

# The Relationship between the Military's Masculine Culture and Service Members' Help-Seeking Behaviors

Rachel Reit  
*Marquette University*

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MILITARY'S MASCULINE CULTURE AND  
SERVICE MEMBERS' HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIORS

by

Rachel Reit

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ABSTRACT  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MILITARY'S MASCULINE CULTURE AND  
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Rachel Reit

Marquette University, 2017

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, over 2.5 million active duty U.S. military service members have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (Knobloch & Wilson, 2015). Of those who return as veterans, twenty percent experience serious mental health problems, and only 30-40% of them seek help or treatment (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008; Wilson, Gettings, Hall, & Pastor, 2015). Recently, the military has increased efforts to encourage help-seeking behaviors among service members and to normalize mental health treatment. However, the military's masculine culture and emphasis on strength and toughness inhibits the success of these efforts.

The present studies investigate the tension between military masculinity and mental health help-seeking behaviors. Study 1 uses ideological criticism to examine the recruitment websites of the four main branches of the military in order to assess the ways in which they communicate about masculine values and mental health. Study 2 presents an ideological analysis of two memoirs from individuals who have experienced life in the military and mental health problems upon returning home. The authors' accounts are evaluated in comparison to the messages portrayed on the websites in order to determine whether real veterans have experiences that reflect the messages conveyed on recruitment websites. The two studies reveal what the military communicates about its culture and about mental health (Study 1) and what service members actually experience of military culture and mental health (Study 2). Suggestions for the normalization of mental health treatment among service members are discussed.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, over 2.5 million active duty U.S. military service members have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (Knobloch & Wilson, 2015). Due to demand for the volunteer-based American armed forces, these service members face unique stressors as they spend more time overseas, less time at home, and are called for repeated deployments. Twenty percent of veterans who served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan experience mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008; Wilson, Gettings, Hall, & Pastor, 2015). Of the 20% of returning service members with mental health issues, only 30-40% seek help or treatment (Wilson et al., 2015).

Recognizing the implications of these statistics, the military has begun to encourage members to seek professional help for mental health problems. The military has developed programming and training, has funded research groups, and has required members to complete psychological health measures in attempts to reduce stigma and to facilitate service members' help-seeking behaviors (Bowles & Bates, 2010). Despite these recent efforts, of the more than 500,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans with mental health issues, only 30-40% seek help (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008; Wilson et al., 2015).

Researchers have argued that the military embraces masculine values that emphasize physical and mental fitness and self-reliance, and its culture acts as a barrier to service members' seeking treatment for mental health problems (e.g. Fox & Pease, 2012). In a culture that values physical and mental strength, toughness, and self-reliance, attempts to encourage seeking professional help for mental health issues may fail. Previous research in psychology has established the relationship between the masculine

culture of the military and mental health problems among veterans (Fox & Pease, 2012), but communication research within the context of the military remains in its early stages. The relationship between the masculinity of the military's culture and its efforts to encourage mental health help-seeking behaviors must be explored further, especially in regard to the messages conveyed by the military. In order to understand better the opposing messages service members receive about mental health, research in the communication discipline should be conducted to provide a new perspective on the tension between military culture and mental health. Ultimately, further research could uncover ways to increase service members' utilization of mental health services and to reduce the number of mental health problems they experience.

The present study examines this relationship and employs a communication-based framework to analyze the military and mental health. In this thesis, I first establish the scope of mental health problems common among military members today. I then introduce some of the military's efforts to encourage help seeking among service members and veterans. Next, I explore the military's masculine culture as a barrier to help-seeking behaviors. To investigate what the military communicates about its masculine culture and members' mental health help-seeking behaviors and what service members actually experience of the military's culture and mental health discourse, I present two complementary research studies that both employ ideological analysis. The first study analyzes the recruitment websites of the four main branches of the military (Army, Marines, Navy, and Air Force) and assesses them for evidence of their masculine nature and the accessibility and prominence of information about help-seeking resources. The second study analyzes two veterans' memoirs and the ways in which the authors'



experiences and ideologies relate to the messages portrayed on the websites. While Study 1 explores the messages that the military communicates about masculine values and mental health as exhibited on the recruitment websites, Study 2 examines the ways in which the military's messages affect service members' lives, according to their own accounts. Finally, I discuss suggestions for the normalization of mental health treatment among service members.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Military members face significant mental health problems, especially after they return from combat situations, but many fail to seek treatment (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008; Wilson et al., 2015). The military has implemented efforts to convince members to seek help for mental health problems, but the messages it sends regarding help seeking conflict with the masculine image many service members strive to maintain. Masculine values encouraged, and sometimes necessary, for service members form a barrier to seeking mental health help (Braswell & Kushner, 2012; Fox & Pease, 2012; Lorber & Garcia, 2010; Whitworth, 2008). Each of these assertions will be explored in-depth below.

### **Mental Health and the Modern United States' Military**

Over one fifth (20%) of military personnel who have served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, or about 500,000 individuals, experience mental health problems upon returning from active duty (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008; Willingham, 2014). Similar rates of American adults (20%) experience a mental illness in a given year, but only 4% of adults in America live with a serious mental illness that interferes with or limits their life activities (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2015). In contrast, approximately 17% of Iraq War veterans have been diagnosed with a severe mental illness (Hoge et al., 2004). The rate of major depression among troops is five times higher than for civilians. Intermittent Explosive Disorder, which manifests as extreme anger, is six times more common in veterans, and the prevalence of PTSD is nearly 15 times higher for service members than for civilians (Willingham, 2014). Service members experience serious mental disorders at rates much higher than civilians. Additionally, symptoms of

depression, PTSD, alcoholism, aggressive behavior, and suicidal thoughts often occur together in war veterans, thus exacerbating problems and impeding functioning. These issues correlate with unhealthy behaviors such as unsafe sex, impair the development of personal relationships, cause stress and disruption in marriages, yield negative outcomes for veterans' children, limit productivity, and lead to significant economic costs (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). These mental health problems and subsequent challenges are linked strongly with combat experience and exposure (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006). Veterans from the Army and the Marines report worse mental health and physical health than do those of the Air Force and Navy (Eisen et al., 2012).

In addition, the suicide rate for military service members has risen over the last few years. In 2008, the military suicide rate surpassed that of civilians, and it has remained higher, especially for the Army and the Marines, since then (Jones, Hourani, Rariden, Hammond, & Werbel, 2012). Male veterans commit suicide at rates two times higher than civilian men. In 2014, veteran suicides accounted for 18% of all suicide deaths in the U.S., but veterans make up only 8.5% of the population. Each day, roughly 20 veterans commit suicide in the United States (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016b). Research conducted by VA revealed that after adjusting for age and gender differences, the suicide risk for veterans is 21% higher than that of U.S. civilians. Rates of suicide among active-duty service members in all branches of the military also have risen in the last several years. In 2015, 265 active troops committed suicide in comparison to 145 in 2001 (Zoroya, 2016). During 2012, the year that claimed the most active-duty lives by suicide, the Army's suicide rate was about 30 per 100,000, a rate much higher than the civilian rate of 12.5 per 100,000. The Navy suicide rate increased

from 11.6 per 100,000 active duty troops in 2008 to 14.5 per 100,000 in 2009 (Braswell & Kushner, 2012).

### **Failure to Seek (And Stigma Against) Treatment**

Despite the large number of people affected by, and the struggles that accompany, serious psychological problems, only 30-40% of afflicted service members seek help or treatment (Hoge et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2015). Hoge et al. (2004) discovered some significant barriers to seeking help among members of the Army and Marines. Of the 731 participants that met the screening criteria for a mental health disorder, 65% reported fears that they “would be seen as weak,” 63% indicated “My unit leadership might treat me differently” as a perceived barrier to treatment, 59% agreed with “Members of my unit might have less confidence in me,” and 50% thought “It would harm my career” (p. 21). Although Warner, Appenzeller, Mullen, Warner, and Grieger (2008) found reductions in these numbers a few years later, the most frequently endorsed barriers to help seeking still were “My unit leadership might treat me differently” and “Members of my unit might have less confidence in me.”

Even in 2011, members of the National Guard demonstrated similar concerns in accessing care for mental health problems. Gorman, Blow, Ames, and Reed (2011) uncovered that 45% of their sample listed the fear that help seeking for mental health would appear on their military records as a barrier to receiving treatment. Barriers similar to previous studies emerged as 31% of troops did not want to seem weak, 24% thought it was embarrassing to seek treatment, and 25% worried that doing so would harm their careers. In comparison, civilian spouses of National Guard members endorsed these barriers for themselves only 21%, 17%, and 7% of the time, respectively (Gorman et al.,

2011). Similarly, a 2011 Navy quick poll revealed that 40% of officers and 38% of sailors believed that their supervisors would treat someone differently if he/she sought mental health treatment (Acosta et al., 2014). The results of these studies and the growing, and increasingly publicized, understanding of the relationship between mental health and military service have led the military to strengthen its efforts to normalize mental health treatment.

### **Military Efforts to Encourage Help-Seeking Behaviors among Service Members**

As the military has recognized the prevalence of mental health disorders among service members and the impacts these problems have on their functioning, it has begun to encourage help-seeking behaviors and to normalize receiving treatment. To reduce the stigma surrounding mental health care, the military has employed annual mental health screenings (Wilson et al., 2015). Additionally, when returning from a deployment, all members must complete the Post-Deployment Health Assessment (PDHA). Depending on the severity and urgency of detected mental health concerns, members will be interviewed and evaluated immediately or referred to mental health professionals for continued treatment (Hoge et al., 2006). In the last decade, the Department of Defense (DoD) has quadrupled the number of mental health professionals it employs in attempts to assist active duty and transitioning members of the military (Cronk, 2015), and the Obama administration increased funding for mental health services for veterans by almost 75% (Diaz, 2016). The DoD also has implemented the Embedded Behavioral Health (EBH) program that fosters relationships between mental health professionals and Army personnel. The EBH program promotes conversation about mental health among members of the Army and calls for commanders to be advocates for help seeking (Acosta

et al., 2014). The DoD launched the website inTransition which provides coaches to establish continuity of mental health care during transitions and the Real Warriors campaign which serves to increase public awareness of service members' mental health problems and to encourage troops, veterans, and their families to seek help. The Military Pathways program, accessible to all branches, also helps to reduce mental health stigma through education, activities, and a web portal that offers screening and resources for mental health (Acosta et al., 2014).

Bowles and Bates (2010) outline a large number of military organizations and programs that contribute to its resilience building efforts. For example, the international Technical Cooperation Program (TCP) provides mental health screenings, works to improve the mental health support available during deployments, and attempts to reduce the stigma around mental health care in the military. The Defense Centers of Excellence for the DoD strive to promote resilience and engage in significant military suicide prevention efforts (Jones et al., 2012). The Yellow Ribbon Program supports National Guard members and families and provides education and services regarding health and benefits, such as access to counseling programs. The Psychological Health Strategic Operations programs focus on initiatives to prevent the development of mental health disorders during deployments. The Deployment Health Clinical Center and the Center for Deployment Psychology offer health resources for deployment-related problems (Bowles & Bates, 2010). The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress funds and conducts research to build resilience and to identify risk factors in service members. Military Community and Family Policy launched the website Military OneSource to facilitate help-seeking efforts in military members and their families. The website, designed for all

branches, ranks, and generations of military, provides 24 hour access to care through hotlines and other resources. The family members of military personnel also can use the website to seek help for themselves or to educate themselves about the needs of their service members. Additionally, Military OneSource offers access to civilian health care professionals to provide reassurance of confidentiality and to distance military work from mental health treatment (Jones et al., 2012).

In addition, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers numerous benefits for veterans, including a smart phone app developed to help manage PTSD symptoms (Williams, 2014). VA's National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder leads the world in PTSD research and education. Their AboutFace campaign and website allows individuals to learn about PTSD from veterans who have experienced it and about therapies that worked for each veteran. Videos from veterans cover topics like "How I knew I had PTSD," "Why I didn't ask for help right away," and "What treatment was like for me" (AboutFace, 2016). VA hosts a veterans crisis line (1-800-273-8255) for those in need of immediate assistance or mental health care, and it operates the website Make the Connection which provides information for friends and families, active service members, and veterans about signs and symptoms of mental health problems, resources for treatment, and conditions that many members experience. VA also offers a free online course called Moving Forward: Overcoming Life's Challenges that teaches veterans and service members skills to aid in overcoming stressful problems (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016a). The National Resource Directory, a partnership program among VA and the DoD, connects service members, veterans, and their families with support programs across the country.

This non-exhaustive list establishes the scope of the military's efforts to encourage help-seeking behaviors in service members and families (see Appendix A for a table of the surveyed resources and for more information). Although the effort is there, the military has not succeeded in normalizing mental health treatment among its members (Gorman et al., 2011; Hoge et al., 2004). Perhaps that is because these efforts form a tension with the values of the military's culture. Service members may feel pulled between programming that encourages help seeking and the masculine principles that permeate their service starting from their first interactions with the military, both of which are endorsed by the military. Previous research has shown that masculine norms do act as a barrier to accessing mental health care (Acosta et al., 2014; Fox & Pease, 2012), thus linking the military's culture with its failure to normalize mental health treatment.

### **The Masculine Culture of the Military**

Much research has been published about the manifestation of masculinity in the military, and even more literature examines men and masculinities in general. In this section, I will provide a brief overview of masculinity, an investigation of masculinity in the context of the military, and an exploration of the influence of the military's masculine culture on help-seeking behaviors.

#### **Masculinity**

Connell (2005) recognizes that gender identities are not fixed traits but are produced through human action. She subverts biological interpretations of gender and presents them as socially constructed entities, thus introducing power relations among different manifestations of gender. Masculine ideologies that exist at the top of the gender



hierarchy exhibit hegemony, which privileges the ideology of one group over another (Foss, 2009). Hegemonic masculinity, then, is the most powerful form of masculinity. It dominates over other kinds of masculinity and over all types of femininity. Because masculinity is socially constructed, the conception of masculinity that occupies a dominant position may change over time, depending on societal influence (Connell, 2005). Traditionally constructed hegemonic masculinities encourage qualities like risk-taking, physical toughness, aggression, violence, emotional control, and self-discipline (Hinojosa, 2010). Trujillo (1991) identifies five features of the hegemonic masculine ideal in American culture: “(1) physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality” (p. 290). He articulates familial patriarchy as representing masculinity in that males dominate over women and children in the family. Common representations of this third feature cast men as “breadwinners” and “family protectors.” The frontiersman symbolizes nostalgic masculinity that emphasizes bravery and the outdoorsman; cowboys act as an archetypal image of this version of hegemonic masculinity (Trujillo, 1991). To provide a complete history of the concept of masculinity is beyond the scope of this project. For deeper insight into masculine values and ideologies, see Spence and Helmreich (1978) and Connell (2005).

