left with the complexities of those beings transitioning from civilian, to warrior and back again as a citizen-warrior. If we have intended that our warriors will return to the fold, we must more critically assess from whence they come. In this vein, Dewey’s (1927) words draw heed.

The problem of discovering the state is not a problem for theoretical inquiries which already exist. It is a practical problem of human beings living in association with one another, of [human]/kind generically… It demands power to perceive and recognize the consequences of the behavior of individuals joined in groups and trace them to their surface of origin … It requires institution of a government such that those having the renown and power which goes with the exercise of functions shall employ them for the public and not for their own private benefit … Power to detect consequences has varied especially with the instrumentalities of knowledge at hand. (p. 32)

With regards to trauma and healing, Tad reflects on the mission at hand and in doing so, his words find a piercing and potent resonance in the words of Dewey (1927).

You gotta take care of these people when they get back. And I don’t mean pay me for PTSD. You just gotta provide me somebody to talk to… Without me feelin’ like it’s the wrong thing to do. So, how the Army’s gonna crack that nut is gonna be tough. M: Because - why? What would need to change? … Commanders at
all levels of the Army need to lead by example and prove to us that everything is
going to be okay. They got – somehow they’re gonna have to earn our trust on
that one, and that – I mean, if the commander of the Army said, “Okay, we’re
gonna pick up – we’re gonna take this battalion tomorrow and we’re gonna
invade Panama and oust Noriega,” and everybody in the unit goes, “Okay.” And
they say, “Okay,” and there’s no problem, because we’ve all been trained to do
that. And we trust the commander knows what he’s doin’. And we’ve seen the
commander in the field suffering with us. And we’ve seen the commander in the
field doin’ marksmanship with us. And we know he’s tactically sound. But when
he says, “Go get counseling, it won’t affect your career,” and he hasn’t or won’t
himself or herself, we’re not goin.’ So, who’s gonna take the step? And I think
some people are, but it’s not Army-wide – no way, no how. And it’s just – I
mean, it really is a cultural shift, and it’s – you know, we learn all about resistance
to change. I mean, this is a huge resistance to change. Are you kiddin’?

Tad’s sentiments strike to the heart of the matter specifically with regards to
‘power,’ ‘consequences,’ and those hegemonic militaristic “instrumentalities of
knowledge at hand” (Dewey, 1927, p. 32). He speaks directly to and from the embodied
warrior. The role of leadership is evident throughout these narratives and specifically
here with Tad. He reminds us that warriors would/will follow their leaders to the death if
that is what is required of them. Heath added to the conversation speaking at length with
me regarding the nexus of leadership and trust in the culture of the military.
The most forefront principle is discipline because the military, at any branch doesn’t operate without discipline. You have to have discipline not only in your personal character … but on a greater level the discipline necessary to convince yourself that you can trust your superiors and that you have an obligation to look after your inferiors … Fundamental to leadership is the concept of service and any good soldier will tell you that a leader is a servant … one of the things the military does is that it teaches you that, “I have to trust people above me to make the right decision” - that’s discipline.

Trust is both fostered and required. Tad speaks to the notion of a unit mentality where comrades are trained to function as one, to work together, much like Pete reminded us in terms of him, “conforming to this ship.” In his uptake of the military response and treatment to PTSD, Ralf unwittingly posed legitimate concerns over the question of trust as well.

Well again I’ll - everyone will have their opinion about whether or not it’s enough or not but I think they’re doing an excellent job in terms of counseling. And, helping you know - everyone as I understand it. I know in the Air Force, and I believe it’s true in the Army, everyone coming back must go to counseling. And if the counselor - and you know - the experts then determine who needs more and who doesn’t need as much - you know they sort of triage there and treat the people who need it the most. They’re doing what they believe is the best they can. Importantly, sending people to counseling does not always remove the barriers that have historically prevented warriors (men in particular) from seeking and receiving counseling. Issues of masculinity, fear of stigmatization regarding both mental stability
and career jeopardy continue to remain prevalent within the structure of the military, and the mindset of many warriors. Kara offered a distinctly different (contradictory) perspective from Ralf’s. She speaks from the experience of having lived with a traumatized warrior, who in turn manifested that trauma into physical violence and alcohol abuse.

I think, going on deployments you have to be a strong person I think that if you are weak in any aspect - everybody’s weak somewhere - unless you’re really superman than your going to have to have problems. You have to be really strong. I guess they do this with some psychological testing - but, you can’t get a test for going to kill somebody. They do, do training with simulation and whatever - where they have to be able to run over a car or be able to fire at a kid. But I mean that’s one thing - you can do that on a TV or on a screen but when you go over there its hard. It’s not something you - anybody should have to experience. And these guys do - and they come home and they don’t have any other training or any of their rights, medical issues and unemployment. It’s not good. It’s causing - military has the highest percentage of divorce rate and I can see why. It’s very obvious; I mean these guys go through so much.

In 2007, The President’s Commission on Care for American’s Returning Wounded Warriors submitted a report entitled, “Serve, Support, Simplify” The mission of this commission was to, “address the needs of the current generation of “wounded warriors’ but if implemented they will help other deserving vets as well” (Intro n.p.). Their recommendations were, “few but actionable” They included, “To serve those injured in the line of duty while defending their nation; To support their recovery and
successful rehabilitation; and To *simplify* the sometimes overly complex systems that frustrate some injured service members and their families and impede efficient care” (Intro n.p.). The focus of this commission was intended to primarily to address the needs of the “seriously injured.”

Attending to the needs of the seriously injured is not a matter of choice that we make, but rather a commitment we must adhere too. However, while this need is significant, the needs of those who *appear* less extreme must not be neglected. Each warrior and their family require an equally obligatory response. Triage is a necessary reactionary response, but one that cannot substitute for preventative – preemptive solutions. I am reminded of Heath’s experiences, whereby he described the difficulty in sorting rampaged bodies (triage), “This guy’s got a gunshot wound, this guy’s got a shrapnel wound, this guy’s got a gunshot wound, this guy was gonna die - *everyone of ‘em IS hurt.*” And then, “*some of them,*** he told me, “*are unbelievably quiet - and say nothing. And some of them are screaming at the top of their lungs.” As is so for the physical wounding of the body, so it is true for the deeper wounds.

These are the seemingly silent wounds. These are the wounds that creep underground; they creep *through* the blood as opposed to pouring forth their own blood. They are more easily disregarded not only by warriors and their superiors but by a nation as well. I need only consider Kip’s thoughts about trauma and his matter-of-a-fact-telling. Perhaps more importantly, Kip speaks (unintentionally) to the ways in which trauma persists undercover in the body:

> The problems that people have relating to dramatic experiences I’m sure are there for me but don’t seem to be at the forefront. I mean they’re there and I’m sure
they impact - like the issue with mortar fires, the issue with getting shot at, the issue with finding a bag of heads one day; that was troubling.

Kip eventually sought counseling, but when I last spoke to Rory he had not. Rory’s telling shared that very matter-of-fact-ness and yet he also seemed to be a measuring what would be an acceptable range of trauma.

You know that PTSD is real, it’s out there and you’re thinking well nothing has really happened to me that would trigger that because during our deployment not too much happened. We had a couple fire fights. We did lose a couple guys. An IED blew up right underneath my vehicle I was in. It blew up and it blew out. The wheelwell actually angled the blast out away from the vehicle. If it hadn’t I have a feeling - I wouldn’t be sitting here right now - because it was right underneath me. So there are things that did happen that you’re not sure if it will affect you.

To varying degrees, those I spoke with were (or had been) inclined disregard the profundity of their experiences, remain stable (though not critical) and continue to persist with fortitude under the radar. In this way I am reminded of peat-moss fires. A peat moss fire can smolder underground at extraordinary depths, meandering undetected across countless miles. Moreover it can burn undetected for weeks, months, and even years until an unanticipated air pocket fuels the flame and the heat bursts to the surface in flames (For information about peat moss fires see Rein, Cleaver, Ashton, Pironi, Torero, 2008).

Tad was explicit about the need to address the intricacies related to PTSD. Moreover, his narrative attested to those countless warriors and consequent support warriors that suffer when institutional bodies, employ particular instrumental rationalities and then decide who is in need of treatment and how much.
We talk about mental health all the time in the Army. We teach it to cadets. We teach it to everybody. We teach it to soldiers. It’s a quarterly requirement. But, you know, when we talk about mental health, it’s always – what’s the first thing people think about? You know? When we talk about mental health, we don’t talk about Tad bein’ healthy. Everybody thinks I’m already healthy. We talk about the people who are about to commit suicide and how to look for suicide tendencies. You know? I think there are PTSD signs there, too, I’m sure. There has to be. I mean, I – sometimes I don’t think people who are exhibiting it know.

And we’re talkin’ – this is ’09, and we’re talkin’ four years later for me. I haven’t had four of these conversations in four years.

If more deeply weighing the consequences before we go to war is one imperative, then similarity, the debriefing phase is another potent quandary. Narratives throughout this project have spoken to the angst in the liminal space of Kuwait. We came contemplate how it is that leaving the theater is akin to losing pieces of a body-being (Raven, Troy, Rory) and how it is pieces of a self, that cannot be recovered are also left behind. (Wise) Decompression and debriefing the terms used to demarcate the transitioning roles/states-of-being of a warrior. Here, the plasticity of a liminal space is stretched further still. The connective tissues between a body, a warrior and a nation are raw, confounded and numb. There is an attempt to assess the body and minds of warriors before they depart country and return stateside - before they return back into communal and familial folds.

In speaking with warriors it seemed their reflections came in phases. Initially both leadership and cadets alike recognized the tensions residing in that space.
Understandably, there is a great need to leave theater and to get home. Radar explained cadets as having a limited frame of trajectory: “Pizza, beer and sex – and not necessarily in that order.” Raven offered a poignant observation. One that deserves considerable heed:

Definitely it was helpful. We had a couple people come in - you talked to the Chaplin or you could talk to someone else - but it was still so fresh in your heads that our - or we had been so dulled because of our experiences that none of us really so to speak saw any signs or anything like that. Yeah, exactly because you’re still with the same people, and there are no wives, no kids, there is no one else involved, it’s still just your unit.

At the same time, pragmatic and practical means of disengaging are equally demanding. Weapons must be returned. Almost reliving that relief Al said, “The mission's over. I'm not signed for $17 million worth of government property anymore.” Kip implicated both the inherent paradox and irony that unravels in the process of attempting to disengage from one world to the next:

But it’s - what of those checklist items - like make sure you pack up all your equipment then go to the briefing on family reintegration. Go turn in the machine guns that you drew when you first got here and then afterwards go talk about how you’re going to love your wife and kid when you get back and then go watch Gumby. And in addition to those discussions that they have - there’s a lot of medical stuff where you spend time with doctors and part of that has to do with identifying any maladies that you developed during the time so that if you did have some VA claim at some point, there’d be documentation of it.

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There are also injuries to be assessed, reported, and reams of paperwork to sign. With regards to the countless surveys need to be filled out, Tad commented, “Well, for one, I think people won’t tell the truth on it.” Even having a leadership position as a Captain, Kip remembered, “Another point that stands out is probably the medical aspect of really checking, do you have any problems breathing? Do you have feelings of lack of self worth? Do you feel very angry? - and - going down the list you’re like - ‘I just want to go home!’” He explained other worries that also hover in the body, “There’s a fear in the National Guard and reserves that when you get back they will keep you on active duty to treat you and won’t let you go back to your family.” He explained, “so you’ll have a period of time where you’re back in the United States in this limbo land of Ft. Knox where there’s a big army hospital instead of back with your family.” As a General, there resides a measure of paternalistic authority in Kent’s description. He ‘gets’ the worry but wants his soldiers to comply:

Now, mind you though, in Indiana, I could tell you that most soldiers were really focused on going home. So, that was one of the things that we emphasized to the soldiers, that, “You need to be honest. You’re not gonna be delayed. And it’s not gonna get you home any quicker. You just need to tell ‘em what’s on your mind. If you have any injuries, mental illnesses, or you have just frustrations or concerns, you need to bring that up now.” ---“Oh, I’m fine; I’m fine; I’m fine” [they’re] - Digging in.

