ISBN 978-82-326-4698-2 (printed ver.)
ISBN 978-82-326-4699-9 (electronic ver.)
ISSN 1503-8181

Roger Lien
Doctoral thesis

Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2020:175

Roger Lien

From Meaning of Service to Psychological Growth and Confirmation of Identity

A Mixed Method Research

Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2020:175

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Thesis for the Degree of
Philosophiae Doctor
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Psychology

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

NTNU

Roger Lien

From Meaning of Service to Psychological Growth and Confirmation of Identity

A Mixed Method Research

Avhandling for graden philosophiae doctor

Trondheim, June 2020

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Psychology

NTNU
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Thesis for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Department of Psychology

© Roger Lien

ISBN 978-82-326-4698-2 (printed ver.)
ISBN 978-82-326-4699-9 (electronic ver.)
ISSN 1503-8181

Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2020:175

Printed by NTNU Grafisk senter

Acknowledgements

As a veteran and Major in the Royal Norwegian Air Force, I have had the privilege of conducting research on military veterans. First and foremost, my sincere thanks to all veterans and collogues in the Norwegian Air Force for having welcomed me at the different Air Force Bases and units around the country, giving me valuable data and a strengthened belief in the motivation and competence of military veterans. This thesis, and the knowledge developed from it, is in recognition of the effort of veterans in the Norwegian Armed Forces. The Norwegian Ministry of Defense has funded this and other veteran research projects, and I am grateful to be part of an organization that prioritizes veteran affairs.

Thanks to the Department of Psychology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) for all support during this study. My deepest appreciations go to Professor Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair and Associate Professor Mons Bendixen at NTNU, first and foremost for their professional knowledge and opinions. My sincere appreciations to my coach at the Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy and NTNU, Associate Professor Kristian Firing for backing and caring during the whole process. Also, highly appreciated is also the work of Associate Professor Torun Haaland at the Norwegian Defense University College who managed the application process and lead “The Veteran Programme” which gathered resources within veteran research. Associate Professor and Major Hans Jakob Bøe at the Joint Medical Services, Institute of Military Psychiatry made data available for study III something which is highly appreciated. I also had the privilege of coworking with him, and Associate Professor and Commander Senior Grade Rino Bandlitz Johansen at the Norwegian Defence University College. Finally, thanks to Lieutenant Colonel Bjørn Olav Heieraas, Lieutenant Colonel Stein Maute and Lieutenant Colonel Dag Henriksen for giving me the freedom to plan my work during my positions at the Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy and Ørland Air Force Station. To my family, thank you all.

Research Studies

Study I

Lien, R., Firing, K., Bendixen, M., and Kennair, L. E. O. (2016). Meaning and Inconsistencies of Meaning – Exploring the perspectives of Norwegian veterans in Afghanistan. *Journal of Military Studies, 7*, 31-43. https://doi.org/10.1515/jms-2016-0004

Study II

Lien, R., Bendixen, M., and Kennair, L. E. O. (2019). Developing the New Meaning of Service Questionnaire and Assessing its Association with Psychological Growth among Veterans. (Currently under review in *Military Psychology*, submitted October 2018, resubmitted December 2019).

Study III

Lien, R., Bøe, H. J., and Johansen, R. B. (2019). Confirmation of Military Identity after Exposure to Stress - the Influence of Status Dimensions. (Submitted to Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies, December 2019).

Contents

1 Abstract....1

2 Introduction....5
2.1 Research motivation....5
2.2 Concept of Meaning....6
2.3 Stressors....11
2.4 Construction of Meaning....14
2.5 Growth and Identity....17
2.6 This thesis....22

3 Method....24
3.1 Methodological Approach....24
3.2 Methods study I....25
3.3 Methods study II....28
3.4 Methods study III....30

4 Results....33
4.1 Results Study I....33
4.2 Results Study II....34
4.3 Results Study III....36

5 Discussion....37
5.1 Synthesis....37
5.2 Limitations....44
5.3 Further research....46
5.4 Conclusion....47

6 References....49

Appendices:

Paper I: Meaning and Inconsistencies of Meaning – Exploring the perspectives of Norwegian veterans in Afghanistan.

Paper II: Developing the New Meaning of Service Questionnaire and Assessing its Association with Psychological Growth among Veterans.

Paper III: Confirmation of Military Identity after Exposure to Stress - the Influence of Status Dimensions.