### **Military Masculinity**

Military masculinity has emerged as a distinct form of cultural masculinity. Connell (1985) identifies three different types of masculinity that create the foundation of the military: “physically violent but subordinate to orders on the one hand, dominating and organizationally competent on the other hand,” and “the professionalized, calculative

rationality of the technical specialist” (p. 9). In this way, militarized masculinity takes on several different forms. Belkin (2012) defines military masculinity as a “set of beliefs, practices and attributes that can enable individuals – men and women – to claim authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military or with military ideas” (p. 3). He explains that the masculinity derived from the military’s culture can be operationalized in many different ways. For some, the trustworthiness and competence required to perform in the military may certify one’s masculinity. Others interpret physical rhetoric, such as muscularity or tattoos, as documentation of strength and toughness. Masculinity also could be expressed through martial values and a military record (Belkin, 2012). Belkin further argues that these conceptions of military masculinity function as the archetypal form of masculinity. In this way, being muscular or demonstrating martial values makes an individual masculine, but doing so through an affiliation with the military amplifies masculine status. The military, therefore, engages with the discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Connell (2005) explicitly links the military with hegemonic masculinity as she says, “violence on the largest possible scale is the purpose of the military; and no arena has been more important for the definition of hegemonic masculinity in European/American culture” (p. 213). Connell purports that the military has influenced cultural definitions of hegemonic masculinity, and it reinforces those definitions by shaping its members to conform to the hegemonic ideal. The military provides access to resources that allow an individual to fulfill a hegemonically masculine identity. Through military training and service, members become physically fit, receive economic security, and are sanctioned by the country to use violence and aggression in order to dominate

other peoples and nations (Hinojosa, 2010). Whitworth (2008) also recognizes this relationship in saying that militaries employ “a hegemonic representation of idealized norms of masculinity which privilege the tough, stoic, warrior who is capable and willing to employ violence to achieve whatever ends into which he may be ordered” (p. 127). Hegemonic representations of masculinity have pervaded military culture for many years. Morgan (1994) echoes Connell’s sentiment as he suggests that “of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct. Despite far-reaching political, social, and technological changes, the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity” (p. 165). Similarly, Hooper (1999) addresses the popular ideology that “military service is the fullest expression of masculinity” (p. 479). Clearly, an intimate and long-standing relationship exists between masculine identities and the military.

Illustrating the link between hegemony and archetypal discourse, Prividera and Howard (2006) assert that “hegemonic masculinity is reified in the construction of archetypal male (e.g., hero, soldier, father)...role models and in who are identified as national representatives” (p. 31). They present archetypes as manifestations of ideology that often remain invisible to the public. Howard and Prividera (2015) recognize the media-driven archetype of the American service member as the ideal hero and a strong warrior. The warrior hero most often is conceptualized as “heterosexual, white, of unrivalled physical and mental constitution, sexually potent, morally and nationally superior, and surpassing non-warriors in most respects” (Howard & Prividera, 2015, p. 222). Howard and Prividera argue that any perceived or actual frailty, including mental health problems, threatens the masculinity of the warrior hero. Cultural interpretations

and media depictions of service members endanger their mental health as they stigmatize any weakness and frame it as feminine. Gilbert (2014) illustrates this challenge in regard to physical injuries through his analysis of Bobby Henline, a war veteran, amputee, and standup comedian. His investigation of “nationalistic masculinity,” in which suffering through a war and the infliction of pain are inherently masculine and getting wounded is emasculative, supports the conception of service members’ roles as warrior heroes. The healthy, strong male body visually communicates masculinity, and injury detracts from that depiction. In this way, physical and/or mental health concerns threaten masculinity as they apparently indicate weakness.

Brown (2012) investigates the ways in which military recruitment strategies employ masculine ideologies. To provide a comprehensive overview of masculine appeals used by the military branches, she analyzed recruitment texts that were published between 1970 and 2007. She argues that masculine appeals are fundamental to the military but that each branch employs masculinity in a variety of ways. The Marine Corps utilizes traditional constructions of martial masculinity and the “warrior hero” almost exclusively. The Army, Navy, and Air Force, however, encourage various types of masculinity in their recruiting advertisements in order to attract a broader base of consumers:

The civilianized but still masculine offers made by the branches have included adventure and challenge – a modern analogue to the frontier masculinity that allowed a man to test his physical and mental abilities – economic independence and breadwinner status, dominance and mastery through technology... (Brown, 2012, p. 5)

Evidence of Trujillo’s (1991) features of hegemonic masculinity, such as occupational achievement and frontiersmanship, pervade Brown’s definitions of masculinity.

In addition to these conceptions of masculinity, Brown (2012) also introduces hybrid masculinity, “which combines egalitarianism and compassion with strength and power” (p. 5). In the 1990s, this form of tough yet sensitive masculinity emerged as a new ideal. After the Cold War, the United States presented itself as a “benevolent” country, ready to serve “as a model of democratic government and enlightened gender relations” (Brown, 2012, p. 27). Traditionally, enemies in war have been feminized and American patriotism masculinized, but in the Iraq War, Saddam Hussein was depicted as hypermasculine while the United States was portrayed as “progressive and sensitive” as well as tough and aggressive (Brown, 2012, p. 27). In early 2002, the Air Force employed constructions of hybrid masculinity on its recruitment website. At the time, they were the only branch to display a “Humanitarian Outreach” page that highlighted humanitarian missions to help those in need, thus appealing to recruits through a sense of hybrid masculinity.

While the Marine Corps relies almost solely on martial masculinity, the Air Force, Army, and Navy blend different types of masculinities in their recruitment advertisements to increase representation and to appeal to larger audiences (Brown, 2012). As explored above, the Air Force uses appeals to hybrid masculinity as it emphasizes caring for others, and it appeals to career development through a focus on job training and a “working-class masculinity that values skilled labor and economic independence” (Brown, 2012, p. 16). Perhaps most notably, the Air Force stresses its technological superiority through which it offers masculine values of dominance and control. In contrast, Army recruitment strategies blend traditional conceptions of warrior masculinity with newer forms of business masculinity that privilege economic security.

Finally, Brown (2012) argues that the Navy has shifted its appeals between “an emphasis on career and benefits and an emphasis on adventure and challenge” (p. 15). Although all of the branches appeal to masculinity in their recruitment materials, they do so in ways that employ various types of masculinity.

Recruiting materials do feature women and occasionally portray them enacting typically masculine roles, but Brown (2012) posits that “they do so in such a tokenized way that the associations with manhood and masculinity are retained” (p. 5). When women are not featured in a tokenized position in recruitment advertising, they usually fulfill traditionally feminized roles such as nurses. However, when Brown’s work was published, women were unable to serve in combat roles in the military, thus eliminating them from traditionally masculinized combat/action roles in the advertisements. Brown argues that because the military masculinizes so many noncombat roles, women in the military still need to conform to masculine standards. Brown’s work provides significant implications for the present study that examines the recruitment websites of the Army, Marines, Navy, and Air Force as she evaluated the websites in 2000 to augment her analysis of recruitment advertising. Her constructions of masculinity were considered in terms of masculine ideologies in the present research. Brown’s research contributed to the coding framework for masculinity in both Study 1 and Study 2 as I treated technology, economic security, adventure, and hybrid masculinity as components of masculinity in the research process.

Although usually attributed to men, masculinity is not exclusive to men. Masculine women demonstrate traits typically considered masculine, such as power, aggression, strength, and independence (Weinstein & D’Amico, 1999). Women in the

military face significant challenges as they first must overcome barriers of visual masculinity and socially constructed assumptions about gender in order to adopt traditionally masculine ideals and to fit the warrior hero archetype more closely (Prividera & Howard, 2006). The archetypal soldier represents the antithesis of femininity (when femininity is seen as weakness, compassion, dependence, and kindness), and “for the warrior hero, to falter is female” (Woodward, 2000, p. 652). The relationship between masculinity and the military relates to all genders, but individuals’ experiences of pressure to perform militarized masculinity may be more challenging for those who do not identify as men.

In addition to the individualized types of masculinity encouraged among military members, the military itself represents national masculinity (Prody, 2015). This relationship dates back to ancient Athens and continues to influence Western society today. Connell (2005) posits that “the military and government provide a fairly convincing *corporate* display of masculinity” (emphasis in original) (p. 77). The United States’ ability to defend and protect itself is dependent on its military. When this ability is threatened, a nation experiences a masculinity crisis (Hooper, 1999; Prody, 2015). The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, undermined images of the United States’ masculinity. To reclaim it, the U.S. initiated its military and invaded Iraq in order to demonstrate that it was still the most powerful nation in the world (Mann, 2006). War provides an occasion to perform national masculinity and to establish power over others. In order to maintain this sense of masculinity, a nation must “instill and reinforce in its men the traits beneficial to military endeavors, such as readiness to engage in violence, emotional control, and self-reliance” (Prody, 2015, p. 443). In this way, both the military

as an organization and its individual members are expected to exhibit masculine values, thus exacerbating its hypermasculine culture and potentially impeding help seeking.

**Influence of masculine culture on help-seeking behaviors.** Members of the military become acclimated to its masculine culture before they deploy and potentially experience trauma that can trigger future mental health disorders. Brown (2012) confirms that “the gendering of military service begins long before a recruit reports for basic training” (p. 185). Service members’ induction into the organization and the prevalence of masculine values during training immediately create a barrier to future mental health help seeking. The military’s masculine culture could discourage troops and veterans from receiving mental health treatment. Lorber and Garcia (2010) advance that socialization in traditionally masculine ideologies decreases one’s likeliness to seek mental health treatment and increases the difficulty of discussing emotions. Because men generally are socialized into a masculine gender role that stresses emotional control, independence, self-reliance, and the rejection of weakness, they tend to seek mental health treatment much less frequently than women (Mozes, 2015; Wendt & Shafer, 2016). Men also attach a greater stigma to mental health treatment than women do (Vogel, Wade, & Hackler, 2007), although the stigma surrounding mental health problems and treatment exists for most members of American society (Greene-Shortridge, Britt, & Castro, 2007).

The hypermasculine culture of the military may intensify these effects in troops and veterans. Many members of the military still fear that mental health records will damage their careers and potential for advancement, cast them as weak, and/or cause them to be treated differently by peers (Gorman et al., 2011). The military’s culture expresses pride in its strength, toughness, and self-reliance; these traits may formulate



reluctance in members to admit “weakness” and to seek help for their problems (Burnam, Meredith, Tanielian, & Jaycox, 2009). Additionally, cultural values of the military such as devotion to duty and mission, subordinating individual needs to serve the collective, and adhering to the chain of command emphasize a warrior mentality and exacerbate the existing stigma against mental health help seeking (Weiss, Coll, & Metal, 2011).

Whitworth (2008) claims that the military’s masculine ideology instigates its denial of the prevalence and severity of PTSD among service members; in a culture that values emotional control, being traumatized by combat disrupts conceptions of masculinity, thus leading to the stigmatization of those with PTSD. She posits that “emotional pain and fear fundamentally contradict the ideals of hypermasculinity so carefully inculcated into the soldier recruit” (Whitworth, 2008, p. 120) and that PTSD acts as a “profound betrayal of the norms of hypermasculinity” (p. 122). Braswell and Kushner (2012) explicitly link the masculine culture of the military to its heightened rates of suicide and argue that the masculine ideology of the military could in itself lead to psychological health problems in troops.

Research demonstrates the masculinity of the military and its recent commitment to destigmatizing help seeking (e.g. Belkin, 2012; Bowles & Bates, 2010; Brown, 2012; Connell, 1985). However, not much research has examined official military texts to determine how they portray these concepts. This research project builds on preliminary research I conducted in Spring 2016, that analyzed the Army and Marines recruitment websites for evidence of masculine values and mental health discourse. Although in the current project I initially proceeded in the direction that my previous findings indicated, I remained open to engaging with new themes and insights as a different method and the

addition of two websites and two memoirs introduced new findings. In this research, Study 1 evaluates the recruitment websites of the four main branches of the military (Army, Marines, Navy, and Air Force), and Study 2 presents an analysis of two memoirs written by military veterans. The websites represent official military texts and the memoirs provide a window into service members' actual experiences of life in and after the military. Incorporating these two perspectives provides a complementary and more comprehensive investigation into the military's culture and mental health discourse.

Study 1 was designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: In what ways do the military recruitment websites manifest evidence of the military's masculine culture?

RQ2: In what ways do the military recruitment websites manifest evidence of the military's efforts to encourage help-seeking behaviors among service members?

Study 2 was designed to answer the following research question:

RQ1: How do the memoirs of military veterans relate to the messages of masculine culture and help seeking found in Study 1?

Both Study 1 and Study 2 rely on ideological criticism in order to discover the beliefs and assumptions about military culture and mental health evident in the texts (Foss, 2009).

### **Ideological Criticism**

Ideological critics examine many elements of a text to uncover an ideology, or a pattern of beliefs that structures one's worldview (Foss, 2009). In the present research, the website analysis offers insight into the ways in which the military communicates about its masculine values and mental health discourse, and the memoir analysis assesses

the ways in which the military's messages affect service members' lives. Understanding the ideologies conveyed on the websites (Study 1) provides a foundation for the analysis of the ways in which those ideologies manifest in service members' lived experiences (Study 2).

Foss' (2009) description of ideological analysis as a four-step process provides the general research method for both Study 1 and Study 2. First, a researcher must identify the presented elements of a text by looking at its observable features. For example, images, phrases, colors, and language can be considered at this stage. Focusing on a particular subject or theme will guide the analysis of presented elements. After the presented elements have been identified, the researcher should evaluate the suggested meanings of the presented elements by contemplating what the surface elements communicate; this forms the basis for the identification of ideological tenets (Foss, 2009). The third step requires the grouping of suggested elements into categories to create a framework for ideology and for the extraction of themes and ideas. Finally, the researcher must consider the functions of the ideology and its consequences for the audience.

Van Dijk (1995) and Cormack (as cited in Brennen, 2013) explore ways in which to analyze discourse from an ideological framework, and their research provides the specific method for the present studies. Van Dijk contends that ideologies can be determined from elements of discourse like surface structures, syntax, and semantics. He investigates the ability of surface structures such as large type and the hierarchical nature of headers to communicate organizational ideologies. Word order, agency in language, word choice, and topics of focus also convey ideological values. Similarly, Cormack presents five components of an ideological method. He proposes assessing the content

(vocabulary, stereotypes), structure (binary oppositions, opening and closing), style (color, design, genre), and mode of address of a text to determine the ideologies it conveys. Additionally, he encourages the consideration of what is absent, missing, or unsaid as he argues that identifying what is absent from a text is critical in understanding the ways in which ideology influences the text. The examination of these features of the websites and the memoirs guided the specific method for the present analysis: surface structures, syntax, word choice, word order, agency in language, topics of focus, content, structure, style, mode of address, and what is absent.