And finally, time to acknowledge that ‘we’ are leaving and what ‘we’ are leaving and prepare for the potentialities of reintegration. And here, regardless of institutional awareness and personal reflection, a tension persists. Kip remembered, “I’d try to tell my
soldiers, “look guys you don’t understand it now but it’s going to be a challenge trying to put yourself back into your world.” Even for Kip, “I knew that was coming - and even though I knew it was coming, it still didn’t seem to help me very much.” For all Al was willing to share when I asked about the debriefing process, he was far less animated and forthcoming. I noted, “It's interesting though, you don't seem like it – like it doesn't seem like a time that really stood out for you.” He responded,

Really, at that point, in my mind, it was just a game of hurry up and wait. Once you pass that point of the TOA, [Transfer of Authority] where that new unit stakes their flag on in front of the headquarters, the weight's lifted off of your shoulders, and at that point, you know - I don't wanna bust myself out as an officer, but you set the cruise control and you're completely like – I'll catcha ’cause I know we're going and we're gonna get there sooner rather than later.

Tad knew, “Yeah, the advice is good. So, that’s in the back of your mind. So, you have an idea. And I’d already been through one deployment, so I kinda knew a little bit about what happened last time.” But still, “It’s just I don’t know what else you can do for somebody before they got back. You know? I mean, I don’t know what else you could do. ‘Cause I think some things are just gonna happen.” And Kip’s thoughts ran similarly to Tad’s, “the things that stand out probably more than anything else as I look back the National Guard provided a couples counseling program where both people would go. I don’t know that it necessarily helped us, but we did go.” Thinking more, he said, “It probably did help. I just think everything that they did, there’s nothing they could’ve helped. They couldn’t have done any better.” In Hal’s opinion:
I don’t think I really, there’s nothing you can really do to put out - to reorient yourself back into civilian life. You can’t just - there’s no test to take - there’s no restaurant to go to make you feel better. There’s - there’s nothing to drink that- that brings you - there’s no drug to help you back into civilian life.

Raven regarded this juncture. “I think that’s got to be the hardest job in the United States right now. It’s hard to say what works and what doesn’t work, because it’s an individual basis.”

Given the increased attention to the mental and physical health of warriors there have indeed been shifts in thinking and attempts to more thoroughly respond. Kent’s reflections in hindsight, “if I knew then what I knew now, I would have…” are indeed evidence of shifts for these specific wars. These narratives serve as a reminder that although ‘top-down’ (and even outside - the public-in) the intent to attend to warriors in a more comprehensive manner, is intricately laden with complex challenges. Some are obvious. Warriors want to go home. Their families want them to come home. The nation wants them to come home. Yet clearly they are frequently far less prepared to be home once they get there. At this point it is important to address the comprehensive history of studies conducted with combat warriors that specifically address the issues our warriors face today. Elder & Clip (1988) site a number of studies conducted well over a 50 year span that consistently report the emotional impact of combat and trauma on warriors. These authors site the works studies by Figley (1978) that refer to “the residual stress perspective.” This notion indicates, “psychosocial aftermath of war continues or even intensifies through post war years” (p. 136). Further studies conducted by Archibald and associates (1962) found that, “veterans with combat fatigue continued to seek treatment
in VA hospitals for seven years after WWII ended” (p. 137). “Archibald & Tuddenham, (1965), conducting follow up studies, “extended this pattern for over two decades” (p. 137). Another study conducted by Klonoff & associates (1976), “reported that psychiatric and physical problems continued for men exposed to intense combat over an extended duration” (p. 137).

Time has been a persistent theme in healing. How long? How much longer? In sharing his map, Kip attested to this angst:

It seemed like I had this constant – after that, it was this constant battle from ’05 on ‘til now even, [2009] I’m in this constant battle. And I don’t think I’ve come out of it, really, of – well, maybe the last year, I’ve done a lot better this last year since we got to Ohio.

Listening to them, and with them, I have begun to wonder if the debriefing phase is one more long, long liminal phase of waiting that moves from the cries of, “when will this be over? When will I get my life back?” To – this is it.” “Is this it?” Is this then our new normal?” I am reminded of the stages of grief where we move unpredictably through predictable (anger, denial, bargaining…) phases and emotions. I suspect the bodies of warriors and those who support them are filled with untold-unacknowledged grief.
Narrative Map 31: “How long is this supposed to stick around” (Tad)

*I guess the point is, you know, there’s my question mark again. Is it ever gonna end? I don’t know. How long is it supposed to stick around? ‘Cause I’m getting a little fed up with it. You know? ... So, I’m not on this – I’m not where I want to be, in my happy state - in my band of excellence. It’s like – it’s build, break down, and rebuild; build, break down, and rebuild. It’s just – it’s my little acronym for BBR. Yeah, and I don’t know if that’s what I mean by – I don’t know if that’s what I mean by learning to live with PTSD, but that’s kinda where I’ve really settled the last year. I think is just – okay - you know. The number one trait of leadership is self-awareness. Right? I mean, the number one trait of a potential leader to move on and be capable of doin’ greater things is self-awareness, knowing self first. And I think I’ve just learned that. I mean, this is me.
I mean, this is self-awareness for me right now. You know, learning to live with it is helpin’ me be more self-aware. (Tad)

The years reflected in the passage through which these warriors transitioned the decompression and debriefing phase continue to reflect the ebb and flow, of address and redress with combat related trauma. Kent, Kip, Tad, Troy and Raven, Troy and Wise were all a part of the initial insurgency. They went through and came back in what we might now terms as preliminary phases of de-compression and debriefing phases for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Kent and Kip are both in the National Guard. During active duty they function as Army corps.-people. Tad and Raven are Army folks, Troy and Wise are Marines. Al and Hal (Army) both came through in 2009. With hindsight Kent explained the debriefing process out of Iraq in Kuwait:

You went through – wow, you went through – you sat down and you talked to a chaplain, and you received a couple of briefings about the reintegration, expectation management, and that was about it. But it was real – it was pretty short. It wasn’t as developed as what it is now. And that was in theater. Now, once you left, we returned back through Atterbury, Indiana, they did the same thing. (Atterbury Indiana is the central training location and thus demobing station specifically for the National Guard units).

Kip described the basic experience:

We didn’t really have much of a reintegration thing at all - I think the first time it wasn’t really a major deal. The second time they put a lot more into it. The National Guard knows that it’s a bigger problem because you’re not only going back to the United States but you’re going out of the army. You’re going back
into your civilian life, so for the last month before you redeploy they start having briefings and there’s a check list where the Chaplin comes and talks quite a bit, provides opportunities for counseling if people want them. But then there’s standard briefings that they talk to you about.

Tad came back through in 2005,

Well, I think the process that we went through was we started doing surveys before we ever left Iraq. So, it’s basically survey driven. Yeah, survey driven, that’s right. So, it was survey driven, and there were – some of the surveys would even score you. You know, they would score your potential for PTSD and things like that. And if you scored a certain number, then you probably oughta seek counseling. And that was pretty much it. I mean, there was nothing else. That was in ’05, yeah.

When I asked Troy about the debriefing process he responded, “Just - it went by quickly. We had a couple classes about PTSD, I guess. I don’t know. We had a couple classes…” When I pressed him, “You say that like with such disdain. Does it irritate you, the term, or what?” No he said, “It’s more – I don’t know. We kind of have a joke about it now — between me and all the Marines. It’s like – and the guys that go to school here, you know, it’s like they call this my PTSD tattoo.” For Wise, just remembering that period was difficult. His company (and Troy’s) drew specific attention of counselors given the extensive, persistent and engaged combat and deaths they encountered/suffered.

There were about, “100 guys left,” in his company at that point he told me. I wondered if the therapist spoke at large or in smaller groups, “they talked to the masses -
but like if you ask for help like - it was good - but your unit people didn’t really look at it
that way I guess. Like people look down on you for getting help … like the people in
charge, just - that’s their way of life - like they don’t know anything better I guess.” In
time Wise knew he needed help and he was able to ‘pay if forward,’ “Yeah - actually, I
helped a lot of my friends get set up with the VA and stuff because you have to jump
through a lot of hoops like just getting in contact with someone is half the battle so yeah I
just went to the VA.” When I asked, “So what -can you think what things stands out for
you from that period? Like that stands out to you during that whole debriefing?”

Umm, really not much - I mean they remind us there are laws in the United States
versus over there. Like you have to be a lot more sensitive to the people around
you - make sure you’re a lot more sensitive around them. And - that’s like the
main thing. Like they’d ask you if you’re depressed and if you want to get help.
But I think it’s almost like they have to.

What stood out for Kip:

For the debriefing - there’s several blocks of instruction that you get from people
whether chaplains or commanders or whatever - that say your family is going to
be different, your friends are going to be different, just know that you’re going to
be different so that kind of stands out. That’s kind of a resounding theme.

I spoke with Hal in September of 2009. He left the theater in March/April of 2009.

You know – they - when they go through this check list you don’t see eye contact
with them. They’re, “do you have this. No. None of this? None of this? None of
this? None of this? None of this? None of this? None of this? Ok. Stamp. Stamp. Stamp. - Ok here ya go.”

Three hundred people. So you know - in a four hour period or whatever you just
try to - you know try to push them through. You try to hurry up. You know. You get them through - ‘cause you only have so much time. And the ones that do have problems - it’s you know, “oh well we can get you to see a mental health professional, or we can do this. And when you come back from deployment - you know mental health professionals -a lot of people are seeing them.”

I met with Al in December of 2009. He returned stateside in September of that year.

Whoever the installation chaplain was, he came in and they – it seemed to me like they talked really heavy on the expectation management … It was – I don't know. To me, it was kind of a tough briefing to sit through. You sit there and they say, "Well, we know you may have issues, but we're not here to point fingers. These are the things that you may experience. So we want to talk about it and get it out in the open.” Kinda make you aware or try to make you more aware of what's being felt on both ends of the spectrum.

Increased media attention and military concern regarding the extreme difficulties and consequences returning warriors and their families are confronting have provoked considerable attention and response for these wars (and in general, once again). Across institutional and socio-cultural spheres, then, contemporary society (including warriors) has largely become familiar with the term PTSD. Importantly, Raven’s observations move us beyond acknowledging the utility in discussion. His expression, “it was still so fresh in your heads … or we had been so dulled because of our experiences,” is a critical observation. We heard how the pressure to account for all injuries physical and emotional is more than daunting. Given the “dulling of the senses” of combat experience, combined with the compulsion to get home, warriors are clearly unable to account for all they need
too in that moment. This becomes immensely critical when warriors attempt to receive care from the V.A. once they leave the military.

The narratives moving through the decompression and debriefing realms reveal some of the dilemmas and contradictions that persist. Having the information, exposure and discussion about potential problems warriors might anticipate was clearly something soldiers were able to draw on later. Resting with/in the other narratives, Hal’s story warns us of difference between perfunctory reactions and critical responses. At the same time his words reflect certain magnitudes and must give us pause. With magnanimous proportions, in the amount of multiple deployments, we have yet another potent reminder that the number of “troops” military personal “request” of the nation, before congress, to “complete the mission” will once again be returning back through this fold as well. Given the scope of multiple deployments these stories now rest exponentially in our midst.

Roger and I spoke about multiple deployments. With regards to short intervals between tours, Roger was disturbed, “I said to Kip, that ain’t right you need to talk to somebody” After discussing his second deployment, Roger looked at me again, “and you know - that’s enough.”