Appendix I: Interview guide of Paper I

Appendix II: Survey of Paper II

Appendix III: Survey of Paper III

1 Abstract

Purpose

The overarching aims of this thesis have been to explore what meaning constructs veterans assign to service in international operations, and to investigate how meaning constructs affect psychological growth and military identity. The main purpose of this thesis is to increase knowledge and understanding of the positive effects of participating in military international operations and the psychological processes involved. This might enhance military leaders' understanding of the psychological processes of soldiers in and after service in international operations. In addition, it might increase the knowledge of how to support soldiers in their effort to establish meaningful constructs of their experiences, something that might spur positive effects such as psychological growth and confirmation of their military identity.

Theory

The thesis describes the process of meaning-making which is largely based on theories of Park and Folkmand (1997) and Park (2010), as well as Janoff-Bulman (1989; 1992), Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995; 1996; 2004) and Baumeister (1991). Meaning-making is described as a process that is initiated by stressful experiences where appraised meaning of an event do not correspond to needs for meaning (Baumeister, 1991) or global meaning (Park, 2010). Several factors are important to consider in order to explaining this process, such as those of meaning discrepancy, meaning-making efforts (Park, 2010), psychological growth and identity change (Park, 2010; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Zebrack, 2000). This thesis posits a model where construction of meaning of service includes appraised meaning of an event and efforts to handle meaning discrepancies. In addition, this model separate construction of meaning of service from outcomes of the meaning-making process such as

psychological growth and confirmation of identity. Furthermore, this thesis argues for some differences between finding meaning in a military context compared to other contexts.

Method

This thesis is based on a mixed method research with an exploratory design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007), where study I with a qualitative method forms the basis for the quantitative methods in study II and III. In study I, in-depth interviews of thirteen Afghanistan veterans were conducted. It aimed to explore what aspects of the service veterans found meaningful and how these meaningful aspects were related to inconsistencies of meaning and meaning-making coping strategies (Lien, Firing, Bendixen and Kennair, 2016). Study II used a cross-sectional design with veterans from the Norwegian Air Force having participated in different operations abroad. Study II operationalized the meaning-making process described in study I by establishing the Meaning of Service questionnaire (MoS) and testing its association to psychological growth. Study III used a prospective design, with Norwegian veterans serving in Afghanistan for a given time period. In study III, one particular meaning category from study I, Status, was used as a guide to define status dimensions through the use of Combat exposure index questionnaire (Hougnæs, Bøe, Dahl and Reichelt, 2016). Mixed method analysis was used to explore whether change from pre- to post-deployment in operational identity was associated with these status dimensions, and also cohesion and employment status. Study III also explored changes in idealism and individualism from pre- to post deployment.

Results

Study I described the meaning-making process by the use of themes of meaning, inconsistencies of meaning and coping strategies. The following three meaning themes were

found: (1) Confirmation of ability, (2) Cohesion of peers and (3) Significance of effort. In addition, three pairs of inconsistency themes were found: (1) Ambivalence to action which activated the coping strategy Counterfactual thinking, (2) Unreliable team members which activated Downward comparison and (3) Indifference of civilians which activated Justification. In study II, principal component analysis revealed a factor structure almost as expected. However, none of the inconsistency categories and coping strategies were complete, leaving us with three meaning themes and two coping strategies for further analysis. The results from regression analysis indicated that the meaning themes and coping strategies are associated with psychological growth. The results from study III showed that operational identity significanctly increase as a result of a deployment to international operations. Individualism was not different between pre- and post deployment. The results also showed that a specific experience of stressors is associated with confirmation of operational identity. The study supports the idea that exposure to certain stressors could be viewed as status dimensions among the soldiers. Furthermore, Study III also revealed no significant differences between temporarily and permanently employed soldiers in average level of operational identity.

Further research

More research is needed to better understand the psychological process of meaning-making in a military context. Further research could follow the research model in this thesis and further add relevant meaning themes and themes of inconsistencies to the model. To validate the revised Meaning of Service (MoS) questionnaire would be a natural next step. In addition, longitudinal studies would capture a meaning-making process that evolves over a period of time, for instance pre-, under and post- deployment. Research could also further develop the

understanding of meaning ascribed to certain stressors as status dimensions. In addition, reasons for employment differences should be investigated further.

2 Introduction

2.1 Research motivation

Over the past two decades, western countries have participated in numerous international operations, such as operations in Afghanistand and over Libya where also thousands of Norwegian soldiers have been involved. Some have operated in a highly threatening environment, involving combat and air strikes over foreign territory. A range of studies document how such stressful experience leads to reduced health and quality of life after redeployment from military operations. Military personnel are at heightened risk of suffering from symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after having completed their service in war (Litz, 2007). However, an increasing numbers of studies show that high stressor load or traumatic experiences also relate to positive effects, also in the military context. In a recent survey of Norwegian veterans from missions in Afghanistan, more than half of the veterans reported increased coping capabilities during stress and increased self-esteem after redeployment (Forsvarets Sanitet, 2013). It was this research and perspective that largely motived the current research.