## METHOD

### Study 1

To examine the military's masculine culture in conjunction with its efforts to encourage mental health help-seeking behaviors, an ideological analysis of the recruitment websites of all the major branches of the military (Army, Marines, Navy, and Air Force: [goarmy.com](http://goarmy.com), [marines.com](http://marines.com), [navy.com](http://navy.com), [airforce.com](http://airforce.com), respectively) was conducted on a laptop computer in December, 2016. The mobile sites have different layouts, and only the desktop versions were considered. Due to the large number of directions available on the sites and to the prominence (and importance) of main page images, only images on the homepages and first-level subpages were assessed. In the image analysis, images in which gender identity could not be assumed were not considered. Direct quotations taken from the websites are reproduced in this paper exactly as they appear online to retain typographical importance.

The recruitment function of these websites allows for the examination of the argument that those inducted into the military learn the military's cultural values and norms from the beginning of their experience. Troops begin their relationship with the military during the information-gathering stage prior to enlisting. The messages that each branch conveys on its recruitment website provide a foundation for military life and embody the branch's culture. Because the military itself does little recruiting, examining the branches allows for an accurate depiction of recruiting strategies (Brown, 2012). In her analysis of recruitment advertisements, Brown (2012) justifies the use of recruitment materials to determine military ideologies: "recruitment is one of the military's most

public faces. It is an attempt to legitimate service in the eyes of Americans, offering up reasons to serve and potential ideological bases for military culture” (p. 6). She also explains the importance of recruitment strategies in constructing ideals about military masculinity: “...they create and propagate images of service members for public consumption that attempt to legitimate and normalize particular understandings of soldiering and related ideas about gender” (p. 185). As Brown posits, the recruitment sites offer rich data from which to extract military ideologies.

Additionally, the recruitment websites are generally the first to appear in a Google search of each military branch (for the Army, the recruitment site is the second) and have web addresses that make them simple to find. They provide a number of different resources for service members and their families. Because of these factors, current members of the military also might utilize these sites to gain information. Other websites offer access to support and mental health resources for all members of the military and their families. However, these sites exist in a separate online space and serve the purpose of attending to health and mental health concerns. I am interested in assessing the ways in which the military branches themselves portray access to mental health resources, thus justifying my analysis of each branch’s recruitment website.

This thesis builds on preliminary research conducted in Spring 2016, that analyzed the Army and Marines recruitment websites for evidence of masculine values and mental health discourse. The present study expands on that research and assesses all four branches’ recruitment websites. An initial investigation of the websites revealed stark discrepancies between the visual elements of masculinity on the Army and Marines websites and on the Navy and Air Force websites (see Appendices B-E). The Army and

Marines sites feature completely black backgrounds with bold text and images displaying active service members. The Navy's homepage is white and blue and has a wider variety of images, and the Air Force's homepage contains a video that comprises the entire computer screen. I grouped the Army/Marines and Navy/Air Force websites together based on these discrepancies.

In the current study, an ideological analysis of the four recruitment websites was conducted to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the military branches as portrayed on their websites. This analysis focuses on two main categories: masculine values/culture and mental health discourse. In order to identify the military's masculine culture linguistically, I looked for words or phrases that convey toughness, (physical) strength, and self-reliance (Burnam et al., 2009). I also coded words and phrases that refer to militaristic identifications of strength such as "warrior" and "hero" based on Howard and Prividera's (2015) conception of the warrior hero. Additionally, I attended to themes that reflect Brown's (2012) constructions of masculinity such as appeals to economic success, technology, adventure, hybrid masculinity, and martial masculinity. I identified generic male language, which uses male pronouns to refer to both sexes or to a person whose gender is not known, as evidence of masculine language devices (Earp, 2012). I also coded man-linked language as indication of masculine language. Man-linked terms, such as the word "fireman," incorrectly "identify a job as linked only to a male" (Ramsey, 2011, p. 14). I conducted image analyses that indicate how many men, women, and people of color are pictured. I considered how the people in the images are portrayed, the role they have, their attire, and who is absent from the photos (Brown,

2012). For mental health, I examined all pages of the websites for the words “mental health” or related words such as “therapy,” “counseling,” and “psychological services.”

To structure the general research method, I used Foss’ (2009) four steps to ideological analysis. I first went through the websites to identify presented elements such as overall appearance of the websites, color schemes, language usage, and visual images and depiction of sex and ethnicity to uncover the material manifestations of the military’s ideologies (Foss, 2009). I analyzed specific elements such as word order, agency in language, content, and what is absent as suggested by Van Dijk (1995) and Cormack (as cited in Brennen, 2013). I made notecards for each observed element that related to the topics of masculinity or mental health based on the criteria mentioned in the previous paragraph. Analysis of the Army’s website generated 37 notecards, the Marines’ website necessitated 58, the Navy 46, and the Air Force 38. I then went through the notecards to identify the suggested elements and made notes on the back of each notecard regarding what the presented elements are communicating. I grouped the notecards into categories based on the suggested elements in order to formulate ideologies evident on the websites. I then examined the consequences and functions of the extracted ideologies on the intended audience.

## **Study 2**

To understand how those in the military are affected by the military’s masculine culture and its efforts to encourage help-seeking behaviors, as portrayed on the recruitment websites, I read and conducted an ideological analysis of two memoirs: Kayla Williams’ (2014) *Plenty of Time When We Get Home: Love and Recovery in the Aftermath of War* and Brian Castner’s (2013) *The Long Walk: A Story of War and the*



*Life That Follows*. I use memoirs as research texts for this thesis because I intend to assess how the military's masculine culture and its stigma against help seeking impacts real service members. Memoirs provide rich and extensive insight into an author's personal experiences. While Study 1 explores the messages that the military communicates about masculine values and mental health, Study 2 examines the ways in which the military's messages affect service members' lives, according to their own accounts. Although I do not know absolutely if the authors of the memoirs saw the websites, the results from Study 1 feed into Study 2 as they both comment on the same themes within the context of the military. The memoirs give accounts of life in the military and mental health problems upon returning home. Williams reflects on her time in the Army and Castner recounts his life with the Air Force. I encountered Williams' memoir in my Communication in Military Families course, and it optimally served the purpose of this study. I then derived criteria for the selection of the second memoir from Kayla Williams' book. To parallel Williams' book, the second memoir needed to be published within the last 5 years, be written by someone in the Navy or Air Force (in order to represent the two groups in Study 1), be written by a man, so I would have the perspective of both sexes, and explicitly discuss the author's time in the military in Iraq/Afghanistan and his mental health upon returning home. The first book I found that fit all of these criteria, Castner's memoir, was chosen for the research.

The memoirs were evaluated in comparison to the messages portrayed on the military recruitment websites in order to determine how veterans' experiences relate to the messages conveyed online. The framework of ideological criticism structures my analysis of the memoirs and allows for the assessment of the values and beliefs that the

authors hold about the military's culture and mental health (Foss, 2009). My goal was to discover the ideologies embedded within the memoirs and to relate them to those portrayed on the websites. To uncover the ideologies present, I employed the same general and specific methods as in Study 1. I read through the two memoirs and highlighted phrases that related to the topics of masculinity and mental health. I created notecards with the presented elements (text only) and analyzed what they were suggesting. The analysis generated 44 notecards for Williams' (2014) memoir and 48 notecards for Castner's (2013). I then grouped these suggested elements into categories and organized them into communicated ideologies. I identified consequences of these ideologies and considered the ways in which they relate to the ideologies conveyed on the websites.

## FINDINGS

The Army, Marines, Navy, and Air Force recruitment websites all engage with the discourse of masculinity in some form. Due to clear differences in visual presentation (see Appendices B-E), the Army/Marines and Navy/Air Force websites were evaluated as two groups. The ways in which the military's masculine culture manifest in recruitment appeals differ among the sites, but all of the websites employ career and economic success as an appeal, and all sites emphasize the necessity of physical fitness in service members. Interestingly, explicit differences represent the masculine cultures of the branches. While the Army/Marines websites emphasize the pride and masculine identity of the self internally, the Navy/Air Force sites link masculine identity to externally-oriented features such as pride in technological advancements. None of the websites significantly considers mental health concerns or provides resources for members seeking help for mental health problems, although they all do mention mental health practitioners (psychiatrist, psychologist, etc.) as career options.

In their memoirs, Williams (2014) and Castner (2013) consider both the masculine culture of the military and their mental health. As a female soldier in the Army, Williams offers a different perspective of the military's culture than does Castner, a male member of the Air Force, but they both suggest that it is a male-dominated environment and express the importance of martial masculinity to military identity. Additionally, they each describe their struggles with mental health problems, the stigmatization of weakness cultivated by the military, the lack of information they received from the military about mental health resources, and the inadequate quality of mental health care they encountered.

## **Study 1: The Army and Marines Recruitment Websites**

Analyses of the imagery and text on the websites were conducted to evaluate the presence or absence of, and the portrayal of, the two main themes of masculinity and mental health. The following themes comprise the ways in which the sites depict masculinity: masculine imagery, masculine language, masculine ideologies (Brown, 2012), and military pride. Mental health discourse was generally absent on the websites. These two issues and subsequent themes will be elucidated below.

### **Depictions of Masculinity**

The masculine themes of the Army and Marines' websites supply concrete evidence of the military's masculine culture. As demonstrated in Appendices B and C, both the Army and Marines recruiting websites convey masculine values based on visual elements such as color scheme. Their similar layouts rely on completely black backgrounds with shades of gray separating content with the linked resources at the bottom of the home page. Black is often associated with power, authority, and strength, and when combined with the powerful color red, as on the Marines' website, it offers an aggressive visual (Parker, n.d.). When navigating to other subpages through the linked tabs, the Marines' website backdrop and color scheme remain the same, whereas the Army's retains the black background as a border but provides white boxes for black and gray text. Color schemes that emphasize the masculine values of power and strength permeate all pages of these websites, thus emphasizing their masculine nature.

The images portrayed on the websites clearly privilege the masculine and reserve passive, noncombat roles for women. The language employed, especially on the Marines

website, appeals to masculine concepts like danger, warriors, risk, and physical strength (e.g., Trujillo, 1991). Superlatives were used on both websites as a boasting tactic to reinforce masculine identity. Competitive language and boasting, or speaking with excessive pride (Decapua & Boxer, 1999), typically is associated with masculinity (Miller, Cooke, Tsang, & Morgan, 1992). Brown's (2012) conceptions of various masculinities as expressed in older recruitment advertising proved relevant in this research. Pride also emerged as a theme of masculinity. Previous research in several contexts has established pride as a stereotypically masculine trait (Stanley, 2007), and some research even examines "masculine pride," or the pride one feels in being masculine (Jakupcak, Lisak, & Roemer, 2002). On the websites, allusions to military pride appear to indicate strength and fitness in addition to the competence required to serve in the armed forces. In this way, the military pride theme further explicates the military's masculine culture and its depiction on the Army and Marines websites. The depictions of masculinity on the Army and Marines sites associate masculinity with an internal, self-focused identity. All of these factors contribute to the masculine ideology conveyed on the recruitment websites.

**Masculine imagery.** The visual depictions of men and women on both websites literally privilege the masculine. An analysis of 58 images featuring 109 people on the Army's website homepage and first level subpages revealed that 80% of the people depicted in the photos were men. Although this seems unbalanced, the presence of women pictured (20%) is consistent with the percentage (16%) of women in the Army (CNN Staff, 2013). However, it is the passive depiction of these women that should cause concern. On the homepage, the slideshow of images contains 14 men and only one

woman. Each of the large background images on subsequent pages of the site features men. The only exception is on the “For Parents” page in which a soldier who appears to be a woman comprises the background, but her back is turned to the viewer as she hugs her father who is the focus of the page. All of the images on the “Army Family Strong” page depict males as the soldier of the families and reserve women for the wife/mother role. Almost all of the 86 men in the image analysis are wearing Battle Dress Uniforms (BDUs aka camouflage) or officer uniforms. Several women of the few in the images observed wear an Army sweatshirt or fulfill different roles in the Army such as a dentist. Although many of the women are wearing BDUs, they are behind computers or just standing around, but they never appear in combat action or with a weapon. In contrast, men are depicted as versatile and capable of filling many roles such as action/combat, science, engineering, training, family, educational, mechanical, and civilian roles. Overall, the photos largely portray males as strong, confident, and as soldiers with weapons and in action. The images convey more ethnic diversity than gender diversity; 69% of the people featured in the image analysis are White, and many people of color are depicted in prominent image locations.

Similarly, the images on the Marines’ recruitment page depict mostly male Marines. There are no pictures of women on the homepage, including in the large pictures that scroll across the screen in slideshow form. A large image of three men defines the “Strategic Warrior” page, and of the 14 officers portrayed on the “Marine Officers” subpage, only one is a woman. Most of the photos portray weapons and physical strength, but none of those depict women. An image analysis of the same type conducted on the Army’s website surveyed 70 photos on the homepage and first level

subpages of the Marine's website. Of the 187 people in those images, only 31 (16%) of them are women. However, one image on the "Recruit Training" page contains 25 of the 31 women pictured on the main pages of the site. Without this image, only 6 (3.8%) women would be featured on the rest of the site. Unlike the training photos that feature men accomplishing tough physical tasks, the recruit training photo of the 25 women shows them sitting down listening to an instructor. Additionally, men almost always are pictured wearing Marine battle or dress uniforms, whereas many of the women wear athletic/running clothes in the photos, thus situating them outside of combat roles. Although women appear to be largely underrepresented on the site, only 8% of Marines are female (CNN Staff, 2013).

**Masculine language.** In addition to the messages the images convey, the language of the Army and Marines recruiting websites also cultivates a sense of masculinity. The Army functions "to defend the American people from aggressors with a force of qualified, skilled, and dedicated soldiers" (U.S. Army, n.d.-a, para. 4). The Army encourages members to become leaders and to rise through the ranks. The website focuses on the necessity of physical fitness and strength in order to survive the rigors of deployment. Evidence of the value of toughness and masculinity also presents itself in the Army's seven values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage (U.S. Army, n.d.-d, para. 1). The organization suggests that in order to serve selflessly, one should "endure a little longer" to meet the efforts of the Army (U.S. Army, n.d.-d, para. 5). Enacting personal courage requires "enduring physical duress and at times risking personal safety" (U.S. Army, n.d.-d, para. 8). These sentiments reflect Gilbert's (2014) research about the manliness of pain and suffering, and Gagen (2000)

identifies loyalty as a masculine value engendered in boys at a young age. The embodiment of the Army's seven values are the promises of the Warrior Ethos: I will always place the mission first, I will never accept defeat, I will never quit, and I will never leave a fallen comrade (U.S. Army, n.d.-d, para. 1).