Summary

*Time. Time is all, time is the only thing that gonna help it. You know, and time and - companionship, people, and - not necessarily companionship. Companionship but - I don’t want to say therapy. I’m not sure of the word I’m looking for here, I guess just talking with other people, having the conversation. You know, being able to talk with other people. Having people you know- know*
what you’re doing. You know, you want people to understand what we’re going through. But, people don’t understand what we’re going through. (Interview, Hal)

The narratives in this chapter help to reveal more nuanced complexities at work in the dynamics of coming together to heal in the aftermath of war. Time moves forward, backward, sideways, and all-ways in a journey of how it is we come to be through each other. For one, the histories of those long since gone, mark a terrain that has become our own. Consider Raven’s memory of meeting his grandfather’s war-buddies. Such a history is intimately personal and yet, potently political given the historical context of those wars. Those stories have unfolded, forward into this future. Indeed, the histories of war and the studies of trauma reveal how far we have yet to come – and give us doubtful pause in the hope that we might progress. If we consider the dearth of research that has been conducted on warriors and trauma, and the subsequent consequences of those (personal/political) choices it is clear we have yet to fully account for such a presence in our midst. The reality looms exponentially high as the narratives in this project, in combination with public discourses have exposed the freight endured on bodies, in beings across time. This is especially so in the face of an unprecedented ease through which these young women and men are deployed again and again. Failures to fully account for the historical contingencies of war have contributed to the angst in our midst.

Questions related to the constitutive nature of identity in this chapter reflect personal, social, institutional and cultural contributions to the manifestations of trauma and vulnerability as it takes up space in the body and ultimately between us all. In the social milieu rest a host of ideals’ regarding gender, healing, the unfathomable realities of war and what it means to be both warriors of support and/or combat warriors. These
liminal spaces are paradoxically dense with uncertainty and rife with potential. Liminal spaces require considerable reflexivity across multiple spheres where trust is both mutually fostered and required. Such reflexivity begins with an internal dialog, and must then move outward to encompass the larger realms of our existence. As these narratives attest, healing is both liminal and always ongoing. In the liminal spaces of healing warriors fall into the direction of others; betwixt the desire to be well, and the need, fear and willingness to trust others to lead them to do so a vulnerable self staggers.
Chapter Six: Discussion from an Embodied Listener

I sincerely enjoyed our time together discussing life and soldiering. As I reflect on the meaning and purpose of your study, I believe it is much more personal than a doctoral research project. It is your very personal journey to wrap your mind and soul around what is and has happened between you and your son as it relates to war and the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” that it brings upon the military family. You have, through your son been pulled unknowing into an ancient and noble cast – that of the warrior. Now, as we humans must do, you seek to understand what is happening to you and assign meaning and purpose to it. (Roger, hand written note)

I have come to understand that this journey/project traversed the course of a life, in a series of punctuated life moments that unfolded, opened wide and tumbled forward and backward. Cultivating both an insatiable curiosity and the passion to quest, those moments moved with me, and through other brilliant, vulnerable body-beings. They have been the scholars, mentors, friends and loved ones who shared, tolerated and fueled the quest. So when Roger suggested that this was a personal quest, my feminist proclivities must celebrate. Indeed, I acknowledge the personal within this quest, and yet this story extends well beyond my own. Moved by the personal I have sought to reach beyond the bounds of my own intimate angst, to seek, understand and situate this which we share, across a broad spectrum of spheres. Thus, first and foremost this quest does not shy away from the intimate, but rather celebrates the personal/political nature of our coming into
being/s. I celebrate the potential and the hope that such poststructural feminist perspectives entwined in and through narrative sensibilities offer us all.

Given a past (my warrior brother’s death) and present experience of war and the familial, cultural responses to public discourses, my sensitivities were certainly heightened by Levi’s involvement. However, I was deeply moved by two specific, acutely entwined public discourses that finally inspired (propelled and compelled) me to pursue this project. The first was the attention National Public Radio (NPR) brought to issues of PTSD, returning vets and the assistance they were not only not receiving, but how fiscal, ideological and practical barriers further inhibited access/support to their physical and emotional needs. Story after story of young women and men returning from combat and being denied care and/or acknowledgment of trauma profoundly disturbed my sensibilities.

Concomitantly the fervor of “patriotism” and professed ideals of “supporting our troops” ran rampant in communities across the nation. Thus I began to ponder what it meant to “support our troops.” The day (that punctuated moment) I sat on the living room floor of Dr. Lynn Harter’s home, sun pouring through the windows, has been forever cemented in my memory. Here I asked my advisor, mentor, friend, “What does this mean? What does it mean to wave flags, drive magnetic yellow ribbons through our streets? What does support entail?” I wanted to know, to understand and to explore how it was that we moved through a language of support and ultimately to heal in the midst of this tumultuous terrain. The quest began anew.

This final chapter addresses the sum of this quest as I took up the inquiry through narrative and poststructural feminist sensibilities. These frames of inquiry undergirded
this project and as I lay out here, speak to my sense-making, the limitations of my work and the potential for future research in the area. It must be said that, fundamentally, where narrative emplotments served as the paddles for wading into and troubling the confluence of what lies between the spaces that make up ourselves (familial, institutional and political spheres), a poststructural feminist analysis propelled me to account for those discursive configurations of power, control, and resistance. Narratives spoke to how it was that support and combat warriors moved through those spaces as body-beings. Moreover, the narratives in this project provided the means for culling out powerful (disciplining) ideologies that likewise, took up space in bodies and most especially as they worked to confine individuals through subject positioning.

At the onset of this project I set out to answer three seemingly distinct questions.

- RQ1: How do veterans experience trauma, vulnerability and healing?
- RQ2: How do family members experience trauma, vulnerability and healing?
- RQ3: How do corporeal, material, and gendered forces shape the experience of trauma, vulnerability and healing?

Yet in the course of my time with each participant and the unfolding of the project at large, I found instead the very symbiotic nature of our existence made it so that each question melded one into and through the other. Vulnerability and trauma proved to be a mutually constitutive force that traversed historical, economic, personal, familial, and political terrains. Thus in this chapter I have collapsed three questions to focus on the components of the third question. Here I will take up and highlight the corporeal, material, and gendered influences of healing as they unfolded in chapters four and five,
addressing both warriors and their supports. Concomitantly I speak to the issue of vulnerability as it took up space and moved through the participants and myself, as embodied inquirer, and ultimately came to rest in our collective midst.

Corporeal: The Language of Vulnerability

I’ve thought about this for years, and I can’t figure out – there was not one thing that made me mad again. It was just like it started, or maybe it started, and it felt good to yell. I don’t know. Did it feel good to yell at somebody? ‘Cause I would get to the point where I would just be standin’ there in the kitchen yelling at the top of my lungs to my 12-year-old son. And he’d walk away, and I’d go, “what was I doin’?” So, I guess it’s – guys like me need to be more vulnerable, more often. Cuz it is healing (Tad)

Throughout the course of these last chapters I have framed the notion of trauma and vulnerability as a language moving through the body – PTSD - a language in need of response. More specifically I have suggested this language is the means by which a body speaks both to us and through us. I further believe that the ways in which trauma takes up space in the body – as rage, depression, sleeplessness, irritability, traumatic memories, fear and a host of other physiological, psychological responses, is a language we must learn to hear. One screaming to be heard. In this way, I am suggesting that in the quest to understand the language of trauma invoked on a body-being through the process of war, ‘PTSD’ has (instead) emerged as a medicalized manifestation/explanation of trauma and vulnerability. Here I move beyond the pathology of trauma and vulnerability as it is defined (and lost) in the terminology and medicalization of PTSD. I want us to move
beyond our cultural propensity to imagine/view trauma and vulnerability solely as a/the
disease of war located in the body. Such a stance has not only (and severely) limited our
episteme, but the medicalization (gaze) of PTSD further serves in the process of
redirecting our attention, and disciplining our collective vision from those more
penetrating, reflexive and necessary questions regarding trauma.

The consequences of such a stance serve to further the locus of the “disease” with
the warrior. Indeed, Rosenfeld & Faircloth (2006) argued that “by focusing on the
experience of illness rather than its construction … [we] … treat illness as a practical and
moral exigency challenging the individual rather than as a social and cultural by-product
of medicalization” (p. 18). The disciplined/ing gaze serves to further remove the
collective “we” (social) from a being invoked through trauma. Silence permeates the
public voice and PTSD takes up a voice of the institutional; “medicine’s hope of
restitution crowds out any other stories” (Frank, 1995, p. 83). Such “restitution” is not
merely/only a personal quest, instead it serves to further inculcate us all (if only by
default) into the workings of the “military machine” (Pete). Thus, we are called to breech
this divide by penetrating a biomedical model that not only bifurcates a healing process
(mind/body, emotion/reason, etc) but critically, “individualizes and decontextualizes
political issues” (Rosenfeld & Faircloth, 2006, p. 15). Weedon’s (1998) insight offers a
particularly potent imperative for health communication scholars having reminded us “if
language is the site where meaningful experience is constituted, then language also
determines how we perceive possibilities of change” (p. 82).

I argue that in this language - the experience of trauma and vulnerability - lays the
juxtaposition of cultural, communicative means. Herein lays a body-being attempting to
address the liminal disjuncture that emerges in the shift of identities from civilian to warrior to civilian to warrior to civilian to warrior -- With 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} deployments. Here, each culture maintains and professes particular roles and rules of civility (engagement) that are frequently, fundamentally in opposition to one another. It is in the attempt to reconcile, to make some sense of social relationships when warriors move through “the brutal business of war” where a corporeal language emerges. In *Our Consubstantial Selves*, I suggested that in matters of war, our (civilian) *experientially unfathomable* remains but *an un-embodied referent* while for warriors it has become the stuff of a life world. For warriors, the once seemingly unfathomable becomes the very real – lived/ing - life long enduring experience.

Here the dynamic interplay of our social contracts, the rules and norms that protect, guide, govern and discipline our collective selves; rules regarding the ‘right’ to kill permeate the fabric of our social existence (e.g., death penalties, ethics of “doing no harm,” etc.). Those social ‘rules’ not only serve as a means of governing and guiding, but they also divide us, one from the other. Butler (2004) articulated the relational relevance and consistency of such norms: “at the most intimate levels; we are social we are comported toward a “you”; we are outside ourselves, constituted in cultural norms that precede and exceed us, given over to a set of norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally” (p. 45). The intimate is both personal and political, and in the case of Kara, serves to illuminate the degree to which warriors both embody and are traumatized in the presence of relational norms. Kara shared with me the meaning her (now ex) spouse attributed to her/their miscarriage.
He said to his brother that, that was God taking away his child because when he was in Iraq he had to shoot a car and he killed a family and there was a new baby in there. And he said that because he killed someone else’s baby God killed his baby and he was really, really upset about that.

She moved to explain further that this wasn’t something he shared with her, “He never told me about that. So I think that’s a lot - I mean he has a lot going on in his head that he doesn’t want to talk about a whole lot.” For me, this story links the unfathomable to the very real, lived corporeal experience - the disjuncture between what we understand ourselves to be and what others/our collective selves have asked warriors to take up on their/our behalf.

We are all, and have been confounded in an attempt to understand these altered selves anew often in the flux of seemingly insurmountable grief. I think of Tad and the potency of force from within, to be “yelling at the top of my lungs.” Concomitantly I am reminded of Radar telling me that “it takes a lifetime/energy to hold that monster down.” In the midst of them both I am confounded by the juxtaposition of a social-body trying to suppress (outside in) and the language (trauma and vulnerability) of a body-being attempting to scream forward. Clearly we have yet to fully account for the vulnerable being and now are called to re-imagine/view the medicalized concept of PTSD, the medicalization of socially induced illness and move toward understanding trauma as socially induced and vulnerability as a language of wisdom. Grosz called us to such action having urged, “both physical and social dimensions must find their place in reconceptualizing the body, not in opposition to each other but as necessarily interactive” (Grosz, 1994, p. 23). Thus an interactive (and reflexive) approach to healing requires that
we take up the “we” as a contributing factor to the social ailment of trauma and vulnerability. Moreover, the “we” must also be a part of a collective healing process. Supporting our troops requires the efforts of the collective all-of-us.