The overarching aims of this thesis have been to explore what meaning constructs veterans assign to service in international operations, and to investigate how meaning constructs affect psychological growth and military identity. It is important at this stage to note that this research does not intend to romanticize war in any way. Rather, it may provide a contrast to the image of the veteran as merely a person in distress. Furthermore, the research is a contribution to the knowledgebase of what experiences are found meaningful to soldiers conducting military operations in foreign countries. Along the way, we will consider what is found inconsistent with such experiences and how this might affect psychological growth and military identity. Hopefully, this might contribute to enhanced knowledge and understanding of military veterans, especially the importance of finding meaning from stressful experiences.

Subsequently, military leaders might encourage this positive, personal growth process by implementing the different pathways and mechanisms presented in this thesis and the three specific research studies. Furthermore, this thesis will provide an overview of the theoretical background that has guided the research of the three studies presented here.

2.2 Concept of Meaning

Existential meaning describes human life from a philosophical view and Frankl (1946/1984), a survivor of Holocaust, emphasized the personal freedom and responsibility to find meaning in life, including the meaning of suffering. Frankl (1946/1984) also described meaning as an inherent human will or primal drive, emphasizing the motivational aspects of meaning. Mascaro and Rosen (2008) define existential meaning as "*possession of a coherent framework for viewing life that provides a sense of purpose or direction, which, if lived with in accord, can bring about a sense of fulfillment*" (p. 578-579). In psychology, the motivational aspects of meaning and coherent framework for viewing life are essential in describing meaning, and most concepts of meaning include a description of such a coherent framework, for instance global, core schemas, general orienting systems or global meaning that people employ to interpret their experiences (Park, 2010). Park and Folkman (1997) describe meaning as a sense of purpose and goals worthwhile to strive towards, and such meaning is found within an established global belief system about the self and the world. Global belief systems are also referred to as shared mental representations (Baumeister, 1991), cognitive maps, knowledge structures or schemata (Mooren, Schok and Kleber, 2009). Within the field of research on stress and trauma, Janoff-Bulman (1989) uses the term assumptive worlds that encompass beliefs that concern our views of benevolence in the world, whether distribution of outcomes is a result of justice, control or chance and beliefs about ourselves regarding morals, self-control and luck. Further, Baumeister (1991) refers to

four universal needs for meaning: purpose, efficacy, self-worth and value. Janoff-Bulman's (1989) description of assumptive worlds and Baumeister's (1991) description of needs for meaning overlap. Both describe goals, own morality, perception of control and of self-worth (self-esteem) as important categories of their theories.

Most descriptions of meaning-making include stressful experiences that create a discrepancy between the meaning assigned to an event and global meaning or assumptive worlds. According to Park and Folkman (1997), this discrepancy generates distress and initiates a meaning-making process. They define meaning-making as "*the eventual integration of situational meaning with global meaning through cognitive reappraisal of both the appraised meaning of the situation and global beliefs and goals*" (p. 132). Park and Folkman (1997) describe situational meaning as an initial appraisal of meaning of an event, and points out that situational meaning is assessed within the frame of global meaning. Most of the time this process is completed without much effort as global meaning is confirmed through situations perceived within expectations (Lomsky-Feder, 1995). However, sometimes our global meaning is challenged, often through stressful events, since stressful experiences have the potential to be incongruent or inconsistent with general goals and beliefs about the self and the world (Park, 2010). The meaning-making process challenges established meaning structures, which allows for adaptation, learning and integration of new perspectives of life (Park and Folkman, 1997; Park, 2010).

Within this field of research, terminology used across studies is rich (Park, 2010). Different ways to describe and operationalize meaning-making and outcomes of these processes undoubtedly add to the richness of terms used. For instance, meaning-making efforts are sometimes referred to as rumination, indicating that finding meaning is at least partly an intrusive process, not only a deliberate effort (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). In addition, some argue that the meaning-making process involves unconscious and automatic

efforts rather than conscious and deliberate efforts (Park and Ai, 2006). Meaning-making processes may also be described through a search for comprehensibility (what happened, how it happened and why it happened) and search for significance (gain from the experience), indicating that these processes are completed in a certain sequence (Schok, Kleber and Lensvelt-Mulders, 2010b). This complies with general theory of stress, appraisal and coping (Park and Folkman, 1997). In addition, other meaning-making pathways have also been suggested (Dekel, Ein-Dor and Solomon, 2012; Park, 2008; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). For example, a narrative process is considered another meaning-making process as people might see their stressful experience within a positive perspective through a reconstructed narrative (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