The United States Marine Corps (USMC) uses masculine language throughout its entire website. It claims that Marines are “optimally trained, in support of the overall mission” and that the USMC is “NOT FOR THE FAINT OF ANYTHING” (U.S. Marines, 2016i, para. 1). Much of the language used on all pages of the website portrays the sense of toughness needed to succeed as a Marine. For example, this excerpt follows the heading “Toward Chaos” on the “Global Impact” subpage: “Where chaos looms, the Few emerge. Marines move toward the sounds of tyranny, injustice and despair—with the courage and resolve to silence it. Ending conflict, instilling order and helping those who can't help themselves, Marines face down the threats of our time” (U.S. Marines, 2016d, para. 3). This type of language reflects and advances the warrior hero archetype outlined by Howard and Prividera (2015) and speaks to the toughness, strength, and courage necessary to be a Marine (Burnam et al., 2009), and it is present on all pages of the Marines recruitment website.

Interestingly, both websites employ superlatives as a boasting tactic to emphasize the masculine identities of the branches. The Army presents itself as “THE STRONGEST FORCE IN THE WORLD” with the “most dedicated, most respected Soldiers in the world” (U.S. Army, n.d.-a, para. 1). The Marines have the “ability to provide the most rapid, effective, and efficient military response to conflicts anywhere in the world” (U.S. Marines, 2016e, para. 1) with the “world's finest fighting force” and through the “world's



most demanding recruit training” (U.S. Marines, 2016g). In addition to using superlatives to describe the power of the Marines as a branch, their website also draws on hyperbolic references in regard to the experiences of individual Marines. The site asserts that “By earning our title, you will accomplish one of the most honorable of all endeavors” (U.S. Marines, 2016c, para. 5) and that “only those who complete the most demanding training can accomplish the world’s most demanding missions” (U.S. Marines, 2016a, para. 1). This language establishes the high importance of the military and cultivates a sense of military pride, a theme that will be explored below.

**Masculine ideology.** Evidence of Brown’s (2012) various conceptions of masculinity surfaced in the present research. The Army recruitment site relies on appeals to economic and career success, via education, in addition to traditional, martial masculinity. A photo on the Army’s homepage reads “Kickstart your career. Earn up to \$40,000 bonus if you qualify” (U.S. Army, n.d.-c). Another box on the homepage advertises “\$20K Army Reserve Bonus” as money for college and student loan repayment. The prominent homepage location of this information suggests the importance of economic appeals (see Brown, 2012) to Army recruiting. Further promoting education and its effects on career success, the Army claims that “you can often accelerate the promotion process by taking advantage of additional training and schooling opportunities” (U.S. Army, n.d.-a, para. 8). The Army combines these appeals with those of martial masculinity as evidenced by the aforementioned Army values and Warrior Ethos. Highlighting equipment such as “machine guns, grenade launchers, and sniper rifles” that “deliver maximum firepower” also contribute to a sense of militarized masculinity (U.S. Army, n.d.-a, para. 6).

While the Army appeals to economic/career success and to militarized masculinity relatively equally, the USMC heavily focuses on military masculinity. Traditionally masculine ideals that summon the construction of the warrior hero pervade the Marines website. Marines are “elite warriors who courageously and honorably face down the threats of our time” (U.S. Marines, 2016d). The USMC “ensures the war-fighting capabilities of every Marine are enhanced with extensive weapons training” and promises to “bring out the warrior in every recruit” (U.S. Marines, 2016a).

The Marines website blends these traditional definitions of military masculinity with humanitarian appeals, thus communicating a hybrid masculinity similar to the one proposed by Brown (2012). The recruitment website has an entire subpage dedicated to the “Global Impact” and humanitarian efforts of the Marine Corps. Marines aim to “make the entire world a safer, better place,” but they conform this desire to hegemonic masculinity: “The desperate cries of women and children The rapid bursts of machine gun fire. The deafening roar of a tsunami. Most people hear the sounds of chaos and run in the opposite direction. But there are a few who listen intently to these sounds not in the hopes of hearing them but to help rid the world of them” (U.S. Marines, 2016d, para. 1). Considering the largely male audience of the recruitment website, the invocation of the warrior hero who saves the “desperate” women and children emphasizes the masculinity of helping behaviors and cultivates a hybrid masculinity.

Although the Marines site masculinizes helping behaviors as it claims “not just anyone can fight for everyone” (U.S. Marines, 2016d), it also situates women in traditional helping roles outside of combat as it advertises Female Engagement Teams. From 2009-2012, female Marines performed community outreach with women and

children. In doing so, they “showed that an outstretched hand is often the strongest weapon against terror” (U.S. Marines, 2016b, para. 2). While the USMC website does address the role of women in the Marines specifically, it does so with a blurb that exists in a separate, reserved space for attention to female Marines and their ability to advance peacemaking efforts through stereotypically feminine ways. This is one of the only pages that features women in camouflage, thus communicating their limited and supporting roles in combat.

**Military pride.** Pride in regards to the military permeates the Marines recruitment website. Perhaps this theme was much more prominent than on the Army website because of the Marines’ slogan “The Few. The Proud. The Marines.” On several pages including the “Marine Officers” page and the “Parents and Mentors” page, the text describes the Marines as a “noble profession” and a “noble calling” (U.S. Marines, 2016f, para. 3). It suggests that there is “nothing comparable to earning a pride that few will ever know” in contributing to the Marines’ “proud culture” and its “proud history” (U.S. Marines, 2016f, para. 5). Joining the Marines, “one of the most honorable of all endeavors,” will instill “life-long pride” and will allow members to experience the “pride, purpose, and honor reserved only for the Few.” The reverence accompanied with serving in the Marines contributes to the sense of the mission’s importance. The Army website does not have many explicit messages of pride, but by framing its work as challenging and as completed by “the team that makes a difference” and “the strongest force in the world” (U.S. Army, n.d.-a, para. 1), it communicates the valor earned for serving in the military. A sentence on the “Parents and Family” page reassures parents that their son or daughter’s decision to join the Army is “the most important choice of his or her life”

(U.S. Army, n.d.-e, para. 1), thus situating the Army as more significant than anything else and instilling pride in the decision to join. Overall, the Army and Marines recruitment websites offer concrete evidence of the research on the military's masculinity. They support those claims through their visual and linguistic communication strategies that create a masculine ideology. Staying consistent with their masculine themes, the websites fail to provide sufficient resources for mental health concerns or even to address the possibility that those resources will be needed.

### **Mental Health Discourse**

Both websites erase mental health concerns from their discourse and provide no other option than for members of the Army and Marines to be mentally healthy. On the first subpage of the "About the Army" tab, the paragraph nearest to the top of the screen and containing the largest font reads, "A U.S. Army Soldier is the embodiment of physical and mental strength. As a Soldier, you will be prepared to serve whenever and wherever you are needed" (U.S. Army, n.d.-a, para. 1). This sentiment primes military candidates to believe that soldiers must have impeccable mental health. The phrase "you will be prepared" does not offer any other option but to be strong enough to serve, despite any physical or mental health problems. This theme repeats on the "Fitness and Nutrition" page under the "Lifestyle" tab. Again situated at the top of the page and in the largest font, references to mental health expectations are explicit: "A Soldier in the U.S. Army must be mentally and physically fit...fit Soldiers [are] essential to the Army" (U.S. Army, n.d.-d, para. 1). Although the page's images focus on physical fitness, mental health discourse can be found throughout the language. It indicates that soldiers "must be mentally prepared" and that because they live to a higher standard, they must

“continually strengthen themselves mentally and physically through ongoing training.” Despite the apparent focus on physical fitness on the “Fitness and Nutrition” page, the Army linguistically places mental health before physical health twice, thus emphasizing its necessity. The last allusion to expectations of mental health occurs under the description of the Army’s seven values. One of those values, Selfless Service, is defined as putting the “welfare of the Nation, the Army, and your subordinates before your own” (U.S. Army, n.d.-d, para. 5). This phrase clearly prioritizes a soldier’s duty before his or her own mental health concerns. As the Army stresses the importance of mental fitness, it eliminates any possibility for soldiers’ mental health problems by assuming that they have none.

Like the Army’s tacit assumption of mental health, the Marines fail to develop any meaningful mental health discourse on its site. The “Recruit Training” page emphasizes the “mental toughness” necessary to be a Marine and indicates that “every recruit will develop the physical and mental endurance required to win our nation’s battles” (U.S. Marines, 2016g). The USMC holds its members to the “highest standards of moral, mental, and physical strength” and insists they are “at all times focused, alert, and in control” (U.S. Marines, 2016h, para. 1). The “backbone of every Marine” consists of “mental, physical, and ethical strength.” These continual references to the necessity of mental health in the USMC give Marines no other option than to be mentally healthy and suggest that if one is not mentally fit, she/he is not a Marine.

In contrast to this discourse, the websites do provide some information about mental health services, although the term “mental health” is never used. On the Army’s page, the website user must click on “Benefits” then scroll down to the sixth of seven

features on the page entitled “Soldier and Family Services.” The brief description introduces the “services, support groups, counseling and training available to Soldiers and their families” (U.S. Army, n.d.-b, para. 8), but when directed to the “Soldier and Family Services” page, virtually no additional information is provided. The page contains Relocation Assistance Services (housing floor plans, maps, etc.), Money Management Services, Legal Assistance Services, Deployment Services (preparing wills, establishing household budgets), and the Army Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Program (leisure activities). None of these services provide support for active-duty troops’ or veterans’ mental health problems. The “Benefits” page on the Marines website is hidden. A tab labeled “Being a Marine” directs the user to many different links about roles in the corps, leadership principles, and daily life. The page it leads to, however, contains no information about benefits. Only when hovering the mouse over the “Being a Marine” tab does a user receive an option to click on a “Benefits” link, along with all of the other link options presented on the “Being a Marine” subpage. This effectively hidden page includes brief information about family counseling. The links provided under benefits include: salary, medical, housing, education, travel, and vacation. Selecting the medical benefits link presents information geared strictly toward physical ailments. Although the Marine Corps provides healthcare coverage, there is not one mention of mental health care. This absence of information conveys the assumption that mental health is not an issue in the Marines and silences those searching for treatment information or recommendations. When searching the websites for the phrase “mental health,” the only results that appear on the Army site are related to careers in the military such as behavioral health nurse. The Marines site, which also includes links to external resources,

provides news articles that reiterate the “mental strength” necessary for serving in the Marines. Neither search reveals helpful information about mental health resources or treatment for service members.

### **Study 1: The Navy and Air Force Recruitment Websites**

The visual elements of the Navy and Air Force recruitment websites (see Appendices D and E) do not appear as aggressively masculine as do the homepages of the Army and Marines sites and thus were considered separately. I examined the Navy and Air Force websites for the same two themes as the Army and Marines sites: masculinity and mental health. The Navy and Air Force websites depict masculinity through masculine imagery, masculine language, and masculine ideology (Brown, 2012). Unlike the other branches, the Navy and Air Force do not emphasize military pride. They also fail to engage with mental health discourse in any significant way. Each of these themes will be explored in depth below.

#### **Depictions of Masculinity**

The Navy and Air Force recruitment websites employ masculine appeals to attract a certain brand of recruit. However, masculine ideologies manifest in ways different than on the Army and Marines sites. In terms of visual elements such as color scheme and images, the Navy and Air Force display fewer traditionally masculine appeals. Both websites use white and navy as the main color scheme, thus contrasting significantly with the all-black character of the Army and Marines sites. The images portrayed on the Navy and Air Force sites are much less hypermasculine and depict more women in more versatile roles and attire. These sites rely on objective, matter-of-fact language, but they

also use superlatives to boast about their branch's status. Neither site heavily appeals to traditional, militaristic masculinity but rather highlights other masculine ideologies such as career success and innovation/technology (Brown, 2012). Unlike the Army and Marines sites, military pride did not emerge as an explicit theme but rather as an implicit assumption based on the superiority of the United States military. Also in contrast to the Army and Marines websites, the depictions of masculinity evident on the Navy and Air Force websites portray an externally-oriented masculine identity that emphasizes pride in technology rather than pride in self-possessed masculine qualities consistent with a warrior identity.

**Masculine imagery.** Image analyses conducted on the Navy and Air Force sites generated more encouraging results than the Army and Marines sites. The Navy's homepage and first level subpages contain only 23 images that prominently feature people; the site focuses on images that depict equipment and other inanimate objects. Of the 38 people pictured in the images, 21 (55%) of them are men and 17 (45%) are women. These depictions largely over-represent women as they comprise only 16% of active duty members of the Navy (Navy Personnel Command, 2016). The Navy site portrays both women and men as capable of fulfilling various roles. For example, men are depicted in combat action and as fathers, engineers, musicians, and technicians. The women pictured are officers, sailors, students, health care professionals, first responders, and recruiters. The Air Force's main pages also contain few still photos (n = 22). The homepage and all first-level subpages display large videos that comprise the entire screen. Upon scrolling down, more still content appears. Of the 29 people in the Air Force's still images, 22 (76%) are men and 7 (24%) are women. These figures are



consistent with actual ratios as about 20% of Air Force personnel are women (Air Force Personnel Center, 2016). People of color comprise 34% of the individuals in the photos and make up 28% of the Air Force. In addition to the analyses conducted on still photos, I also assessed the prominently featured people in the videos on the main pages because they are such an important focal point of the website. Thirty-nine people are clearly featured in these videos, and 13 (33%) of them are women. The video on the homepage reveals three prominent women and features no men. These findings sharply contrast with the homepages of the Army and Marines.

**Masculine language.** Although they do not employ as overtly masculine of a lexicon as the Army and Marines recruitment sites, the Navy and Air Force do use superlatives as a boasting strategy, and they do so even more often than the Army and Marines. In many instances, the branches use superlatives to amplify already masculine appeals to technology and weaponry. The Navy, “the most multidimensional force serving the nation” (America’s Navy, 2016a, para. 3), has “the world’s most powerful fleet of ships and submarines,” “some of the most powerful and purposeful weapon systems on the planet,” and the “most powerful machines ever put to sea” (America’s Navy, 2016a, para. 9). The Air Force claims that its equipment, laboratories, and engineers are the most advanced in the world, and it reiterates this six times on the same webpage. The Air Force also operates “the largest space program in the world” with “some of the most highly trained specialists in the world” (U.S. Air Force, 2016e). This extreme language reinforces masculine ideals and participates in the traditionally masculine device of boasting (Miller et al., 1992).