Corporeal Support

First and foremost, just as Tad, Troy, Raven, Kent, Kip and so many warriors spoke to their commitment to service and the nation they noted the tremendous amount of personal strength, growth and pride was not mutually exclusive to trauma and angst. Indeed the spectrum of emotions and experience blurs such imaginable boundaries as all merges in the confluence. The same must be said for warriors of support, whose bodies bore considerable angst but whose hearts bore pride, strength and fortitude as they too supported the silenced mission on the stateside-frontlines as corporeal bodies of support. April, Rhonda, Jace, Kara and Sammy all spoke to an internal strength in much the same way as Zvonkovic, Manoogian and McGraw (2001) found in their work with the spouses of fisherman and truck drivers. Women developed a nuanced sense of self through the ordeal of support, in the ‘What-Ifs,’ and across the disruptions in relational selves and understanding the self. April spoke to this in chapter four, as she and her friend climbed the wall. Here she was able to recognize and celebrate a symbolic and indeed corporeal emergent strength climbing the wall. They managed homes and distraught children, demanding work and college careers, bearing an invisible freight. Their “troops” were back-seated, sometimes backhanded, but always back-loaded. A freighted journey. Alice told me she had an agreement with BJ, “if you start a sentence with ‘honey, why did you…’?” then you’re gonna get a fight! ‘Cuz, whatever decision I made, made sense at the
time.” I thought of all that was unspoken, all that might be behind the swirl-wind in her pictorial rendering of BJ’s deployment.

The narratives of chapters four and five both indicated the ways in which the lived experience, the corporeal body, encompassed trauma in those bodies of support. Across chapter four I spoke to how it was that the corporeal body harbored considerable angst for those warriors of support. Rhonda shared the devastating impact of how worry clenched in her gut, she lost sight of what was important to her throughout the daily acts of surviving the persistent “What-Ifs.” Both she and Chester spoke to the powerful throws of depression. Kate told me, “I’ve never felt so powerless in my life – ever - in any situation, I’ve never felt like that, just so powerless.” The vulnerability was massive for Beatrice, who tried to describe the angst harboring in her body. “Absolute heart breaking, feeling of absolute distraught, totally out of control distraught – vulnerable - that’s not a big enough word. Whatever word that’s big enough - I’d have to look in the dictionary to find a bigger word, there’s never big enough words.” For warriors of support, such a harboring of angst took up, and took away considerable space in their bodies. Jace spoke to her lungs “I feel like you took a lung with you when you go” she told Baylor. This bears considerable contemplation when we think of our bodies as tools of support, the body as a corporeal culture of support. Concomitantly our fundamental physiological functions are compromised in such a cultural process. For warriors of support, there is indisputably a physical, physiological, psychological and emotional toll on corporeal culture of their bodies engaged with a silent, war.

The invoked trauma for warriors of support appears far less dramatic and yet, it is one that silently creeps up, tugs and pulls over long periods of uncertainty and fear. The
“What-Ifs” provided potent insight as to the ways in which the corporeal body comes across vast spheres to collectively bear the wounds of war. In the process of reconceptualizing, conjuring alternative epistemological ontological shifts in order that we might learn to more fully listen, both the physical and social dimensions of our body-beings must further be enacted. The social, the collective, the “we,” all of us are, contribute to, and constitute that social. “We” are the institutions, the political, the familial and those deeply personal selves that work to articulate a language between us. Thus, the social body lies in the midst of a corporeal body-politic.

Encountering a Corporeal Community

Through his work treating Vietnam veterans with PTSD, Williams (1988) took up the task of helping vets deal with survivor guilt by attempting to extract the cognitive from the emotional. Where Williams extracts, I want to collapse and then bridge as way of moving toward identifying the intricacies and multiple relational components necessary for healing. As Williams framed it, “trauma victims have a great need to hang on to the guilt; so to make them accessible to treatment you must let them maintain that component while you attack the issue of responsibility” (p. 329). His language here is arresting, both problematic and fascinating as it stands alone and ultimately significantly noteworthy for its far reaching implications. Williams takes up a patronizing stance when he framed the description that “trauma victims have a great need to hang on to the guilt.” Here, I might instead suggest not so much a need, but as a response to trauma. The framing of an approach toward assisting in the care of warriors is disturbing – “make them accessible to treatment…” and “let them maintain…” Here, the linguistic maneuvering is multifaceted. It is patronizing in that one might imagine how we allow a
child to have their lollipop in the sobbing aftermath of a tantrum, in order that we can speak with them and set them straight. Far more disturbing to me is the move toward subject positioning – where he seems to be placing the need for guilt solely in a warrior’s body being, further traumatizing the traumatized even as he intends to illuminate the ways in which they might remove it. This frames and replicates a unidirectional aspect toward healing – an undergirding hierarchical, top down approach, placing the power to determine in the “professional’s” hand; the responding (re)action in the traumatized. In the separation and placement of angst with the warrior we miscue the action for relational healing. As Frank (1995) would suggest, the dyadic body, “one that exists for the other … [is] … a lived reality, not simply a conceptual ideal” (p. 37). In our failure to enact a dyadic body, we fail to fully recognize the ways in which our journeys, our body-beings transcend division.

Williams’ (1988) ethic toward healing is one by which he appears to have distanced himself from the corporeality of a traumatized warrior. This is further evidenced as he progressed, suggesting, “as you continue in treatment with them and continue to give them the affective part of the survivor guilt the anguish will diminish over time” (p. 329, emphasis added). Again, he maintains the discipline and control, that which directs healing. Yet, the injection of “with” is hopeful. Indeed it might be considered the stepping stone we remove from that specific trajectory of healing and instead be transformed into a cornerstone, laying a foundation toward inclusive acknowledgment and healing across our mutual plains. Williams offered up four directions to reduce/eliminate “survivor-guilt.” He spoke to the notion of shared responsibility whereby warriors must look at the incident and contemplate how much
they may or may not have truly been able to prevent the outcome. He noted that in terms of trauma, perceptions of time slow down whereby the warrior distorts the initial potential response. Warriors are also reminded that events did not transpire as a result of a past or previous sin. [And here I want to point to our cultural institutions that have philosophically grounded/professed this very ideal]. He suggested measures for reframing – cognitive restructuring - as a means of redistributing language tapping into the subtleties of meaning-making to shift self image (as in the shift from murder to kill).

Finally Williams (1988) recommended the inculcation of clergy to address spiritual disruption as well (pp. 329-331). Yet, important as these devices are, we must recognize that warriors exist in a corporeal community, one not merely manifested through the relational encounters of shared military, war and/or trauma experience.

This community comes into being as an extension - the enactment- of our social response to international conflict and perceptions of threat. Each of us comprise aspects of that which “engages the machine” on a myriad of levels. On both an intra and inter personal level, we need only contemplate how it is we in turn respond to perceptions of various levels of “threat.” Enlarging the scope, how we vote – if we vote -- takes up traction on a political terrain. We are inculcated – by action, inaction, and by default. Williams (1988) framed, “Shared Responsibility” but left the concentric circle with the warrior and situational context. I want to move outward, imagining a centrifugal force to expand the level of responsibility to the larger social structure. Let us put the angst – the hard realities of war in the light so that we might move together toward healing and ultimately perhaps to more thoroughly consider the implications - all the remains in the aftermath of war. The imperative lies here. If trauma and vulnerability move through the
body as a language of the body, *one that speaks to a violation of our innately understood and articulated social/moral contracts (implicit and explicit)* what fields of inquiry remained untapped? As I sat with Tad, my mind reeled. What are the untapped fields? We talked at length about his “PTSD;” it was indeed central to his willingness to meet with me. “Well, I think I was going through a period of the highs and lows with PTSD, and I was just angry all the time.” We stopped there and I asked, “Like, what –what’s at the root of the anger? Like, what are your thoughts about why you’re so angry? Do you know what I mean?” Tad was visibly moved, this was something he obviously struggled – attempted to grasp himself,

I do, and I don’t know. Like – you know if you’re an infantry guy and there’s a problem, you either attack it, you fix it; you address it. You know? There’s no – there’s never the elephant in the room with us kind of guys. You know? It’s just out there, right? And so there’s no – there’s no one incident that plays in my mind. Now, there are incidents that play in my mind, but there’s not one that I can pinpoint that would make me mad about something.’ So, I don’t get that… ‘Cause - I really don’t know if anybody can answer that.

Indeed there is no one answer. And as Rhonda’s fragmented moment implies “but I mean it *sounds like to send someone* ---- I might get --” there are questions yet to be asked. As the years move on into the lives on these women and men, PTSD is an ongoing extensive response to the seemingly unfathomable. Regardless of this angst Heath wanted me to be sure that I helped American people understand, “that they (warriors) love their military. They need to understand that their military really loves them, that the military loves their country and their military will do anything, including die for their country.”
We went to the game, and the Michigan band started to play the Michigan fight song and I balled like a baby. I cried. I was down on my hands and knees crying. I am crying right now, [just remembering] but my girlfriend was like, “what’s wrong, why you crying?” I’m like, you don’t understand what I’ve been though in my life to get back to this stadium, to get back to where I love, to what I love. … and it’s like almost whole year later. (Raven)

Material Identity

Well, I just never thought I was – okay, you go right back to vulnerability. I never thought I was vulnerable enough for it to affect me. You know? I mean, I’m the tough, best-Ranger-competition guy. Right? I’m not supposed to – I mean, I still run seven miles. I’m not supposed to be doing – it’s not supposed to impact me. It’s supposed to be everybody that’s weak. Right? That’s the kind of mindset that you have. It’s not supposed to be me. (Tad)

Trauma and vulnerability have called into question our relational selves through subsequent material manifestations. For instance the medicalized form of trauma and vulnerability as it is positioned through the terminology (language of) PTSD is one such example. The warrior has a “disease,” in essence, one that isolates him from his warrior self. Diseases are further treated via medication and medical protocols. Such protocols are want to patch up warriors and redistribute them again and again as material resources. “Battle-Rattle” is another manifestation moving beyond the corporeal. Bodies are permanently altered. Baylor was diagnosed with TBI, and I could hear and see the
implications for both Troy and Wise as they struggled with memory loss and cognitive function.

Gender is yet another force intertwined with material consequences. In *Reluctant, Recalcitrant but Ever Ready Warriors*, potent cultural and institutional forces coalesce in forms of creativity and constraint. Creatively, Rhonda wants to re-envision an unanticipated life-world, draw on her own assets and support her spouse. At the same time her options are significantly limited and constrained by the military institutional forces, including the inherent unpredictability of the institution. The social took up power and space in local communities, further limiting her options. Those who support military personnel, become inculcated, pulled into working and demands via the centrifugal and centrifugal forces of a “military-machine” (Pete). Moreover, gender also manifests in and through cultural ideals and expectations regarding masculinity. We want strong warriors but can we allow them to be “weak”? Can we allow ourselves to find the wisdom of our vulnerable selves? It is indeed a potent undertow, a force enacted on and through multiple systems of knowing and being that works to suppress the emotional-body being of a vulnerable warrior body-being. Stigma related to men and weakness was a persistent fear and implication that continues to weave fibers across vast webs of significant, relational selves.

Lupton (1998) urged us to contemplate the role of the embodied social-being having suggested that, bodies are, “not simply ‘natural’ products… [but] rather our experiences are embodied as always being constructed through and mediated by sociocultural processes” (p. 32). Grosz (1994) and McKerrow (1998) both would have us understand that body is a culture in and of itself. And here, Lupton (1998) further
suggested that “bodies, within limits, are highly malleable” (p. 32). It would seem that our body-beings are highly malleable cultures, shape-shifting in the turbulent waters of social, historical and contextual contingencies. War and the trauma induced in and through combat have more than shifted the shape of body-beings.

Finally, materiality played out in the very policies and practices of support. In *Liminal Leadership* narratives served to provide both insight and an overview of the process of debriefing and decompression. I laid out the challenges of debriefing and decompression processes for warriors and leadership over the course of several years of service and the passage of time. In this way I situated the personal within the political/institutional response and calls for response to the needs of warriors. In “Limdu,” Pete spoke to the challenges of wanting/need to be in two places at once. Warriors have constructed deep relational ties of camaraderie built through endured, mutual trauma and vulnerability. Being without their ‘guys’ was challenging for almost every warrior I spoke with. Coming home to family was, for most, was rife with paradox.