The Air Force also relies on gendered language to define its members. Although it refers to the “men and women of the U.S. Air Force” throughout its website, members of the Air Force are labeled “Airmen.” Using this traditionally sexist, man-linked language eliminates women from the discourse and affects how people think about the world while also accentuating the masculine culture of the military. Employing the term “Airmen” to refer to all members of the Air Force presents the male service member as the default and devalues women’s roles in the branch (Earp, 2012; Ramsey, 2011). It works to make women’s roles in the Air Force invisible as audiences who read masculine terms like “Airman” are more likely to picture men fulfilling Air Force roles. By focusing on the sex of a person as linked to her/his job, man-linked language communicates that some jobs, like that of Airman, are not suited for women (Ramsey, 2011). The Air Force employs other forms of generic man language as well. For example, it describes breaking the sound barrier “for the first time in manned flight” (U.S. Air Force, 2016e, para. 3). Using this language reinforces masculine values and minimizes the role of women in the branch.

**Masculine ideology.** The Navy and Air Force do not appeal to militaristic masculinity as often as the Army and Marines. Only a few instances of traditional martial masculinity were recorded on the two sites. The Navy informs its audience of its role to “protect the country and deter threats around the globe” and of its “proud tradition of core values [honor, courage, and commitment], bravery, duty and integrity” (America’s Navy, 2016a, para. 1 & para. 6). The Sailor’s Creed contains the phrase “I represent the fighting spirit of the Navy and those who have gone before me to defend freedom and democracy around the world” (America’s Navy, 2016a). The Air Force communicates even fewer

appeals to martial masculinity. On its page entitled “Mission,” the Air Force’s website conveys in large font and in all caps, “WE PURSUE OUR MISSION WITH EXCELLENCE AND INTEGRITY TO BECOME LEADERS AND WARRIORS” (U.S. Air Force, 2016d, para. 2), and on the “Education” subpage under “Basic Training” the branch discusses how recruits become “elite warriors” (U.S. Air Force, 2016a). Both branches stress the importance of physical strength, fitness, and toughness in respect to training and maintaining a position in the military, thus appealing to the hegemonic ideal of the physically fit warrior hero.

While a militaristic masculine ideology does not play a large role on the Navy and Air Force sites, other forms of masculine ideology do permeate the sites. These branches strongly appeal to career success and to innovation/technology, both of which Brown (2012) recognized in her research on military recruitment materials. The Navy offers “literally hundreds of distinct professional roles in dozens of exciting fields” as a member of its “highly skilled, hands-on Navy workforce” (America’s Navy, 2016e, para. 1 & para. 3). It also highlights many different career options and does not withhold information about mundane jobs that would not be considered traditionally masculine. For example, on the “Transitioning to the Fleet” subpage, the Navy lists Standing Watch, Working Parties, Damage Control Parties, and Mess Duty as necessary duties of new recruits. The Navy recognizes that although sanitizing dishes and preparing food “may not be the most glamorous assignments, every ship’s crew needs to be fed” (America’s Navy, 2016f, para. 10). In this way, the site provides a range of career options that deviate from the “warrior hero” ideal. The Air Force advertises “more than 200 career options” and encourages potential recruits to “pursue your interests, find your strengths,

and elevate your skills while serving your country in the U.S. Air Force. [The Air Force] provides unparalleled career options, growth opportunities and challenges to set you up for success and bring out the greatest potential in every one of [its] Airmen” (U.S. Air Force, 2016b, para. 1). The Air Force also features “Learn about careers” buttons on every page to direct recruits to different careers in varying fields of the Air Force.

Additionally, both the Navy and the Air Force rely heavily on a masculine ideology that emphasizes innovation and technology. Much of the boasting language examined above serves to elevate these branches’ technological successes. The Navy has a subpage dedicated to “Equipment” that provides links to learn more about Vessels, Aircraft, Weapons Systems, and Unmanned Systems. The large bold heading in all caps on the “Equipment” page displays “CUTTING-EDGE AND AWE-INSPIRING VESSELS, AIRCRAFTS, AND WEAPONS SYSTEMS” (America’s Navy, 2016c, para. 1). The Navy uses “some of the most sophisticated missiles and torpedoes on the planet” and has a “clear advantage in hardware.” Although the Air Force does not have a page dedicated specifically to equipment, its “Science of the Air Force” page contains information about new technologies, equipment, and innovation developed by the branch. The heading at the top of the page reads “THE FUTURE DOESN’T INVENT ITSELF” (U.S. Air Force, 2016e). This subpage of the Air Force recruitment site employs six superlatives about its technological superiority. For example, it boasts that “today the Air Force operates the largest GPS constellation in history with more than 30 satellites” and that “from lasers and nuclear engineering to biotechnology, you’ll be able to put your passion for discovery to good use in some of the most advanced laboratories in the

world” (U.S. Air Force, 2016e). Technology and innovation clearly play a significant role in the creation of the masculine ideologies of the Navy and the Air Force.

In addition, both branches dedicate space to a “Humanitarian” page under their “Mission” subpages, thus conveying a sense of the hybrid masculinity identified by Brown (2012). The Navy reveals its “great mission to serve the needs of others and to provide care in times of human suffering” (America’s Navy, 2016d, para. 2). Similarly, the Air Force claims “SAVING OTHERS IS OUR SPECIALTY” on its “Humanitarian” page and suggests that “Airmen are putting their expertise to work saving lives and making a difference whether it’s delivering food, medicine supplies or soccer balls” (U.S. Air Force, 2016c, para. 5). These branches’ appeals to helping others serve to attract recruits committed to values other than only martial masculinity.

Another value of the masculine ideology conveyed by the Air Force emerged from the research; I labeled this category “Achievement.” Although related to previously identified masculine values such as leadership, career success, and military pride, this theme does not fit comfortably into any of those categories. The Air Force employs this appeal five times as it encourages Airmen to “FIND MORE. DO MORE. BE MORE” and to “BECOME THE AIRMAN YOU’RE MEANT TO BE” (U.S. Air Force, 2016b). These phrases are depicted as text in the videos on first-level subpages, thus ensuring consumption of the content. Expectations of high standards and personal achievement, linked to masculine ideologies of success (Brown, 2012), for service members could contribute to a culture that implicitly discourages help seeking for mental health problems.

### **Mental Health Discourse**

Like the Army and Marines websites, the Navy and Air Force sites fail to engage significantly with mental health discourse. The Navy stresses the importance for Sailors to be “always on guard” and “always ready” (America’s Navy, 2016a). Always being on guard is a stressor that could lead to mental health issues, but the sites do not discuss that possibility. The Navy does not address mental health issues anywhere on its “Benefits” page (Pay, Insurance, On the Job Training and Advancement, Education Opportunities, and Travel and Retirement), and any mention of mental health care is completely absent on the “Veteran Benefits” page that describes the role of VA. Although mental health care plays an important role in VA care, the site lists only schooling, loans, insurance (medical), jobs, and money for school as benefits veterans can gain from VA. Mental health discourse also is absent from the “Benefits” page on the Air Force website and from the discussion of health and wellness on the “Lifestyle” subpage. This page mostly focuses on physical health, and the health and wellness centers on Air Force bases serve physical fitness needs as well as provide resources for stress and quitting smoking. No explicit mentions of mental health exist on either page.

Despite the lack of mental health discourse on the main websites, searching for the term “mental health” on both recruitment websites yields some results. The Navy’s site conjures one: a clinical psychology job posting. The description for this job narrowly begins to normalize mental health treatment as it suggests that “a typical Sailor or Marine faces extraordinary – as well as ordinary – challenges every day. Responding whenever and wherever duty calls” (America’s Navy, 2016b). The clinical psychologist will help service members to stay emotionally fit despite these challenges. Although the webpage insinuates that service members will seek help from clinical psychologists, the job

posting simply advertises an open job position and does not encourage sailors to seek treatment from their psychologists.

The Air Force website's search results for "mental health" also are housed under its "Careers" page. This site does the best job at making service member mental health concerns visible as it highlights five jobs dedicated to mental health treatment (clinical social worker, mental health service, psychiatrist, mental health nurse, and clinical psychologist). The text that accompanies the job descriptions also indicates the beginnings of normalization efforts. Mental health nurses "CARE FOR THE STRESSES WE CAN'T SEE," and mental health specialists ensure that every Airman is mentally fit (U.S. Air Force, 2016b). Most notably, the Air Force site features photos of troops and veterans seeking mental health treatment alongside the job descriptions. However, this rhetoric resides only under job postings and is not intended for a larger recruitment audience, thus compromising its influence and effectiveness.

All four of the recruitment websites convey a masculine ideology without ever mentioning the word "masculine." Color schemes, imagery and depictions of men/women, language usage, and (lack of) mental health discourse contribute to the ways in which the branches imply their masculine identities. To examine how the messages communicated on these websites might impact real members of the military, I next present an analysis of two memoirs written by service members. These service members both have experienced mental health problems and have served in the Army and in the Air Force, respectively, thus representing the two groups developed from the website analysis.

## **Study 2: The Army and Air Force Memoirs**

Understanding service members' lives in the military can illuminate actual experiences of military culture. While websites portray virtual manifestations of military culture, service members can provide authentic descriptions of military life. Memoirs offer a rich window into military culture that recruitment websites cannot, thus complementing the research texts in Study 1. Both Kayla Williams' (2014) and Brian Castner's (2013) memoirs attend to the authors' experiences of life in the military and to their mental health problems upon returning home from deployments. The analysis of masculinity in the memoirs revealed three main themes consistent throughout both books: male-dominated environments; expressions of martial masculinity, particularly through graphic violence in Castner's book; and masculine ideology (Brown, 2012). Brown's (2012) economic and technological constructions of masculinity play a role in the memoirs consistent with messages communicated on the websites; Williams, an Army linguist, discusses the importance of education and economic security, whereas Castner, a member of the Air Force, provides several extensive descriptions of equipment and technology. Although they both recall the military's masculine culture in regard to its impact on mental health help-seeking behaviors, Williams does so much more directly. In addition to both authors' visceral, disturbing descriptions of what it is like to live with mental illness, distinct themes that treat mental health and the military were uncovered from the texts: the military's stigmatization of weakness, the military's lack of communication about mental health problems and resources, and a lack of quality of care, especially through VA. These themes will be examined below.

### **Depictions of Masculinity**



Because Williams (2014) is a female soldier and Castner (2013) is a male Airman, they provide different perspectives of military culture. For example, Williams highlights the importance of visual masculinity in securing a military identity. She recounts that even in conversations with other veterans, men would praise her husband for his service but minimize her contribution to the war. After having a conversation with a stranger about her three-legged dog, she observes that “No one had ever on sight alone assumed I was a combat vet. More people had now officially assumed my dog was a combat vet than that I was” (Williams, 2014, p. 203). Castner fixates much more than Williams on graphic violence and the warrior hero as components of martial masculinity, and he mostly fails to include women in his language choices. Despite their different experiences, Williams and Castner both identify the military’s culture as one that is dominated by men and that relies on martial masculinity, and they engage with the masculine ideologies proposed by Brown (2012).

**Male-dominated environment.** Men dominate the military environment in the sense that they make up more of the population, but they also dominate the environment socially as they devalue the role and importance of women in the military. Williams’ (2014) expression of her experiences in a male-dominated environment is more poignant than Castner’s (2013). She discusses “the hygiene issue” with her female veteran friends (Williams, 2014, p. 206) as she indicates that “there were no female latrines” in the Battalion Headquarters at which she served (p. 70). One of Williams’ friends recalls being asked by a male superior “ ‘How do you pee out here?’ ” to which she responded “ ‘I pee’ ” (p. 214). Williams also recognizes that women in a combat zone face added pressures such as sexual assault and harassment and the pressure not to report it. While in

Iraq, she heard male troops respond to a female soldier's breaking down by saying, "See—that's why none of you females should be here' " (p. 62). Because she knew that women as a group would be judged by her performance, she felt the need to be stronger. Castner does not face the same kind of discrimination as Williams does, but he contributes to the military's male-dominated environment by employing gendered language throughout the memoir. He constantly refers to other service members as the "guys" or as his "brothers," only including "sisters" three times in the 220 page book. All of his friends from the military are men, and Castner makes no significant mention of military women at all.

Williams (2014) and Castner (2013) both attest to the masculine behaviors that pervade the military's environment. Although recently the masculine character of swearing has been challenged, it traditionally has been associated with masculine identities (Vingerhoets, Bylsma, & de Vlam, 2013). Williams admits that "Army-speak can be a harsh and vulgar code" (p. 9) and employs foul language throughout her memoir, both in her own voice and in her recalling of conversations with other service members. Like Williams, Castner also swears throughout his book and often uses words typically regarded as more offensive than others: "Get the fuck down! Put the fucking gun down! Get the fuck down! Tell this bitch to shut up!" (p. 147). Additionally, research has linked drinking alcohol with conceptions of masculinity (de Visser & Smith, 2007; Lemle & Mishkind, 1989), and Williams and Castner communicate the importance of drinking in military culture. Williams often gets drunk with her friends from the military, and Castner alludes to many nights when the "beer and liquor flowed generously" (p. 45).

Service members' frequent swearing and drinking contribute to the masculine environment of the military described by the authors of the memoirs.

**Martial masculinity.** Values that promote martial masculinity thrive in the culture created by the military's male-dominated environment; sixteen notecards were categorized into this theme. Williams (2014) received an award that applauded her courage and dedication to duty, values traditionally associated with martial masculinity (Weiss et al., 2011). She acknowledges the Army's appeal to martial masculinity as she discusses the Primary Leadership Development Course—"since renamed the Warrior Leader Course as part of the Army's fixation on calling everyone a warrior" (Williams, 2014, p. 71). Similarly, Castner (2013) summons the warrior hero archetype as he trains others to "disassemble the IED (Improvised Explosive Device), catch the bad guy, and come home a hero" (p. 175). Stripped of his warrior identity when he wasn't able to serve during an important battle, Castner remembers feeling emasculated, "an impotent, mute, broken failure" (p. 50). After being bitten by a scorpion that might be deadly, Castner asks his friend to make sure he stays breathing. His friend Griffin validates the importance of the warrior hero archetype as he responds, " 'If you die in your sleep, we won't tell anyone. We'll take you out on a call and blow you up. You'll go out the right way' " (p. 136). Additionally, his experience at EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) school suggests his transformation into a person who embodies hegemonically masculine qualities: "The crucible eliminates self-doubt and instills supreme confidence. The combination of intellectual and physical requirements, academic rigor, emotional stress, and final consequences is unparalleled...I left a focused, dedicated, obsessive, invincible man whose only purpose was to go to Iraq and blow things up for real" (p. 26). Like the

language used on the Air Force website, Castner's use of extremes such as "unparalleled" and "only purpose" communicates the supposed superiority of the military experience.

Williams (2014) demonstrates the ways in which military values infiltrate life outside the military as she uses the Army promise "I will never leave a fallen comrade behind" to justify remaining in an abusive and destructive relationship. Castner (2013) also invokes warrior expectations of sacrifice as he advises others to "be prepared to extricate your EOD team by shooting your way home. No matter what, your brothers come home alive" (p. 39). He describes the courage necessary for those who take the Long Walk, a lone approach to disarm a bomb: "You take the Long Walk for your brother's wife, your brother's children, and their children and the line unborn. No greater love does one brother have for another than to take the Long Walk" (p. 171). Both authors demonstrate military values that are evident on the recruitment websites (i.e., dedication to duty, the warrior hero archetype, physical fitness, sacrifice, and courage) as they allude to traditional, militaristic masculinity throughout their memoirs.

***Graphic violence.*** Previous research has situated violence as a quality encouraged by constructions of hegemonic masculinity, especially within the context of the military (Connell, 2005; Hinojosa, 2010; Prody, 2015; Whitworth, 2008). While most of Williams' (2014) memoir takes place at home and thus does not describe much combat violence, Castner (2013) engages with violence in several different ways that generated 11 notecards. Throughout his book, he describes his mental fixation on killing others as a solution to the anxieties he experiences. Most prominently, he recalls a situation he encountered in Iraq at the scene of a bombing. Women were screaming and crying in the wake of the attack, and he remembers, "I noted my rifle again, heavy in my hand. I can

shut these women up. If no one else will do it, if the Iraqi police won't move them on, get them home, then I can stop the screaming... There are only, what, five or six? I could kill five or six women to stop the shrieking. It would be worth it" (p. 85). While later talking to his therapist about this incident, Castner directly relates the use of violence to a sense of masculinity as he admits that " 'The only reason I didn't shoot them is because I wasn't strong enough. I pussed out. I got scared... I would have done it if I wasn't so weak' " (pp. 205-206). Castner struggles with the same thoughts after he returns home: "When I get sick of standing in a grocery line, I make a detailed plan to kill those I am surrounded by, allowing me to leave the store" (p. 185). Perhaps a symptom of his mental health problems, Castner's fixation on killing also reflects the violence endorsed by the military. Additionally, his graphic descriptions of combat violence provide further evidence of this theme. He recalls walking through "bloody pieces of children" (p. 99) and wondering "Did they think I liked wading knee-deep through their former cousins, sons, brothers, children?" (p. 85). He suggests that after bombing a suspicious vehicle, "The driver would then probably stay in one large piece, peeled back and inside out like a dressed deer that has been hung by the leg from a tree and skinned" (p. 146). Despite these graphic encounters, Castner expresses his love for the chaos and violence of war: "Knee deep in blood, charred cars, yelling Iraqi policemen, and sporadic gunfire. Luckiest son of a bitch I knew" (p. 56). Violence contributes to the notion of hegemonic masculinity, and Castner portrays the role of violence in constructing his military identity.

**Masculine ideologies.** Williams' (2014) and Castner's (2013) accounts reflect some of the masculine ideologies proposed by Brown (2012) and evidenced in the

analysis of the respective websites. Like the Army's website, Williams' narrative focuses on the importance of education and career success. She enrolls in graduate courses, works long hours at multiple jobs, and feels a profound sense of "shame" when she has to file for unemployment (p. 121). Unconsciously incorporating the Air Force website's emphasis on technology and innovation in his work, Castner provides extensive descriptions of weapons, technology, and the "millions of dollars' worth of classified equipment" that he uses while deployed (p. 108). For example, Castner discusses the variety of robots he used to disarm IED's depending on the specific mission. He goes into detail about the differences between types of robots: "PackBots were small but maneuverable, light enough to be carried short distances by one man, with a four-jointed arm and multiple camera systems. The Talon was rugged and durable, bigger and heavier but the strongest too. Our largest robot was the F6A, nearly four hundred pounds but also practically indestructible..." (p. 70). He also provides detailed descriptions of the planes and helicopters used by the military. Castner's focus on equipment and technology reflects the emphasis placed on these factors on the Air Force's recruitment website.

### **Mental Health Discourse**

Unlike the military recruitment websites, both Williams' (2014) and Castner's (2013) memoirs engage with mental health discourse. The two books present heartbreaking and disturbing accounts of what life is like for service members with serious mental illnesses. Williams faces additional stresses; in addition to her own mental health problems, her husband Brian struggles with PTSD, depression, alcohol, and a traumatic brain injury (TBI) that exacerbates problems and impedes his functioning. Much of her mental health discourse focuses on Brian and his experiences, but Williams

also recognizes her own mental health issues. She recalls one night after a violent fight with Brian that she contemplated committing suicide:

I couldn't control the memories that suddenly, with no warning, invaded my consciousness: images of those men screaming, thrashing, bleeding on the ground. I couldn't control when the smell of diesel on the road or at the gas station made me feel like I was in Iraq again. I couldn't control flinching at sudden noises. Couldn't control my dreams, still couldn't even remember them, but knew they must be bad because I sometimes woke drenched in sweat, heart pounding.

But this, this I could control. This gun, this choice. It offered me a way out, and freedom from the fear that nothing would change. The thought of nothingness descending upon my consciousness seemed like it would be a relief—all the stress and fear and anger and confusion gone, replaced by blessed nothingness.

(Williams, 2014, p. 67)

After yet another severe fight with Brian, Williams realizes that “even death would have to be better than this living hell” (p. 125). She pleads to an enraged Brian to kill her: “I didn't have it in me to kill myself, but here was a new way to escape. If he was this miserable with me, I'd make him fucking deal with it, make him end it. Let his rage take him, wash over him and drown us both” (p. 125). Williams demonstrates evidence of her mental health concerns throughout her narrative as she recalls the progression of her life after returning from deployment.

Contrarily, Castner (2013) alternates between memories from combat and the struggle against his internal enemy, the “Crazy.” Castner begins his memoir by introducing himself in the context of his mental illness: “The first thing you should know about me is that I'm Crazy. I haven't always been. Until that one day, the day I went Crazy, I was fine” (p. 1). Throughout the book, he provides insight into his anxious mind and illustrates the inner battle of a life with mental health problems. Because of how much mental illness affects his life, Castner suggests that he died in Iraq. He explicitly states, “I died in Iraq...If I didn't die, I don't know what else to call it...The new me is

frantic and can't sit still. The new me didn't laugh for a year...The new me plans to die tomorrow" (p. 157). He also claims that "My wife is alone in our full bed too. Her husband, the father of her children, never came back from Iraq" (p. 89). Some of his expressions of mental health problems do not make sense logically, but they demonstrate the severity of his affliction. For example, Castner claims that, "In the darkness of my bedroom, at night, when I try to fall asleep, the top of my head comes off" (p. 64). Solidifying the concerning condition of Castner's mental health is his thought process while sitting outside of his newborn baby's room. He realizes that his baby is "Totally helpless. Someone could wring him like a rag and pull him limb from limb. Someone could pinch a little skin on his fat belly, twist and tear, and gut him like a shot duck. They could shake him until his head tore from his neck...So I sit at the top of the stairs, with my rifle, and wait" (p. 135). Castner's graphic portrayal of mental illness convinces the reader of the severity of military mental health problems and offers the audience insight into what life is like after serving in a war.

Williams (2014) and Castner (2013) deal with significant mental health problems, and they both address the military's stigmatization of weakness and of seeking help or treatment for mental health issues. Additionally, they address the lack of communication they receive from the military about mental health and resources for treatment and the inadequate quality of care they receive upon finally seeking treatment. These themes discouragingly convey the relationship between the military's masculine culture and service members' help-seeking behaviors, and they will be illuminated below.

**Military's stigmatization of weakness.** The military's stigmatization of weakness exemplifies the intersection of its masculine culture and mental health



discourse. Research demonstrates that many members of the military associate mental health problems with weakness (e.g., Whitworth, 2008). Williams (2014) directly and explicitly criticizes this sentiment throughout her memoir. As a woman, she notices the glaringly masculine culture of the military and its effects on help-seeking behaviors, whereas Castner (2013) does not attend to the culture much. This difference could be due, in part, to women's increased likeliness to seek help for mental health problems (Mozes, 2015; Wendt & Shafer, 2016). Analysis of Williams' work generated 11 notecards (compared to Castner's two) that fit into the "stigmatization of weakness" theme, thus suggesting that real service members experience the tension between the military's masculine stigmatization of weakness and their own desires to seek mental health treatment. When she realizes that her attempts to push through her struggles are not working, Williams wants to seek treatment but has several hesitations: "Losing my clearance could hurt me not just now but for the rest of my life. And I was embarrassed to go during duty hours, admit to my chain of command—not to mention to my subordinates—that I was struggling" (p. 63). She clearly associates this stigma with the culture of the military as she says, "Army culture made it all worse. The assumption that seeking help was a sign of weakness had been inculcated in both Brian and me. We had grown up as soldiers hearing catch phrases like 'Pain is just weakness leaving the body' and 'Suck it up and drive on' " (pp. 61-62). While contemplating suicide and realizing the severity of her mental health problems, Williams also fears the stigma she would face if others found out about her struggles: "I couldn't imagine going to the chain of command in my unit and confessing this to my platoon sergeant, platoon leader, company commander, and on up...I couldn't admit these feelings of weakness in front of my

leaders—or worse—my soldiers” (p. 67). Although she was “humiliated by the weakness that seeking mental health care implied in the Army” (p. 64), she went to see a civilian psychologist. Later in the narrative, when frustrated with the lack of care Brian was receiving for his problems and with the constant burden of being his caregiver, Williams wants to join a support group but admits that “my Army habits kept me from asking for help and admitting that I couldn’t manage on my own” (p. 96). Williams indisputably links the military’s culture with a stigma against mental health help-seeking behaviors and offers an account of how this tension affects service members’ lives.

Castner (2013) does not address this tension as directly or as frequently as Williams (2014), but he does allude to the military’s stigmatization of weakness several times. Castner learns to push through physical pain and weakness, thus demonstrating masculine values (Gilbert, 2014), as he continues running though “huffing and wincing” and with a knee that “won’t stop protesting” (p. 82). He also questions the military’s stigma of mental health as weakness as he considers how his unit would respond to his battle with the Crazy: “How pathetic would I look to my brothers now? How would I explain it? Drinking to keep my eye from vibrating out of my skull. Alone in the dark. And scared” (p. 51). Although less explicitly than Williams, Castner does experience the hesitation associated with seeking treatment due to cultural stigma. However, like Williams, he describes the complete lack of information he received from the military about mental health and treatment.

**Lack of communication about mental health.** The military’s lack of communication about common mental health problems and about treatment resources (generated 8 total notecards) contributes to its stigma of help-seeking behaviors and to

Williams' (2014) and Castner's (2013) hesitation to seek mental health treatment.

Williams recounts a "conversational bombshell" dropped on her by one of Brian's friends as he openly admits to having PTSD and to receiving treatment for it (p. 72). This conversation causes Williams to rethink her mental health: "It hadn't occurred to me that all the problems we were experiencing might not be just because Brian got blown up, that my own issues might indeed be related to the deployment and not just personal weakness, that our reactions might be a common and relatively normal reaction to the horribly abnormal experience of war" (p. 72). The fact that this thought had never occurred to her prior to having a conversation with another veteran communicates the utter lack of information she received from the Army after completing her deployments. Williams admits this fact as she recalls that "since we'd gotten back, no one had talked to us about the types of problems many of us were clearly facing. I'd even gone to see mental health professionals, and they hadn't chalked my problems up to war" (p. 72). Distinct from her deployment-related mental health problems, Williams also realizes that her role as Brian's caregiver has impacted her mental health. After countless trips to the VA hospital and several years taking care of Brian, Williams wonders "Should I be getting therapy? Join a support group? Was there anything out there to help me deal with the pressure...? I didn't even know where to start" (p. 162). Her questions and confusion about mental health indicate the lack of information provided by the Army to normalize common problems and treatment.

Castner (2013) also suggests that the Air Force fails to distribute adequate information about mental health problems. Arguably most notably, Castner refers to his symptoms of mental health issues as "the Crazy." He has no language to describe the

thoughts and feelings he experiences post-deployment and no information about potential treatment options. He “knows that there must be a cure for the Crazy...There was a time before the Crazy. The logical one knows there must be a time after” (p. 86), but he does not know what the cure is or how to receive it. He reinforces this argument as he demonstrates his lack of understanding about military mental health: “The thing is, when you think you’re Crazy, you don’t always know that Crazy is the problem. Or that Crazy is what you should call it. At least not at first. Some guys are just angry all the time. Some get spooked and nervous. I thought I had a heart attack” (p. 122). Contrary to this evidence, Castner claims that when he got home, “I knew the signs to look for, the indicators that one is having trouble readjusting to American life” (p. 202). However, he explains those signs as “a little jumpiness” (p. 202), thus causing concern about the explanations of mental health issues he has received. Adjustment issues, depression, and PTSD manifest in much more severe symptoms than “jumpiness,” and Castner’s definition of these indicators might have contributed to his initial inability to label his mental health problems.

**Lack of quality of care.** In addition to the stigma associated with mental health problems and the lack of information provided by the military, Williams (2014) and Castner (2013) also describe the lack of quality of mental health care they receive upon finally seeking treatment for their problems (15 total notecards). This theme permeates Williams’ account as she describes the treatment she and Brian endure. When she returns home from deployment, Williams completes the Post Deployment Health Assessment, one of the measures Hoge et al. (2006) introduces as critical to providing veterans with mental health care. Despite Hoge et al.’s optimistic assessment of the test, Williams’

illustrates its ineffectiveness as she notes that “it included a series of questions clearly aimed at seeing if we were fucked up in the head from deployment...It was widely understood that the ‘wrong’ answers might prevent you from being released for block leave” (pp. 34-36). Unlike most others, she answers the questions truthfully and is pulled aside for further questioning: “ ‘Are you planning on hurting yourself?’ ‘No.’ ‘Are you planning on hurting anyone else?’ ‘Nope’ ” (p. 36). Her responses to these basic questions allow for her release, and she considers that “if the fact that I wasn’t an immediate danger to myself or others was good enough for the Army, it was good enough for me” (p. 36). Williams really begins to experience inadequate care as Brian seeks treatment through VA. He has cognitive deficits as a result of his TBI, PTSD, depression, anxiety attacks, and crippling headaches, but “...he was getting no rehabilitation, no real treatment. The Army acted as though he had no problem” (p. 57). Williams understands this challenge firsthand when she is referred to the single division psychiatrist who oversees a division of 18,000 soldiers. When she finally has her appointment, she begins crying and discloses her fears of readjusting to civilian life. The psychiatrist laughs and responds, “ ‘You’ll definitely never make it in the civilian world if you start crying all the time,’ and sent [her] away with antidepressants” (p. 64). Williams and her husband undergo many similar situations and constantly deal with inadequate care. After visiting the D.C. VA Medical Center for an appointment, Brian returns discouraged and hopeless:

‘It was totally fucked up. I went to where I was told to go, the green clinic. They said I was in the wrong place and sent me to the silver clinic. Then *they* said I should be in the red clinic. I have no idea what they were talking about. And I didn’t know where anything was, but no one would help me figure it out, so I just wandered around lost. When I finally saw a doctor, he told me I should be happy to be alive given the severity of my injuries and that he didn’t think they could do anything for me. Fuck it—forget it—I’m not going back.’ (Williams, 2014, pp. 161-162)

Despite her incessant criticism of the military's mental health care, Williams acknowledges the progress being made in VA care. At the Martinsburg VA she "was immediately recognized as a veteran and compassionately asked about [her] combat experience" (p. 199). She also provides the context of current VA care; VA is processing more claims faster than before and offers better quality care than many civilian providers. Additionally, she notes that after combat operations in Iraq ended, both DoD and VA were not prepared for the significant number of troops that would return with physical injuries, PTSD, and TBI (p. 241).