At this point, it could be said that I have come back to the beginning of this quest. Though efforts have been made to improve service for veterans, even in the course of these years, penetrating the inner circles of the VA continues to be a fractious journey. Many vets talked about finding a way to the VA for counseling and how immensely helpful it was. Yet still, some of the warriors with whom I met spoke to the fissures in care that continue to persist. Chester summed it up briskly, “When you sign a contract, you know - he held up his end so why couldn’t they of upheld their end.” He told me about how it took over a year for the VA to address Pete’s claim. Kate’s narratives delve into the breach of social/political and military contractual norms (another disjuncture in
the reintegration process) particularly with regards to the ethics of commitment, loyalty, and service grounded in the both military and social bodies of care.

Yet frustrations consumed their time, energy, and dignity in having to ask, defend and “jump through hoops.” For example, Wise suffered hearing loss, which she explained, “they said he can’t prove is part of his military experience [to my incredulous WHAT?!] –Yea- They said it’s not proven. He was in Iraq as a deployed military” she told me, “so there is no question that the military should be taking care of that” To further contextualize the materiality of policies or lack thereof, at the onset of this project I mentioned that both Wise and Troy were a part of a unit that had endured significant and persistent loss. One third of the comrades in their unit were killed. Their unit became nationally recognized for the brutality and loss these men endured. Their story was covered in TIME, a documentary was made about them, and Vice President, George Cheney came and had his picture taken with them. Locally they were seen as the heroes of their home towns and persistently celebrated, contacted for newspaper interviews and invited to luncheons, schools and civic organizations. These are not uncommon responses as the tools of institutions work to highlight the heroics and redirect a collective focus from the personal sphere to the public one.

The private sphere revealed the intimate realities, and a disturbing contrast to the public sphere/macro response. When I spoke to Wise and Troy it was clear to me that they had both suffered what appeared to be TBI. There was much they couldn’t remember. Huge chunks of time were lost to them. They both spoke at length to considerable difficulties they continue to struggle with. Kate further compounded the contrast, and spoke to more material realities, telling me of the time and stress, “And he
fought for two years, and I did, too, and it was very, very stressful ... There are times it takes months, years.” The expense was considerable and the desire to give up the fight was equally straining, “it was like a $4,000.00 thing, and you know, we didn’t really have that money, but of course I wanted him to have this tooth, and so I just wanted just to say, “Here, here’s my credit card, just do it.” But then again – then I think, “This is bull crap,” you know?” In all that warriors and supports contend with during deployment, in the altered states of need they return home in, these are indeed formidable, undignified responses to support. Continuing to place these issues at the forefront then allows for the conversation to merge into the public sphere, continuing to challenge broken policies, broken promises and broken politics. Importantly,

A poststructural feminist imperative is to deconstruct discourse not only at the confluence where competing and colliding agendas manifest turbulent waters, but where the waters appear deceivingly serene and well beyond the site of contestation. As poststructural feminists we are not only bound to question who’s needs are being addressed but to acknowledge the historically contingent and contextual nature of exactly who is defining those needs. (Thompson, 2010, p. 121).

Paradoxically Limited

I think I would describe it most like a monkey sitting on your shoulders and also squeezing your head at the same time - I mean I think it's easy to see why the apprehension. Like I said, you're walking into – you're the Butterbar, first off -

[Me: A What?] You’re the Butterbar - a Second Lieutenant -- You're rank is a
gold bar. So you're already the guy who doesn't know his a#* from his elbow.

(Al)

Dwight Conquergood (1985) suggested we enter relationships by begin by starting. Specifically he regarded, “one cannot build a friendship without beginning a conversation” (p. 10). These words rest with me now as I regard the limitations of this project are at once, paradoxical. For one, due to saliency of this topic, the public, political, military and other institutional responses to this topic have literally flooded the public forum with studies, findings and more shocking revelations about the impact of trauma on the body. I was challenged to stay abreast of shifting policies of response in the maelstrom.

Perhaps the greatest limitation to this project lies in the limited post-interview I was able to sustain with participants. I had imagined and planned for participants to view transcripts and offer insights. Delays in transcription held up the process, further delaying the time I needed to assure the accuracy of transfer and the time I was able to get transcripts to them. In the long run, few were able to comply with requests. Though I would have valued more interactive participation, many expressed confidence in my ability to do the project, and them, justice. Roger put it to me like this, “I know what I said and I’m not worried about it.” Their trust was both an honor and significant responsibility.

Time. It was something I both took and gave and still there was not enough. The participants I met with were remarkably generous with their time. They had a willingness to risk and be vulnerable with me as we worked through the process of telling stories and
making sense together. As our conversations unfolded, participants became more thoughtful and expansive. My maturity as a researcher grew with them over time, and yet that same inexperience leaves a footprint I cannot erase. (I was however pretty clear about the distinction between my “a#* from [my] elbow”)

Gender. The difficulty in accessing this population was great. There is a protective shield that assists the limits of their exploitation. Having gotten through the first layer, I was still unable to access female vets. I had hoped to be able to delve deeper into issues of gender and explore the confluence of gendered ideologies from both male and female warrior perspectives.

Content. The amount of material produced given the length of the interviews in addition to the mapping project left me having to make difficult decisions about what to leave in and what to remove and still feel as though I met the goals and rigors of the project and lived up to the trust of participants by addressing their concerns. I was blessed with thoughtful, generous and engaged participants who had more to share than I could address at this time.

Hope: Future Implications

I have thoroughly relished the opportunity to explore the corporeal embodiment of warriors. I am excited to continue to creatively approach the means of thinking about, speaking about and learning about the body in the midst of cultural forces. For instance, this work has led me to find striking similarities between PTSD and PMS, and interestingly, with the way women will “cycle” together. Our disciplined bodies and the potential for intimate [listening] relationships with our bodies continue to be interrupted and redirected through the practices of medicalization and isolation. I feel more
confident in the focusing a continued emphasis toward epistemological and ontological shifts in approaching our current biomedical standards of episteme.

In terms of warriors and support warriors, I think this project has further enlightened the contributions of support warriors and the freight that these warriors also endure. Across the board, warriors want and need continued and consistent emotional support. Moreover, I believe that this work can be used to bring to light the needs of children in our communities living the aftermath and present-math of war. Future implications can be considered and planned for now.

For me the Narrative Maps have been another exciting avenue that I look forward to taking up. The passion for this is related to aforementioned hope to learn more about how to listen with bodies, to what bodies want/need to tell us about living in this world. I think the narrative maps can offer much. For instance, in the course of these maps almost every single person included some form of heart or another on her/his map. There is an intriguing correlation here in that heart disease is a common long term health concern for veterans. Troy’s map was potent in its explanation of his world shaking up and down. In this way we gain, I believe, a more visceral sense of his plight. When I looked at his map I was moved to contemplate how it would be for children to be living in that home. Used in this way and beyond the maps can be useful alternative tools for localizing the needs of warriors and further educating the population about the needs/worlds of warriors/families.

Moving through the telling over the course of these narratives was akin to peeling back layers. Memories opened - stories, thoughts reflections emerged, some poured forth. Paradox and juxtaposition took up space in the body. The temporality of healing rendered
non-linear trajectories. These narrative trajectories were syncopated and synchronized with the maps each person constructed. Like many of the maps, indeed most of them, an ebb and flow traverse/d the body and project. These maps are stories in their own right. Each is a temporal, contextual rendering of life moments that are far too often difficult to articulate. Through them we can glimpse how it is that bodies oscillate through the permeability of space, time and beings in an attempt to reconcile the experience of trauma. Importantly, Harter (2009) invited health communication scholars to embark through our aesthetic sensibilities, “Conferring form is an aesthetic process by which the artist/narrator creates a representation from raw experience” (p. 147). The narrative maps are indeed this “raw experience,” spoken with and through the bodies of those in the midst of healing in the long journey of the aftermath of war.

The maps are poised throughout the project as another narrative, particularly as they have assisted my own understanding and ability to listen through stories. More importantly a deeper understanding through the process was evident with almost every participant. Considering these maps as narratives, I return to Harter (2009) once again. Narratives she told us, “invite us to stretch our imagination to grasp events befalling another individual. To exercise our imagination is to affirm our capacity to move beyond the boundaries of our own bodies and experiences to appreciate others’ storied representations of reality” (Harter, 2009, p.147). These narratives, the stories told, (and re-told here, through another) in combination with the narrative maps serve as a means of hearing more broadly and understanding more deeply to the needs and vulnerabilities of warriors and those who support them. Much lies in our midst, none are easy attainable or answerable.
Closing: An Embodied Inquiry

Paradoxes abound in the very stories that unite us. I too have been confounded. I have been humbled beyond measure. I think of the countless, embodied narrative threads that traverse this project and beyond. It is in the stories, those that move through us, those that come up from within us as embodied in the cultural corporeality of our lived, living, lives. From our bodies those stories traverse the spheres of our existence, from the intimately personal through the institutionally functional and the myriad of all that exists in the spaces between us. The question I wonder is can we hear them, what do we hear, and then, what do we do with what we think we have heard? The art of inquiry is indeed the fodder for vulnerable beings. Treading into territory unknown, we grasp for that which makes most sense. In the process, I came to understand that the bodies of these warriors were taking up space in my own:

A chin resting on a shoulder, an arm draped across the back; I miss my girls. I miss my son. I miss those hugs, vessels of laughter, anguish, and relief - holding. I miss the touch. And it is one of the some-things I noticed when Levi returned. It was harder to touch him. It scared a part of me – it scared that part of me that speaks with and through a body. [I have always been that person, that mother, speaking with them through touch]. And too, I knew it wasn’t all about “where he had been.” He was married in the in-between time. So I know that in part, I am charting a new terrain of being with him – yet for me there was still an unmistakable presence of absences. He came back seemingly laden with silent stories. I heard them in a tighter smile that began back along his clenched jaw-line. I thought I saw it there in his broader shoulders bearing freight. His stories swirled around him - soundlessly. I couldn’t find a way in.
Instead, I sat with the stories of many warriors and many who supported their warriors. Listening bridges worlds, my world and my body is changed in listening. Indeed, Rawlins, (2003) drawing on Levinas (1991) spoke to the act of listening; “dedicated listening ... is a form of surrender, a vulnerability and susceptibility to others” (p. 123). These thoughts, conjectures, experiences as they are written, converge amidst the presence of stories and move through vulnerable being speaking bodies – and on through vulnerable being listening bodies.

Summer evening. Warm. I am hanging with Ivy. Now that they live hours away, the time I spend with them is so very precious - a long pull of ice cold water on a hot summer day. So it was – I am in a state – of contented bliss. Ivy and I have been hanging out all day. Just doing stuff. Today no tensions, demands, or illusions pout around between us. Summer has a way of making space, rest in our lives. Laughing and hugging. I miss the touching the most I think– I miss being our bodies being- together-body-speak. After dinner, Ives and I strolled through the shopping center. Holding hands – [my bliss], I give her momma hugs and kisses with a frequency that she tolerates this day/night. In our trailing, we stop to rest, where all at once we entered a vast array of summer-time families. They, too, had come to linger and play in the heat of a July evening. We sat she and I, resting on the steps, each in our own reverie, intent on those moms and dads, babies and toddlers running, screaming, and laughing through intermittent bursts and blasts. Rocketing plumes of water rained over colors of bodies, bodies of all sizes and shapes. Arm touching, we might interrupt the silence, “look at that little girl’s hair...I know it’s beautiful....did you see that little guy with his dad over there– ohh he is sooo
cute...” Here we sat in presence. Mingling in our own personal, shared and collective - a social storying body. The two/all of us.

There was no one moment - but it moved, drawing me out and back in - sound and vision melded and shifted. I was outside looking and hearing in. The sounds stepped forward. Laughter, shouts, voices and tottering feet all storying a presence in time, space and place. There was a shifting back and forth - a single marker, “mamma- I don’t wannaaaaa gooooo” – to the conglomeration - a collective body beings, space, time and smell - sound was blurry. I could hear the water pelt down on the brick terrace. Sound. The screaming joy of kids running through this comfort and peace -parents and families at rest on this July evening. It was in this passage of blur the terror- thought- feeling – picture entered my being --- “This is what happens right before a suicide bomber walks into a crowd and detonates him/her-self.” And in that space I came to understand that the body stories of warriors speaking through vast bodies - were taking up space in my own.

I reflected further, it was after meeting with Wise, I had dreams. Profound dreams that lead to avenues of past memories – some looming, some lost. [that moment he looked me in the eye and said “I don’t remember any of it”] Troy and I met on a December afternoon. For over two hours – grayish skies framed our presence, pouring in from the windows, pouring down from the sky windows above. I was moved to tears - unsettled - at the conclusion of this interview. Both he and Wise conjured up for me the stark reality – perhaps body memory - that my own brother would have been retuning in matter of [weeks] before stepping on a landmine. At 4 am that morning after interviewing with Troy, I woke – wide-eyed; less than a minute later I received a text from Troy that simply read, “I have more to say.”
It was the thing I worried about most – stirring up for others, these warriors in the process of healing, more disturbing thoughts, unwelcomed presence. Reflecting, I remembered Troy’s curled up hands … vulnerability … another presence in need of presence. I looked at my field notes. “At the start of this interview, Troy’s hand/fists are curled and all wrapped up in his sleeves. This posture – it seemed like there was – for all his size and strength - he seemed small, like a little boy.” I feared I had disrupted Troy – caused harm. And yet it is just this kind of disruption – the rawness of vulnerability that I believe might foster wisdom. This notion is present in Ahmed’s (2004) work as well, having suggested traumas that belong to the ‘personal’ and the ‘national’ are traumas that need to be recovered – opened to account- as opposed to being left/hidden in the past/dark/silence. Sitting with the difficulties – the magnitude of powerful emotions does indeed leave a body-being exposed. This vulnerability has the potential to make way for mutual healing- healing of the self, the other, the social-political body. There is and must be courage both in the speaking and the hearing/listening. Here I am particularly drawn to Gonzalez (2003) who suggested compassion could be understood as, “The willingness to open one’s self to see hear, feel, taste, and smell everything about another’s experience – at the same time we share our own experience without intentional or strategic, fearful distortions that it might also be experience by those open to community with us” (p. 85). I find the seeds of compassion necessary in the presence of vulnerability. Warrior’s stories are indeed stories of us and for us all and as such require mutual vulnerability in attending to storied-body- beings. Warriors in particular are paradoxically vulnerable and potentially wise beings.
I didn’t need my field-notes to remind me – the presence of that body had/has been speaking through me all this time – that image courses through my own body. I am thus reminded that, “supporting our troops” requires a full-(em)bodied “us” and a “we” in need of coming together. Clearly Frank (1997) articulated this notion having prompted us with the ideal that, “stories can heal, the wounded healer and the wounded storyteller are not separate, but of different aspects of the same figure” (p. xii). He regarded the communicative body as one that, “communes its story with others; the story invites others to recognize themselves in it” (p. 50). Thinking Troy’s body was expressing vulnerability at the onset of the interview – rather ironically, I felt far more vulnerable at the close of our interview. Indeed, I was visibly shaken. Time and again, I have come to understand that when we move each other – we are indeed moved. Listening to stories traverse the terrain of our mutual bodies has the potential to heal our collective body-beings.

At the onset of this project I spoke to a commitment for reflexivity throughout the research process. Such a reflexivity braided the works of Carpspecken (1996), Behar (1996), and Alvesson & Skoldberg (2002) along with Smith (1999) Dewey (1937) and countless others. Each scholar called not only for the accounting of a self and other, but to attend to the covert privileging of texts, knowledges, class, race, power and gender. In the process, such a reflexivity required deep, embodied listening. As the culmination of these narratives attest, it is indeed profound attention to listening which allows for a healing that can shift our beings, beyond that which we knew or know. Healing in the aftermath of war requires that we acknowledge our vulnerabilities – that which we do not know, have yet to experience. Such a healing emerges in the presence and attention of others and with others (Charon, 2005, Frank, 1995). Healing then is by no means the
absence of angst but rather it occurs in the presence and acknowledgment of our vulnerabilities in the midst of our angst.

Both a narrative and poststructural feminist lens call us to move beyond that which we know. We are called to move beyond the tenants of a biomedical model that would preface an individualistic response to healing as we attend to warriors. We are called to move beyond institutional hierarchies that want to harbor “their own” from the storms that manifest in those very shores. Clearly the intricacies of these narratives, a dearth of recent public address and layers upon layers of extensive histories of war related trauma continue to reveal deep and profound disruptions to the body-beings of warriors. Equally compelling are the voices of support warriors whose bodies for years have silently harbored our unfathomable angst in the public din of silence. This trauma is at once a potent reverberating pulse.

The heft of trauma that moves through bodies, across multiple spheres, over vast terrains and seas is indeed a potent reminder of the power that lies in our midst. If trauma can move through so many beings across countless webs of in/significance, surely we are collectively capable of tapping such a reverberation to foster a more compelling response to healing. An embodied inquiry suggests that the power of healing lies in presence. Perhaps more – the power lies in moving into – moving through that which we do not know. Presence requires a ‘we.’ ‘We’ are the publics with a willingness to move into, through and with the realm of warriors, to be present in the midst of an angst we have asked, by intention or default, those warriors to bear. Such a presence requires a ‘we’ that not only honors and witnesses the vulnerabilities of others, but rather a healing ‘we’ requires willingness (reflexivity) to encounter our deepest vulnerabilities as well.
At its core, feminisms emerged up through countless vulnerabilities. In doing so the world was challenged to imagine beyond that which we thought we knew. And yet, imagination might as easily be viewed as another form of vulnerability; a vulnerable tool; a vulnerable episteme. Imagination requires us to move beyond the realms of our trade and trouble the epistemological waters in matters of deep healing. Conquergood (1985), Frank (1995, 2004), and Harter (2009) each have uniquely called us to draw on, and to draw deeply from the well of our imaginations. In his call for dialogic performance, Conquergood (1985) elevated three “indispensable qualities” for engaging in “honest intercultural understanding” as “energy, imagination and courage” (p. 10). Courage then is one cornerstone of our vulnerable selves – the courage to imagine, to move (with energy) through our fears, angst and trauma. I hear courage, imagination and vulnerability in Frank’s (1994) calls for generosity, reflection and attentiveness. “How to hear the stories – neither to admire them but to make a part of our own practices of generosity – does require reflection” (p. 7). Finally, Harter (2009) calls scholars to draw on “imaginative logics as sensemaking and knowledge-producing resources” (p. 148). Such a call moves us through vulnerabilities and toward courageous, energized acts of generosity, presence and wisdom.

Health communication scholars are pivotally poised to encounter imagination as a means of moving toward deeper, far more compelling avenues of healing. Imagination is indeed a vulnerable tool; one that may be used to discover the compelling spaces, crevices and fissures that reside between us all. These are not beyond our means but rather emerge up from the everyday moments of everyday lives. Here we are confronted (confounded) with choices about how it is we will enter the realm of another. Vulnerably
coupled with imagination might be perceived as exponentially more frightening (loss of control, predictability). Yet paradoxically, this untapped harbor offers exponentially unimaginable possibilities. There is much to explore in the everyday moments. Wisdom and vulnerability reside in our midst, compose our lives. In our pursuit of health and healing, in our attempts to know and heal through trauma, in the aftermath of these wars listening for the harmonies of wisdom and vulnerability is a just and worthy cause.
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With journalists hosts, David Brancaccio and Maria Hinjosa.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS

WARRIORS:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank - Branch</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Num. tours</th>
<th>Tour of Duty</th>
<th>Currently:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radar</td>
<td>Lt. Colonel Army (nurse)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-Vietnam 1-Iraq</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Pre-deploy</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Active Marine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralf</td>
<td>Air Force Supply</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>U.S. Base commander</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kip</td>
<td>Capt. Army Nat. Guard</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Active Reserve Guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tad</td>
<td>Major Army</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-Desert Storm 1-Iraq</td>
<td>Professional Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJ</td>
<td>Major Nat. Guard</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Professional Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wise</td>
<td>Marine</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heath</td>
<td>Lt. Colonel Army</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-Kosovo 1-Iraq</td>
<td>Professor Medical Dr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>University student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Marine</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>University student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>University student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raven</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-Kosovo 2-Iraq</td>
<td>University student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>Army</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>University student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJ</td>
<td>Army</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1-Iraq</td>
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<td>Baylor</td>
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**SUPPORT WARRIORS:**

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<tr>
<th>Intimate Partners:</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship/Role</th>
<th>Parents:</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship/Role</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>35</td>
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<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Mother of son Desert Storm Vet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sammy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Married to Tad</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Mother of Wise Marine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Married to BJ</td>
<td>Sori</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Mother of son Iraq Vet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jace</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Fiancé - Baylor</td>
<td>*Roger</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Father of Kip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Divorced Spouse</td>
<td>*Mack</td>
<td></td>
<td>Father of son Iraq vet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Married to Kent</td>
<td>*Chester</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Father of Pete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Married to Al</td>
<td>* Also Vets</td>
<td></td>
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*Also Vets*
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT BREAK-DOWN

### Warriors -18 (M)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>VETS</th>
<th>ACTIVE</th>
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<td>Rory</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeta</td>
<td>Baylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raven</td>
<td>Al</td>
</tr>
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<td>AJ</td>
<td>Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>Kip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>Tad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wise</td>
<td>BJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>Radar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heath</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td>10 vets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OIF/OEF</strong></td>
<td>8 active military</td>
</tr>
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### Support/Warriors:

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<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Dads</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Alice</td>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>Roger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>Sorie</td>
<td>Chester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sammy</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Mack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spouse – 7 (F)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dads</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moms-3</td>
<td>Dads-3</td>
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### Support/ Warriors

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<td>University 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings (3)</td>
<td>Alex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>Pam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total: 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total: 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td><strong>Total: 1</strong></td>
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</table>
APPENDIX C: PROJECT OUTLINE

Title of Research Proposal:

Coming Home: A Post-Structural Feminist Exploration of U.S. Warrior Re-Integration into Family and Society

Investigator(s) Information

Primary Investigator
Name: Marie Thompson
Department: COMS
Address: 420 Seventh Street
Email: mt336902@ohio.edu
Phone: 740-525-6992
Training Module Completed? X Yes □ No

Co-investigators
Name: NA
Department: 
Address: 
Email: 
Phone: 
Training Module Completed? □ Yes □ No

Advisor Information (If applicable)

Name: Dr. Raymie McKerrow
Department: COMS
Address: Lasher Hall 212
Phone: 740-593-4843
Email: mckerrow@ohio.edu
Training Module Completed? X Yes □ No
Title of Research:
Coming Home: A Post–Structural Feminist Exploration of U.S. Warrior Re-Integration into Family and Society

Researcher:
Marie Thompson

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

The purpose of this project is to identify ways in which you as a veteran (and those who support you), experience societal re-engagement with friends, families, and organized communal life. I am especially interested in the communication and relational processes involved in such an endeavor. I plan to interview veterans who have returned from the Iraq and Afghanistan ongoing wars. These veterans would range in rank from enlisted personnel to officers. Ultimately, I want to better understand how those of us who did not serve on the frontlines can best help veterans through the process of transition and reintegration from combat to “home.”

The interview process will take approximately 90 minutes and will consist of questions that allow you to specify what your own coming home process has involved. You will NOT be asked to describe or reveal any specific combat experience.

At the end of the interview you will be asked to identify a support person who might also be interested in participating in an interview that would speak to their experiences and perspectives of the reintegration process. This person could be anyone you found most supportive during your reintegration process.