Castner (2013) has experiences similar to those of Williams (2014) as he strives to access the care he needs. During a visit to the emergency room at the VA hospital, "the doctor comes in to say you should just chill out and relax, like it's as easy as sitting in a chair and tuning out the kids and ignoring the foot in the box and reading a book and all your heart problems will go away" (p. 122). Once he begins receiving treatment, Castner's therapist leads him through a guided-meditation session, assuming he has no problems relaxing: " 'Release the tension and relax,' she says. But I can't relax. I've already flexed my left arm and right thumb and right hand and right arm and gut and legs and feet before she has made it above my elbow. And anyway, I can't flex the Crazy, and I can't release it. 'Good,' my New Shrink says, assuming I have followed along with each individual step" (p. 155). Castner is diagnosed with severe PTSD and begins regular treatment, but at the end of the book he reveals a conversation he has with his "New Shrink" in which she concludes that because he does not demonstrate symptoms consistent with PTSD, he does not suffer from it. He struggles with this information as he wonders, " 'But what about the hopelessness...and the numbness?' I say. 'What about the

airport, and the chest pain, and the eye twitches? What about the hairy spider that crawled out of my head?’ What about the bodies and the smells? What about knowing I won’t live past today?’” (p. 219). She responds, “ ‘Just because you feel all of those things doesn’t mean you have PTSD’ ” (p. 219). As Castner questions what’s wrong with him if it’s not the Crazy, the therapist replies, “You’re human” (p. 219). This unsatisfying conclusion to the memoir leaves no language with which Castner can interpret his mental health problems. Even though he does not meet criteria for PTSD, he clearly suffers from other mental health issues that apparently remain untreated. If Williams’ and Castner’s interactions with mental health care professionals represent other service members’ experiences, troops and veterans may, understandably, be resistant to seeking help for their mental health problems.

Williams (2014) and Castner (2013) describe the masculine culture of the military and the tension it forms with help-seeking behaviors. The military’s male-dominated environment cultivates values of traditional, martial masculinity, thus stigmatizing weakness and discouraging help seeking. Although both authors have serious mental health issues, they receive little information from the military about mental health problems and treatment, and they do not receive adequate care when they do seek treatment. Although no causal relationship can be inferred, these findings suggest that the values promoted on, or absent from, the recruitment websites might be congruent with the culture of the military and with real service members’ experiences. The culture shaped on the websites and the (lack of) accessibility of mental health support information might set the stage for problems like those examined in the memoirs.

## DISCUSSION

The interdependence of the present two studies reinforces the influence of the values communicated on the military recruitment websites. Williams' (2014) focused emphasis on Army culture and the stigmatization of weakness and Castner's (2013) brief engagement with this theme reflects the variance of masculine values portrayed on the recruitment websites. The Army website communicates more martial values and demands mental and physical fitness, and Williams conveys the influence that Army culture has on the stigmatization of help-seeking behaviors. In contrast, the Air Force site manifests masculinity through a focus on technology and boasting tactics, and Castner does not engage with the relationship between the Air Force's culture and mental health treatment. Additionally, the Army website features aggressive, black colors and more images of physically strong men with weapons in combat action. The Air Force website contains fewer photos that so clearly portray military masculinity. Perhaps the differences between these websites, as evidence of the branches' cultures, impact service members' experiences of military culture and stigma. The higher rates of mental health problems (Eisen et al., 2012) and of suicide (Jones et al., 2012) in the Army and Marines also correlate with this assumption.

Both the websites and the memoirs, in addition to much previous research, convey the importance of conceptions of masculinity to military culture. Different themes regarding the military's culture arose on the websites and in the memoirs due to the sources responsible for initiating the messages. For example, Williams (2014) and Castner (2013) both employ swearing as an expression of the military's masculine culture. Although this form of traditionally masculine language (Vingerhoets et al., 2013)



contributes to the culture, it would be less appropriate for the recruitment websites to use foul language because the military, a respected organization engaging in recruitment, acts as the source.

The lack of resources available on the websites and the blatant masculine culture portrayed presents a double bind for service members. They hear some messages from the military that they should seek help for mental health problems, as demonstrated by the military's programming and normalization campaigns, but they remember and have adopted the masculine values also encouraged by the organization. Jamieson (1995) situates a double bind as "a rhetorical construct that posits two and only two alternatives, one or both penalizing the person being offered them" (pp. 13-14). She examines no-win situations in the context of women in leadership, but the theoretical basis of the double bind can be applied to the dilemma faced by members of the military. The options presented to them are to seek help and be seen as "weak" or to suppress mental health problems and maintain their masculinity, which can lead to suffering and impairments in functioning and in relationships. As evidenced by the reviewed websites and by Williams' (2014) and Castner's (2013) struggles to seek help, the masculine beliefs often prevail. It is true that resources are available, such as through sites like Military OneSource, but the fact that they exist in a completely different online space communicates a message in itself. The lack of communication and information that Williams and Castner receive from the military about mental health and treatment also demonstrates the ineffectiveness of efforts to encourage help seeking. The military is trying, but it is not good enough. Its conflicting and inconsistent messages promote a culture of silence among service members and veterans with mental health problems. The

military needs a culture change to eliminate the double bind and to ensure that seeking treatment from mental health professionals will not be seen as weak, but a complete transformation of the military's culture is extremely unlikely.

Despite the absence of discussion about mental health on the recruitment websites, the memoirs confirm that members of the military face serious mental health problems and significant barriers to seeking treatment. Both Williams' (2014) and Castner's (2013) accounts convey the lack of information they receive from the military about mental health and the lack of communication about available resources and common problems. As demonstrated in the literature review, many military programs exist to encourage help seeking and to educate service members about mental illness (see Appendix A). However, none of those programs appears on any of the recruitment sites. Given the discrepancies between what is portrayed on the recruitment websites and what service members actually experience, as evidenced in the memoirs, I advance suggestions for cultural improvement and for the normalization of combat trauma, mental health problems, and help-seeking behaviors.

Arguably, combat necessitates the qualities evident in the military's masculine culture. Members must be strong, physically fit, and self-reliant during a war. Because of this, a complete cultural transformation may be impossible. However, a cultural shift is necessary to mitigate service members' hesitations about seeking mental health treatment. With 20 veteran suicides per day (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016b), the suicide rate for active duty service members increasing (Zoroya, 2016), and with only 30-40% of members with mental health problems seeking help (Wilson et al., 2015), clearly the military needs to make some changes. Individuals looking to join the

military encounter websites that embody the military's masculine culture, especially on the Army and Marines websites. From the very beginning of their relationship with the armed forces, individuals learn they need to be strong, tough, and dedicated to the military, but they do not learn about trauma and its potential effects or about the importance of seeking help for mental health problems. The analysis of these websites offers insight into why the efforts of the military to encourage help seeking may be largely ineffective.

Instead of changing the culture entirely, the military should work to normalize combat trauma and its potential effects from the outset. During training, military officers should provide sessions that acknowledge that war, combat, and deployments often expose members to serious trauma. A natural reaction to that trauma is post-traumatic stress, and it would be normal to seek treatment for symptoms of the disorder. Educating members on symptoms and providing resources for them initially will help normalization efforts. This information also should be incorporated into recruitment websites with links to external resources. In her memoir, Williams (2014) recalls a revelation she had during training for a volunteer EMT department. Its approach to trauma seemed "healthier and more balanced" than the responses to trauma she experienced in the Army while on active duty (Williams, 2014, p. 190). She recounts the EMT department's briefing on stress in this way:

'You will see things that will fuck you up...That's okay. It's totally normal. Hell, you *should* feel fucked up if you see a dead kid! Just call CISM, Critical Incident Stress Management, and they'll help you out. It's completely normal to have a hard time after some really messed-up calls, and we have a system in place to help get you back to normal. Just don't hide it. Reach out. We're here to help.'  
(Williams, 2014, pp. 189-190)

Implementing a training and response system similar to the one Williams encountered through the EMT training could support the programming and other efforts made by the military, and it would demonstrate that leaders support help seeking, thus creating a climate of respect and understanding. This strategy also would provide military members with information they need to understand common mental health problems and to seek treatment for them. Disseminating accurate, factual information about the causes and treatment of mental disorders helps decrease negative stereotypes and uncertainty about mental illness (Greene-Shortbridge et al., 2007). Because she received no information from the military about mental health, Williams reacted to the EMT training as though “It was a revelation: there was an entirely different way to respond to trauma than the one we’d experienced in the military. Why hadn’t it ever occurred to me before?” (p. 190). She provides insight into the way in which the military should approach trauma and subsequent mental health problems as she reflects on the EMT department’s messages: “the message from the establishment from the very first day was unambiguous: post-traumatic stress is a normal reaction to abnormal events, and needing assistance coping with that is expected and acceptable” (p. 190). Similar messages disseminated by the military during recruitment would strengthen normalization efforts and would reduce the tension between culture and help seeking through a balanced presentation of information.

In addition to implementing programs during training that normalize deployment trauma, efforts should focus on reducing the stigma against mental health problems and against seeking treatment for those problems. To accomplish this, the military should strive to shift the current masculine archetype to include help-seeking behaviors. Fox and Pease (2012) espouse that “a new model of masculinity that better enables the male

veteran to speak about trauma and to reconnect with others has implications for counselling practice with veterans” (p. 16). Their proposed model draws on trauma growth literature to suggest that veterans acknowledge the limits of self-control and redefine masculinity to include living with mental illness and finding the courage to seek treatment. Learning from and discovering strength in trauma can illuminate the problems that exist in pre-trauma models of masculinity. Similarly, Acosta et al. (2014) advise a culture shift that redefines help seeking as a sign of strength. Military leaders who share their own experiences with mental health disorders and talk about their treatment, as on the AboutFace website, will normalize mental health problems. In addition, this strategy could work to disprove the myth that seeking mental health care will harm one’s military career. Personal contact with others who have a mental illness is the most successful technique that reduces stigma, and providing opportunities to allow service members to interact with those who have a mental illness could increase help seeking dramatically (Greene-Shortbridge et al., 2007). Acosta et al. also recognize the importance of reducing self-stigma and encourage the development of programming that focuses on the individual.

Reducing stigma is not the only approach that will encourage service members and veterans to seek mental health treatment. Acosta et al. (2014) outline four possible interventions that could increase help-seeking behaviors in addition to stigma-reduction efforts: “changing perceptions about the effectiveness of care, reducing access barriers, changing masculine norms, and increasing peer support” (p. 94). Programming designed to empower peers to speak up about, and support others in, seeking help for mental

illness could have a significant impact on the number of troops who seek mental health treatment. Focusing efforts on multiple avenues may lead to an increase in help seeking. Types of programs that target the source could work to reduce the high numbers of mental health problems among U.S. service members. The United Kingdom sends troops to Cyprus after completing a deployment for several days of rest and relaxation before returning home (Moore, 2011). This program proved to be so successful that several other countries have replicated it, and “Third Location Decompression” is a common form of PTSD treatment in other countries. Almost 30% of American troops suffer from PTSD, whereas the rate among U.K. troops is 4%. Although this could be due to factors such as longer deployments for Americans, the decompression programming also plays a role (Moore, 2011).

As the military attempts to change perceptions of help seeking, branches should keep in mind the differences in masculine identity uncovered in this research. These differences might indicate how each branch should approach shifts in cultural understandings of masculinity and mental health. Because the Army and Marines websites emphasize an internally-oriented masculine identity, culture change might be more difficult. These branches need to redefine the concept of the warrior hero and deemphasize the internal nature of masculine identity in order to adjust attitudes toward help seeking. Easier to influence may be the Navy and Air Force’s externally-oriented masculinities. These branches could utilize technology in order to encourage help-seeking behaviors and to appeal to their members’ understanding of identity.

Additional practical applications could include modifications to the recruitment websites. A page on each of the websites could provide brief information about mental

health and the military and could direct users to various military programs aimed at treating or normalizing mental health problems. Providing resources such as suicide hotlines and links to websites such as Military OneSource and AboutFace would demonstrate the military's dedication to the improvement of members' mental health and its accommodation of help-seeking behaviors from the outset. New military members would interact more with the military's efforts to encourage help seeking and hopefully would struggle less in the decision to seek help for mental health issues in the future. The military may be hesitant to include mental health information in recruitment materials; however, if this strategy increases help-seeking behaviors and reduces the highly publicized number of military/veteran suicides, it actually may help their recruitment efforts. Additionally, the websites, particularly the Army and Marines sites, could diversify their images. They could include images of masculine, strong people seeking help, and they could add photos that redefine the masculine culture of the military. Showing women in combat roles and displaying fewer images that glorify martial masculinity might shift the values emphasized on the websites. Changing some of the language used on the websites also could reduce the stigma against help seeking and could alter definitions of masculinity. Finally, publicizing the importance of the family in recognizing symptoms and initiating difficult conversations about mental health could help to encourage help seeking. A service member's/veteran's family has the ability to moderate the tensions between military culture and the normalization of mental health treatment, so maximizing its possibilities would improve the efforts further (Acosta et al., 2014; Piertzak et al., 2010; Warner et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2015).

The military as an organization, however, is not the only determinant of its culture. Organizational culture is “learned or created by individuals themselves” (Avruch, 1998, p. 5). Individual members of the military constitute its culture and therefore might contribute to problems. If service members choose to encourage others to seek help, to openly discuss mental health issues and share resources, to respect all other members, and to try to weaken the strict martial masculinity of the military, they could change the organization’s culture and reduce mental health stigma in the military.