Please note that if at any time, and for whatever reason, you wish to decline from answering any specific questions(s), or otherwise feel the need to stop the interview process, your wishes will be respected.
Risks and Discomforts

*There are no known risks in this project. I will not be asking you to disclose or relay any combat experience. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with either the questions or the interview process, you may stop and terminate the interview.*

*Please note: As I will be recording the interviews, your voice may be recognizable, and therefore, you might not want to say anything that would put you or others at risk. However, once the audio files are transcribed, they will be destroyed. (See confidentiality section below).*

Benefits

*Beyond the benefit of having someone listen with care, there are no anticipated - immediate or personal -benefits. However, this project hopes to inform practical and theoretical concerns for all those individuals who are involved in the process of coming home in the aftermath of Iraqi and Afghanistan Wars.*

*This project hopes to aid in identifying valuable communicative means of assisting U.S. vets and the communities to which they return, reintegrate in the aftermath of war. The implications for individuals, the families and communities to which they attempt to return, and society as a whole, are both immediate and long term. Through the process of these interviews, I hope to acquire nuanced understandings of the reintegration process and the more distinct needs of our warriors, both now and as the future unfolds. This project seeks to expand notions of “supporting our troops” beyond symbolic artifacts (yellow ribbons, bumper stickers and other rhetoric of “support”) to a far more inclusive and relational process. Because veterans and their families suffer on behalf of us all; in the face of complex traumas, seeking how it is that we might all aid in the reintegration process becomes a social imperative.*

Confidentiality and Records

*Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants. Only the primary investigator will have access to the raw data. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcription may last over a period of two to three weeks. Once transcriptions are completed, the digital files will be destroyed. The remaining transcripts and field notes will only include pseudonyms. Those requesting data will not have access to any identifiable material. If requests for data are made, only the transcripts, as coded, will be provided.*

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, and a committee that oversees the research at OU;

**Compensation**

*There is no compensation for this project.*

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:

*Primary Researcher: Marie Thompson, 740 - 525-6992; mt336902@ohio.edu OR*
*Faculty Advisor: Dr. Raymie McKerrow; 740-593-4843; mckerrow@ohio.edu*

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature____________________ Date________________

Printed Name_________________
APPENDIX D: OHIO UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM – SUPPORT PERSON

Title of Research:
Coming Home: A Post–Structural Feminist Exploration of U.S. Warrior Re-Integration into Family and Society

Researcher:
Marie Thompson

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

The purpose of this project is to identify ways in which veterans and those who support them experience societal re-engagement with friends, families, and organized communal life. I am especially interested in the communication and relational processes involved in such an endeavor. You have been asked to participate in this study as a person who has or is currently supporting a veteran in the process of “coming home.” Your experiences in this role may offer valuable insight as to how we might best meet the needs of returning soldiers. Ultimately, I want to better understand how those of us who did not serve on the frontlines can best help veterans through the process of transition and reintegration from combat to “home” now, and as their future unfolds.

The interview process will take approximately 90 minutes and will consist of questions that allow you to specify what your role as support person has involved. Please note that if at any time, and for whatever reason, you wish to decline from answering any specific questions(s), or otherwise feel the need to stop the interview process, your wishes will be respected.

Risks and Discomforts
There are no known risks in this project. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with either the questions or the interview process, you may stop and terminate the interview.

Please note: As I will be recording the interviews, your voice may be recognizable, and therefore, you might not want to say anything that would put you or others at risk. However, once the audio files are transcribed, they will be destroyed. (See confidentiality section below).
Benefits
Beyond the benefit of having someone listen with care, there are no anticipated -
immediate or personal -benefits. However, this project hopes to inform practical and
theoretical concerns for all those individuals who are involved in the process of coming
home in the aftermath of Iraqi and Afghanistan Wars.

This project hopes to aid in identifying valuable communicative means of assisting U.S.
vets and the communities to which they return, reintegrate in the aftermath of war. The
implications for individuals, the families and communities to which they attempt to
return, and society as a whole, are both immediate and long term. Through the process of
these interviews, I hope to acquire nuanced understandings of the reintegration process
and the more distinct needs of our warriors, both now and as the future unfolds. This
project seeks to expand notions of “supporting our troops” beyond symbolic artifacts
(yellow ribbons, bumper stickers and other rhetoric of “support”) to a far more inclusive
and relational process. Because veterans and their families suffer on behalf of us all; in
the face of complex traumas, seeking how it is that we might all aid in the reintegration
process becomes a social imperative.

Confidentiality and Records
Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants. Only the primary
investigator will have access to the raw data. Interviews will be digitally recorded and
transcribed. Transcription may last over a period of two to three weeks. Once
transcriptions are completed, the digital files will be destroyed. The remaining
transcripts and field notes will only include pseudonyms. Those requesting data will not
have access to any identifiable material. If requests for data are made, only the
transcripts, as coded, will be provided.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information
confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections,
  whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review
  Board, and a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Compensation
There is no compensation for this project.

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:
Primary Researcher: Marie Thompson, 740 - 525-6992; mt336902@ohio.edu
OR
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Raymie McKerrow; 740-593- 4843; mckерrow@ohio.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:
you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
you are 18 years of age or older
your participation in this research is given voluntarily
you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature_________________________ Date____________________

Printed Name________________________
First, I want to thank you for your willingness to meet and speak with me. I would like to acknowledge the sacrifices you have endured on behalf of our country and your participation in military service. Though I cannot fully imagine all that you have experienced, lost, suffered and/or survived, I acknowledge that it is indeed significant; my hope is that you might find a measure of relief in this opportunity to be heard and to be listened to even as you share.

I will not be asking you to talk about any specific incidents related to your combat experiences. So, unless you choose to do so, please know that I will not be asking for any combat details. However, in the event that you chose to discuss any, please know that I will listen without judgment, criticism, or suspicion. I believe that a part of my own service to you and to our country lies in a willingness to witness with honor for all you have sacrificed. This project stems from a deep commitment to work towards understanding how re-integration into family and society occurs for veterans returning home.

Is there anything you need from me or would like to know about me before we begin?

Interviewee (pseudonym): __________________________  Time of interview: _______
Place: _________________________________  Date: ________________
Gender: ________________________________  Age: ___________________

Background Context:
Could you tell me about what made you decide to join the military and specifically the ______(branch).

Deployment Departure:
Can you tell me about the day you found out you were going to be deployed (for the first time)? What were you thinking and/or feeling? Who did you turn to?
Were there any particular feelings/emotions that you remember or were you especially aware of? (I was afraid I might … I was excited to…. I was worried about…..)
How did you prepare to leave?
If subsequent deployments:
Tell me about being deployed for a second and third time.
Leaving Combat – Military Debriefing Process:
Can you describe how it felt to leave combat?
As you look back on the debriefing process, what stands out for you as particularly noteworthy (memorable) now that you are home?
If you were going to design a debriefing phase – what critical features would it include?

Coming Home:
Tell me about your return.
How did you reorient yourself?
Can you describe the moment when you felt /knew you were home?
Can you describe the places in your home and or community that felt most comfortable to you? Least comfortable? and why?
What drew you to these places?
Can you describe a time when you felt the greatest amount of support and comfort?
Can you describe a significant day, moment, time, or person that most marks your experience of returning from combat to home?
What feelings seem to persist throughout your reflections?
Could you identify any patterns that seem to persist for you throughout your reintegration process?
Looking back over the course of time, are there any challenges that stand out as particularly meaningful for you?
Are there challenges that persist? Or have diminished?

Presently
If you were going to draw a picture or a symbol of your experiences – what would you draw? Can you explain?
Is there anything else you remember that you would want to share about this time?
Anything I missed?
First, I want to thank you for your willingness to meet and speak with me. I hope that between us, we can add something of significance in the effort to alleviate suffering for you, your peers and all of our county’s warriors. I would also like to acknowledge the sacrifices you have endured on behalf of our country and your participation in military service. Though I cannot fully imagine all that you have experienced, lost, suffered and/or survived, I acknowledge that it is indeed significant; most likely a very heavy burden to bear. And, I hope that where any lingering anguish resides, you might find a measure of relief in this opportunity to be heard and to be listened to even as you share.

I will not be asking you to talk about any specific incidents related to your combat experiences. So, unless you choose to do so, please know that I will not be asking for any combat details. However, in the event that you chose to discuss any, please know that I will listen without judgment, criticism, or suspicion. I believe that a part of my own service to you and to our country lies in a willingness to witness with honor for all you have sacrificed. This project stems from a deep commitment to work towards understanding and ending the suffering of veterans as they return home.

Is there anything you need from me or would like to know about me before we begin?

Background Context:

1) Can you take a few moments to talk to me about your relationship with X?
2) How did you come to be a support person for X?

Deployment Departure:

1) Can you tell me about the day you found out X was going to be deployed (for the first time)? What were you thinking and/or feeling? Who did you turn to?
2) Were there any particular feelings/emotions that you remember or were you especially aware of? (I was afraid I might ... I was excited to.... I was worried about....)
3) How did you prepare for her/his departure?
4) If subsequent deployments:
   Tell me about being deployed for a second and third time.

Coming Home:

1) Tell me about the day X returned. (What were you thinking, feeling? What expectations did you have?)
2) How has X’s homecoming impacted your relationship?
3) How do you support each other and who supports YOU?
4) How have your support systems shifted or changed since being a support person for X?
5) Can you describe a significant day, moment, time, or person that especially represents X’s experience of returning from combat to home?
6) What feelings seem to persist throughout your reflections?
7) Could you identify any patterns that seem to persist for you throughout your reintegration process? (as you provide support and care for X)
8) Looking back over the course of time, are there any challenges that stand out as particularly meaningful for you?
9) Are there challenges that persist? Or have diminished?
10) Do you ever feel vulnerable?

Vets in general
11) If it were up to you, what would you ask for in terms of support for all vets? For X in particular?
12) What would you identify as the most important needs to be addressed for vets
   1. Immediately upon return, b. within the first year? And c. over time?
13) How would you describe the vets you have encountered upon their return from these wars?

Presently
1) If you were going to draw a picture or a symbol of your experiences as a support person—what would you draw? Can you explain?
2) If you were going to draw a picture of the one thing Vets most need as they return home what would that be?
3) Is there anything else you remember that you would want to share about this time? Anything I missed?
APPENDIX G: VET DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Gender: 
_____ Female  b. _____ Male

Age: ______ years

Identify your Rank & Branch of Military
_____ Active Military  _____ Veteran  _____ Retired Military
_____ Air force  _____ Army  _____ Navy  _____ Marine  _____ Active Reserve Guard (ARG)  _____ Reserve

______________________ (Rank)

I have had ___ (#) of deployments

I have served in
_____ Iraq  b. _____ Afghanistan  c. _____ Both Iraq and Afghanistan
d. _____ in addition to _______________________

I am: _____ Single  _____ Married  _____ Separated  _____ Divorced

I have children ___ (#) of children

I currently:
_____ Live alone
_____ With _____ with out children  _____ have no children
_____ Live in parents household
_____ With _____ with out children  _____ have no children
_____ With friends
_____ With _____ with out children  _____ have no children
_____ With Spouse
_____ With _____ with out children  _____ have no children
_____ Other
_____ With _____ with out children  _____ have no children
APPENDIX H: SUPPORTS DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- Gender:
  - ____ Female  ____ Male
- Age: ______ years
- Identify your Rank & Branch of Military
  - ____ Active Military  ____ Veteran  ____ Retired Military
  - ____ Air force  ____ Army  ____ Navy  ____ Marine  ____ Active Reserve Guard (ARG)  ____ Reserve
  - ______________________ (Rank)
- I am: ____ Single  ____ Married  ____ Separated  ____ Divorced
- I have children ___ ( # ) of children

My Relationship with this Warrior can be defined as:
- Fellow vet ____
- friend____
- family member ____
- parent ____
- fiancé ____
- marriage partner ____
- other ____