Throughout his eight years in office, President Barack Obama expressed his commitment to military members and veterans. During his first presidential campaign, he advocated for improved mental health treatment for military members at all stages of service (recruitment, deployment, and reentry into civilian life) and for the normalization of help-seeking behaviors in the military community (Elliot, 2007). He continuously worked to increase mental health treatment, reduce veteran homelessness, and improve the condition of VA. He personally met with many military families and visited Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the United States’ largest military hospital, several times a year (Freking, 2016). Obama firmly believes that “psychological fitness is as important as physical fitness” (Obama, 2011, p. 2). To cultivate that sentiment, he helped launch the Real Warriors campaign and has implemented policy changes to advance action. He signed the Veterans Suicide Prevention Bill, increased funding for mental health services for veterans by almost 75%, hired more mental health professionals, expanded VA health care and telemedicine so that veterans everywhere could have access to the care they need, and increased funding for PTSD research (Diaz, 2016; The White House, 2016). Obama’s efforts to serve the military community might



impact the current relationship between mental health and the military. The effects of these changes have yet to be assessed, but all of them, if not revoked, surely will have implications for future service members/veterans. President Trump's budget should reflect support for military mental health resources as well in order to maintain the progress made by President Obama.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

Previous research has established a relationship between the masculine culture of the military and mental health help-seeking behaviors (e.g., Braswell & Kushner, 2012), but the present research studies specifically examine this relationship from a communication perspective. Communication research just recently has focused on the intersection of communication and the military (Parcell, 2015), and this study is one of the first of its kind. It contributes a communicative analysis of both military and service member texts to provide perspectives sanctioned by the military as an organization and by its individual members. As the findings suggest, ideology clearly plays a significant role in military culture and in members' perceptions of help-seeking behaviors. The ideologies presented and the lack of any mental health information available on the websites offer key insight into the mental health crisis in the military. This study advances current understandings of the ways in which organizational messages might impact members' lives, and it acts as a foundation for future research in military communication.

The methodological approach of ideological criticism successfully evaluated the messages conveyed both on military recruitment websites and in service members' personal accounts, and it could be used in future research. Employing Foss' (2009) four

step process of ideological analysis as the general method and attending to elements identified by Van Dijk (1995) and Cormack (as cited in Brennen, 2013) as the specific method allowed for an effective analysis of ideology. Using color-coded notecards aided in organizing and structuring the method. This method could be replicated for future ideological critiques.

The findings of this research also point toward several theories that might help direct future research in the subject. Elaborating on Jamieson's (1995) double bind theory in the context of military mental health could develop a better understanding of service members' experiences. Schein's (1990) concept of organizational culture could be useful in the examination of the military's masculine culture and its effects on help-seeking behaviors. Finally, investigating the relationship between masculinity theories and help seeking also could assist in explaining the findings of the present study.

### **Future Directions**

Future research should continue to investigate the double bind in which service members find themselves as a result of the military's competing and inconsistent messages about mental health. Incorporating interviews or focus groups into research would contribute perspectives of real service members and veterans; although this study does that with the examination of memoirs, interviews and focus groups can guide conversations to reflect specific topics of interest and can provide opportunities for investigating questions further. Participants should represent all branches of the military to provide a more comprehensive perspective. Research also could be done into the success of different programs, such as the EMT department training Williams (2014) recalls, in order to strengthen military normalization efforts.

## **Limitations**

Several limitations may have impacted the results of the present studies. Only one researcher coded the websites and memoirs, thus offering one perspective and restricting the credibility of the findings. Additionally, the websites were coded at one point in time. The online media landscape constantly changes, and different content could be available on different days. Finally, the memoir findings only present perspectives of life in the Army and in the Air Force. Even though I examined the recruitment websites of all four military branches, I did not assess personal accounts of military life in the Marines or in the Navy.

## **Conclusion**

One in five members of the military faces mental health problems, but only 30-40% of them seek treatment (Wilson et al., 2015). The military has implemented programming, resources, and training in attempts to encourage help-seeking behaviors among service members. However, the low number of those who seek treatment suggests that its efforts have been ineffective. The military's masculine culture forms a double bind with its efforts to normalize mental health treatment. Study 1 presents concrete evidence of the masculinity of the military as depicted on its branches' recruitment websites. The absence of discussion about mental health problems minimizes the military's attempts to convince members to seek help. The websites exhibit physical representations of the research about the military and its unsuccessful efforts to produce positive change, and the memoirs demonstrate the ways in which military values affect real service members' lives. Changes to the military's culture must be made in order to

effectively normalize trauma-related stress and mental health help-seeking behaviors.

Modifying the examined websites and implementing new understandings of mental

health could be the difference between life and death.

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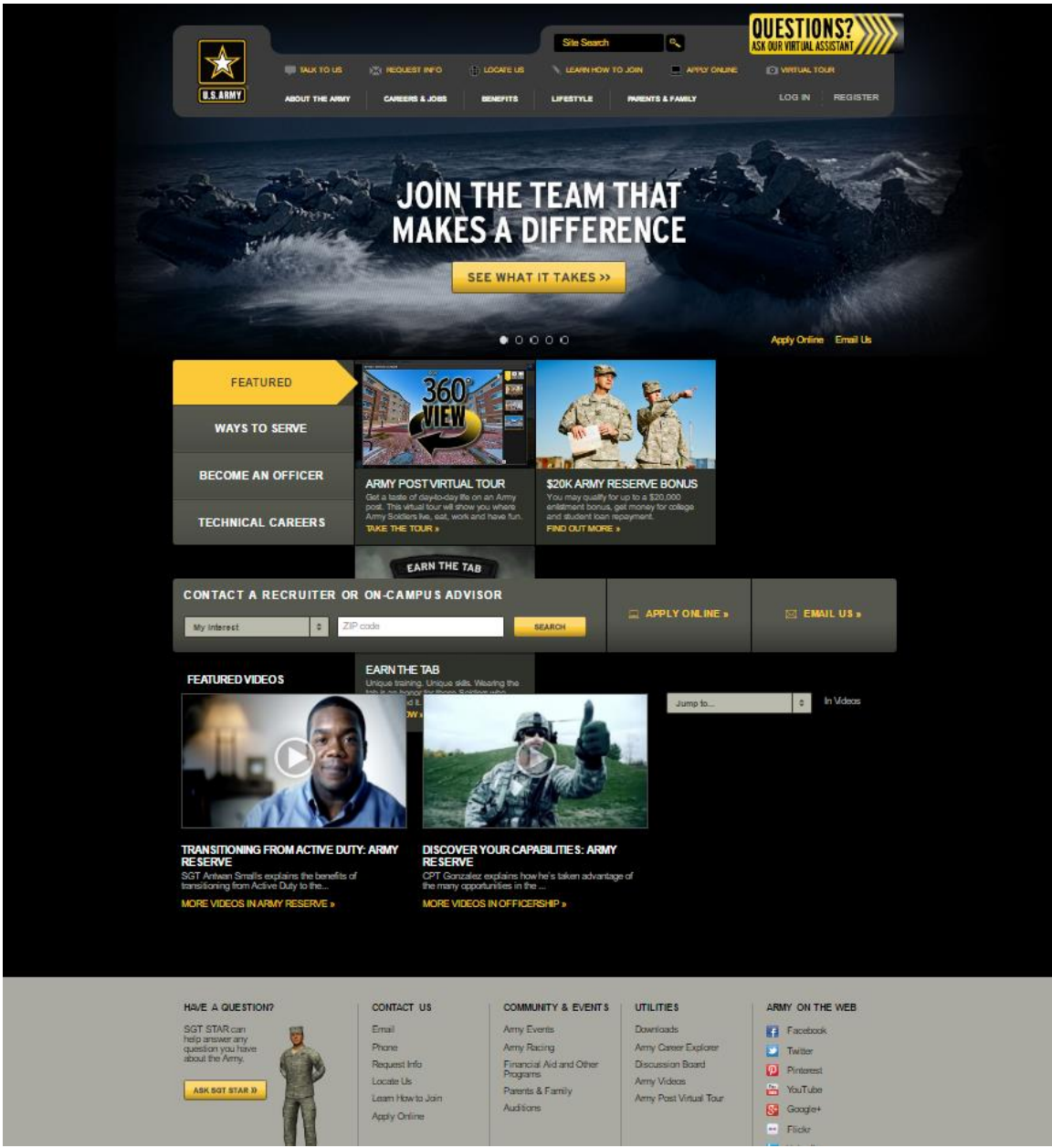
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## Appendix A

Post Deployment Health Assessment	<a href="http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/forms/eforms/dd2796.pdf">http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/forms/eforms/dd2796.pdf</a>
Embedded Behavioral Health program	<a href="http://armymedicine.mil/Pages/EBH.aspx">http://armymedicine.mil/Pages/EBH.aspx</a>
inTransition	<a href="http://intransition.dcoe.mil/">http://intransition.dcoe.mil/</a>
Real Warriors campaign	<a href="http://www.realwarriors.net/">http://www.realwarriors.net/</a>
Military Pathways program	<a href="https://www.myarmyonesource.com/cmsresources/Army%20OneSource/Media/PDFs/Events/National%20Volunteer%20Week/SMH-Military%20Pathways%20Brochure.pdf">https://www.myarmyonesource.com/cmsresources/Army%20OneSource/Media/PDFs/Events/National%20Volunteer%20Week/SMH-Military%20Pathways%20Brochure.pdf</a>
Technical Cooperation Program	<a href="http://www.acq.osd.mil/ttcp/">http://www.acq.osd.mil/ttcp/</a>
Defense Centers of Excellence	<a href="http://dcoe.mil/">http://dcoe.mil/</a>
Yellow Ribbon Program	<a href="http://mil.wa.gov/national-guard/family-programs/suicide-prevention-program">http://mil.wa.gov/national-guard/family-programs/suicide-prevention-program</a>
Deployment Health Clinical Center	<a href="http://www.pdhealth.mil/">http://www.pdhealth.mil/</a>
Center for Deployment Psychology	<a href="http://deploymentpsych.org/">http://deploymentpsych.org/</a>
Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress	<a href="https://www.cstsonline.org/">https://www.cstsonline.org/</a>
Military OneSource	<a href="http://www.militaryonesource.mil/">http://www.militaryonesource.mil/</a>
National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	<a href="http://www.ptsd.va.gov/">http://www.ptsd.va.gov/</a>
AboutFace	<a href="http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/Index.html">http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/Index.html</a>
Veterans Crisis Line	<a href="https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/">https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/</a> 1-800-273-8255
Make the Connection	<a href="http://maketheconnection.net/">http://maketheconnection.net/</a>
Moving Forward: Overcoming Life's Challenges	<a href="http://www.veterantraining.va.gov/movingforward/">http://www.veterantraining.va.gov/movingforward/</a>
The National Resource Directory	<a href="https://www.nrd.gov/">https://www.nrd.gov/</a>

Appendix B



The U.S. Army recruitment website homepage on December 9, 2016 (U.S. Army, n.d.).

## Appendix C

SEARCH NEWS PHOTOS VIDEOS BROWSE

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS SIGN IN

GLOBAL IMPACT OPERATING FORCES HISTORY & HERITAGE ELIGIBILITY BECOMING A MARINE BEING A MARINE

MARINE OFFICER PARENTS & MENTORS CONTACT A MARINE

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The information to help you prepare for the 12, 14 & 16 WEEKS

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NEWS FACEBOOK TWITTER

U.S. MARINES, MARINES AND MARINE CORPS NEWS

U.S. Marines with Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force - Southern Component and Marine Corps support the local national forces working together on several construction projects in Lachar and al Muzara Air Base, Honduras.

U.S. MARINES, MARINES AND MARINE CORPS NEWS

GRADUATION: AN UNPARALLELED ACHIEVEMENT

The crowning moment for every Marine is when they're handed the Eagle, Globe and Anchor and addressed as "Marine" for the first time.

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Be the first to see our new application

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The U.S. Marines recruitment website homepage on December 9, 2016 (U.S. Marines, 2016).

# Appendix D

**AMERICA'S NAVY** Find A Recruiter Apply Online Life Ops

NAVY LIFE ABOUT THE NAVY JOINING THE NAVY CAREERS & JOBS

Live Chat Share This Page

## PROTECTING AMERICA THE WORLD OVER

Whoever we are, whatever we do, wherever we serve, as Sailors we are always there for our country. Get to know more about our mission and our people, the places we serve and the equipment we use, the news we make and the history we've made.

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Interested in making the Navy your primary focus in terms of a career? Look into full-time opportunities serving on Active Duty. Learn how to join based on your background.

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#### PART TIME

Want to have a career in the Navy and in the civilian sector? You'll want to look into part-time opportunities serving on Reserve Duty. Learn how to join based on your background.

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#### ENLISTED

What can you do with a high school diploma in today's Navy? Find out about what it means to be an Enlisted Sailor and how to go about joining the highly skilled, hands-on Navy workforce.

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#### OFFICER

Where can a college degree take you in today's Navy? Find out about what it means to be an Officer and how to go about joining the highly respected, challenging Navy management team.

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**AMERICA'S NAVY**

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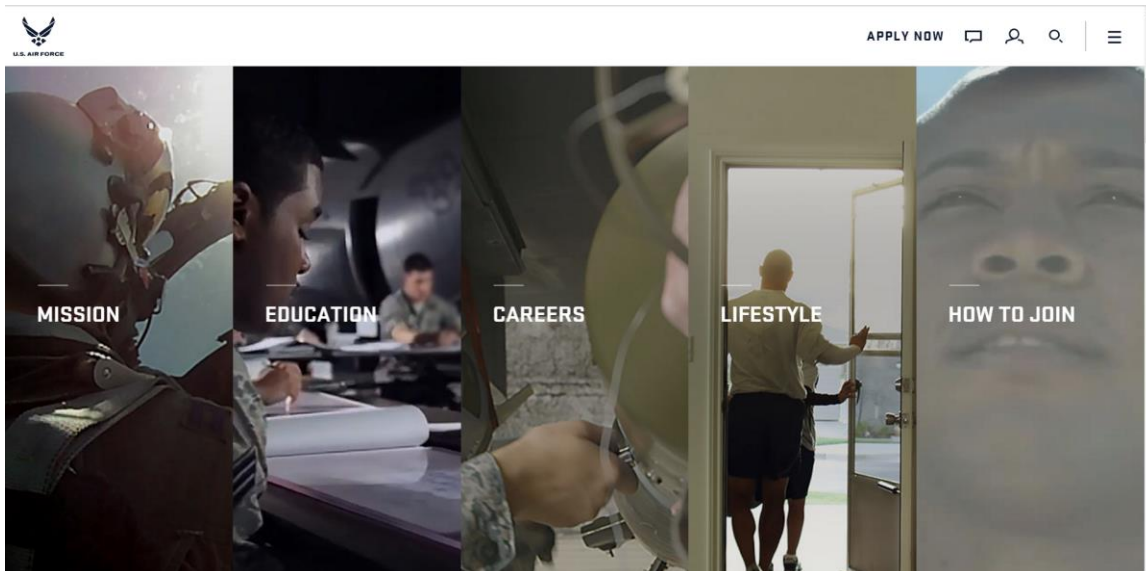
The U.S. Navy recruitment website homepage on December 13, 2016 (America's Navy, 2016).



## Appendix E



Still image of the U.S. Air Force recruitment website video homepage on December 13, 2016 (U.S. Air Force, 2016).



U.S. Air Force recruitment website homepage navigation on December 13, 2016 (U.S. Air Force, 2016).