Living Status:
- a. ___ Live alone
  - i. ____ With  ____ with out children  ____ have no children
- b. ___ Live in parents household
  - i. ____ With  ____ with out children  ____ have no children
- c. ___ With friends
  - i. ____ With  ____ with out children  ____ have no children
- d. ___ With Spouse
  - i. ____ With  ____ with out children  ____ have no children
- e. ___ Other
  - ____ With  ____ with out children  ____ have no children
APPENDIX I: IRB APPROVAL FORM

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

7

Project Title: Corning Home: A Post-Structural Feminist Exploration of U.S. Warrior Re-Integration into Family and Society

Primary Investigator: Marie Thompson
Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor: Raymie McKerrow
(if applicable)

Department: Communication Studies

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

Approval Date 4/25/09
Expiration Date 4/24/10

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Maps</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>Radar</td>
<td>phone</td>
<td>[1:36:09] + [0:11:42] + [1:10:02]</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/6/09</td>
<td>Joe</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Beatrice</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Alex</td>
<td></td>
<td>1:49:46</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>7/29/09 &amp; 8/11/09</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>F-t-F</td>
<td>[0:47:35], [0:18:59], [0:55:27]</td>
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<tr>
<td>8/6/09</td>
<td>*Roger</td>
<td>F-t-F</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Sammy</td>
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<td>(tape malfunction)</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>8/13/09</td>
<td>Cora</td>
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<td>[2:16:12]</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>University</td>
<td>F-t-F</td>
<td>No tape</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity Notes, Resources/Tools and Potential Resources:

L. C.
(Student-Initial talk in lasher computer lab. Sent 2 emails. Left one voice mail. has a friend that she supported through coming home. Also thought she might be able to set up interviews with her friend and her friends mom and partner)

Joe (non-deployed)
Met on the beach-Spoke for about 45 minutes DATE. Did not record or do formal interview as Joe was only preparing for deployment. As a Marine airman – he would be deploying as part of an airplane mechanic crew. 16 days over and so many back.

L T.
R. S. Emailed July 13. Responded 7/16-Anticipates he will respond week of July 20-
R. is a family friend and was also L’s supervisor in the Guard. He is a General and has been in Iraq. Battalion Commander of National Guard in Columbus.

T. T.:
S. S. – emailed DATE -followed up w/ S via email. He was involved in Gulf-War. Out by the time we went into Iraq. Asked if he would be willing to pass on to his brother who has been to Iraq- emergency nurse. no response yet.
C XXX. Lt Kernel. Army R.O.T.C. in OH. Dis T or I send this on to him??? Cant’ remember

E.W. - Hosting a yoga- de-stress workshop. Facilitator of this program has worked with Returning Vets – providing therapeutic strategies. Emailed and was willing to have me meet w/ she and O over tea to discuss my project and her work. Workshop was canceled – rescheduled for October. Need to follow-up and call to meet with E (Art of Living)

J. S. - 7/11/09
Emailed project attachments to J. She sent my info to A. Has invited me to Colorado Springs. - 2 VA Hospitals, two other hospitals, officers in her neighborhood, - thinks I can get all 20 interviews done over August out there.....Waiting to hear from A. 7/19/09 - J sent A’s phone # and contact info.

A. N.- phone conversation 7/20/09. Follow-up w/ Email + attachments 7/20/09
A. S.- sent info
M. S. - psychologist
C. E. - pyschologist

K. H.

A Ds- A.D.’s brother, A, went to school w/ Li (though younger) she gave her sister in-laws email address.

S. D. - email is

S. R. (non-deply) –
G.- 7/20/09 – put packets together with project explanation and note. Kdelivered. 7/22/09 – responding -G and her son were involved with Desert Storm. I may interview her just given her experience.

J. (G’s son- an Desert Storm vet) - 7/20/09 – put packets together with project explanation and note. K delivered.
7/22- response from mom, indicates Desert Storm

J.X. emailed 7/6/09- has a cousin in Buffalo. Sent materials she will forward them on.

V. W- Emailing – J. (Husband) is in DC working with an organization of Vietnam vets. She will look up some local folks. And J might be able to provide contacts as well.

A F

XX-women’s–
XX-vet center

325
B. B. (Director Upward Bound for Veterans – UMASS Boston) Emailed July 24, 2009. Responded same day

Contact info - Joiner Center for The Study of War and Social Responsibility - their director is Kevin Bowen (Kevin.Bowen@umb.edu) and you should let him know what you're doing, that you've been in touch with me, and that you'd like to drop by the Joiner Center while you're in town.

http://www.voamass.org/Services/VeteransServices/OperationStandDown/tabid/8082/Default.asp

S.E.R.V. – Service Education for Returning Vets. (returning to college)
Emailed director and asst 8/3/09– sent flyers and attachments
Left flyers w director at American Legion in Marietta

M. S.
R. P. – Army Retired, Lt. Colonel
– VA psychiatrist

A. J
R. M. – emailed 7/21/09. Anita suggested he might be involved with these persons in some way.
A. S.: 2 tours
S. S.: A’s support person

L.P. - phone conversation DATE. Emailed documents DATE

L. P (Jr) – Iraq Email conversation. Re-sent documents 7/21/09. Thinks she has about 3 or so other people that might be willing to participate.

7/22/09
FROM: G – message she and her son - with Desert Storm. I may interview her just given her experience.

7/27/09
INTERVIEW: G M

7/28/09
INTERVIEW: R A – Veterans Affairs – services

7/29/09
INTERVIEW: Ll E -Support/spouse of vet
INTERVIEW: A Ms (contact via Anita James) met in his home - Athens

August 2009

8/4/09
INTERVIEW: A S – In Athens
8/6/09
INTERVIEW: LlE -Support/spouse of vet
INTERVIEW: Se S (A’s support person)

8/9/09
Exchange info w/ Ke Cs. Physicians asst VA- contact to hang flyers

8/11/09
INTERVIEW: LM - Support/spouse of vet
INTERVIEW: EM - Vet

8/13/09
INTERVIEW: PS - Support/spouse of vet
EMAIL: SDa

8-17-09
Attended / TAPED MEETING @ library those also interested in providing support for vets -left cards
Spoke/Emailed – c b w/ attachments to pass on
Called Lt Kernel Br – left a message. Director of Family Readiness program- has names for me
INTERVIEW : with SD – Osteopathic hospital – director of faculty (3:30)

8-18-09
Left another message for Kernel B
Emailed TF and RC
Response from T. F. – out of state for the week
Spoke w Kel Br - sent subsequent email- email letter, + @ attachments- he will sent them out to some folks who work with him in the family readiness program.
K. sat in on a disabilities meeting for faculty orientation (WVUP) that was all about returning vets – potential meetings and perhaps I can follow PMc and her progress in getting this program off the ground

8/21/09
INTERVIEW: RC.

8/22/09
Spoke with contacts from L. M. (E. and C. C.)- not willing to participate
Reminder – have person call first. Folks were not happy.

8/23/09
INTERVIEW: SE. – Vet in Dayton (previous Student of M’s)

8/24/09
Wrote in journal – potent dream after deep thinking about interview w Stephen
Contact w TFs – Med Dr…. set up meeting for tomorrow the 25th
EMAIL TO: Tea Cal – contact from RC (his support person)
EMAIL FROM S, saying he contacted ML. and that his Mom will email me this week to set up an interview
EMAIL TO: M. L – (contact given by SE.)
EMAIL TO: BD. - to forward to her niece

8/25/09
INTERVIEW: TF (in Athens)
[medical Dr., Family practice and emerg med. Prof at Osteopathic school her (@OU) – gave me his wife’s # and permission to contact for a possible interview

8/26/09

8/27/09

Left messages (voice w/ J. S.)
Called J. S’s office spoke w/ B. M. who is willing to assist me w interviews and w finding vets willing to interview. Find vets and help w schedule and provide space for interviews.
Phone #’s for B. M. - office: (J. S. is going national with the SERVE project – busy travelling)
EMAILED To: Bob info and attachments.
Set up meeting times for interviews tomorrow
Left voice message for A. F. about meeting/interview
EMAILED To: S. E. – sent SERVE info
EMAIL FROM: T. C – YEA!! need to schedule with her!

8/28/09

CLEVELAND INTERVIEWS:
INTERVIEW: Jeffrey Hr, Cell: (253)592-9380, E-mail: xiaver14@hotmail.com-
INTERVIEW: Adam W, Cell: (440)320-4852, E-mail: evasii@hotmail.com
INTERVIEW: Alex Za, Cell: (252)622-5188, E-mail: zazueta3@yahoo.com

8/29/09

Emailed B. M. @ SERV – he seemed upset w me when I left b/c I needed to cancel an interview w him??? Apologized tried to set it right.

8/31/09

EMAIL: Te Ca
Set up meeting for 11:00 Baker Center - Tomorrow
EMAIL: B. C., sent attachments – she will post and pass along

B. C.
Disabilities Specialist/504 Coordinator
Unlawful Harassment Compliance Officer
Academic Resource Center
Marietta College

EMAIL FROM R. M.: all clear – back pain makes him short and grouchy at the end of the day. Set up appointments for Thursday

EMAIL: contacts/participants have 3 appointments for Thursday. A’s Dad (Support), C. C. (vet) B. M. (Support)

EMAIL: S. D

Heard back from S. D. – She is still very much interested.
I returned-asked if we could try to set something up for this week

9/1/09

INTERVIEW: Ta Ca (support – R’s wife)
Received call from A’s friend M. (in Tampa) will do a phone interview with him tomorrow

Received call from G H– (from B M.) will him to interview schedule on Thurs.

Received EMAIL FROM B M. – can do 1:15 Thursday
FOUR interviews for Thursday!!

9/2/09
Received EMAIL FROM S. D. She can do this week – but now I can’t fit her in…rrrrgg. Need to get back to her and reschedule.

9/3/09
Interviews:
12-1: Mr. W. – (A’s Dad (support)
1:15-2:15: B. M. (support)
2:30: G H
6:00 (Serendipitous fit J.B) was open
7:30: C. C.

Letter to those who were referred:

Dear ….
XYZ game me your contact information and thought you might be able to offer some assistance for my research/dissertation project.

I am interested in both meeting with and interviewing those vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan (OIF/OEF). The project seeks to learn more about how we (communities, care providers and families) might best understand and assist the reintegration process as these young women and men return from combat.

I have attached two documents that briefly describe the project and have my contact information.
If there is a chance you know of anyone who might be willing to meet with me or might otherwise direct my efforts I would greatly appreciate your assistance.
Feel free to distribute the documents to whomever (or where-ever) you think might be useful/appropriate.
My hope is to interview 20 vets and 20 support people by early September
I thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Dear XXX
My friend …. mentioned you and your work with Upward Bound recently
and thought perhaps you might be able to offer some assistance.  
I am a graduate student at Ohio University working on my dissertation research.

I am interested in speaking with OIF/OEF vets and those who support them about the process of "coming home" and reintegration with families, friends and communities. I want (us all) to learn more about the healing, relational and communicative processes that come about as we all work to cope with the vast shifts and changes in our lives brought about in the aftermath of these wars.

I have attached two documents that briefly describe the project.  
I am wondering if you could help me by:
1) Allowing me to interview you;
2) Perhaps posting the fliers; and/or
3) By offering contact info for other vets or support people that might be willing to meet and interview with me. All interviews are of course strictly confidential.  
I would be so very grateful for any assistance you might offer.

Before I close, it would be important for me that you know that I approach this project with the utmost respect, compassion and care for our returning warriors. Perhaps more specifically, I have both a vested and more personal connection to the topic as well. My son is now a Cpt. in the Army and preparing for his 2nd "tour" of Afghanistan. I often struggle to know how best to support him now. I worry of course for his future (his physical, emotional and spiritual health) - for all warriors - given all that we know and are experiencing now. I would like to be a part of offering support and solutions to address these concerns.

I am hoping to come to MA in the next week or two and will need to conduct aprox 40 interviews by the 2nd week of September. Any assistance you might offer would be greatly appreciated. I thank you for your time and consideration.

Many Blessings  
Marie Thompson

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