There might be several different effects of meaning-making processes. Exposure to stressful events is often followed by psychological distress such as distressing emotions, thoughts, and physical unpleasant reactions (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). Successful meaning-making processes are believed to alleviate distress, even though some research conclude differently (Park, 2010). However, outcomes might also include negative changes, for instance in global meaning. Schok, Kleber and Boeije (2010a) reported that veterans with PTSD symptoms found human life was worthless and the world to be unjust as a consequence of their military service in Cambodia. In the cases where meaning-making efforts result in successful integration, the outcome of this process might involve changes in identity and perception of growth (Park, 2010).

Research that examines growth uses different measures such as posttraumatic growth, posttraumatic change, stress-related growth, benefit finding, perceived benefits, adversarial growth or psychological growth (Britt, Adler and Bartone, 2001; Linley and Joseph, 2004; Nordstrand, Hjemdal, Holen, Reichelt and Bøe, 2017; Park, 2010). In this thesis, the term psychological growth is used to address growth in general, and specific terms as they are used

in the research they refer to. In a military context, some research has documented the prevalence of psychological growth after having conducted service in international operations (Aldwin, Levenson and Spiro, 1994; Elder and Clipp, 1989; Fontana and Rosenheck, 1998; Mehlum, 1995). However, none of these research articles actually investigate any meaning-making efforts, but rather effects of military service.

Another outcome of the meaning-making process is change in identity (Park, 2010). People who change or revise their identity after being exposed to stressful events are for instance found among cancer victims (Zebrack, 2000) and survivors of bereavement (Neimeyer, Baldwin and Gillies, 2006). Corresponding research within the military context is scarce. Nonetheless, research within the military context provides examples of how military identity strengthens or weakens over time, for instance for US cadets (Franke, 1997). Other research focus on whether different military identities are suited for all possible missions ranging from combat to humanitarien operations (Franke and Heinecken, 2001). In order to measure military identity, Johansen, Laberg and Martinussen et al. (2013a) have developed a scale to measure military identity based on the prevalence of different motives to serve. Johansen, Laberg and Martinussen (2013a; 2013b) identified a military identity that included characteristics of both warriorism and professionalism termed as operational identity, and view this as the dominant identity of the current soldiers. Furthermore, they also identified idealism that is related to patriotic beliefs and national interests and individualism to self-fulfillment and self-centeredness.

Research within the military context seems to stand out from other research on meaning-making in a civilian context. Research within a civilian context often describe survivors and victims of one single traumatic event. Larner and Blow (2011) emphasize the fact that military combatants are not considered victims of random events, but voluntarily face potential stressors of war. This might be said for most soldiers, also non-combatants. In

addition, military personnel typically work in teams and closely with other units towards defined objectives and they represent their nation and possibly UN or NATO in their mission. Thus, the meaning constructs from military service in international operations will not only encompass the personal self, but also the relational self as a part of a team, and collective self as a part of the organization and the society as a whole (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Thus, construction of meaning might also reach beyond influences of the unit and organization.

Baumeister (1991) emphasizes that meaning is found within a larger context such as the culture and that we receive meaning from the culture. Consequently, one could argue that construction of meaning of war is influenced by how it is generally interpreted in the society (Gustavsen, 2016). For instance, Lomsky-Feder (1995) found that most Israeli soldiers who had participated in the 1973 Yom Kippur War interpreted their participation just as a phase in their life. Only some of the soldiers considered the war to represent a discontinuity in their lives, an experience that disturbed or destroyed assumptions about the world. In the Norwegian Armed Forces, status of serving in international operations seems to have increased from the Norwegian military engagement in Lebanon (1978 to 1998) and to the present, at least within the military organization (Edström, Lunde and Matlary, 2009). For example, the Norwegian Armed Forces use participation in international operations as a means to select applicants to different positions. Such organizational incentives might be important to recruit personnel to service in international operations. However, it might also have created a gap between the status of such service within the military organisation and the status within the society in general. For instance, Norwegian veterans would like to be appreciated more within the society than they do today (Gustavsen, 2016). Thus, conducting research on meaning-meaning within the military context must also be understood within the culture of the military organization and the position of the military organization as a part of

the society. This might have bearing on how to interpret and compare research of soldiers from other nations.

2.3 Stressors

Meaning-making processes are initiated by exposure to stress and soldiers who deploy to international operations might be exposed to various stressors. Besides the risk of being killed or wounded, stress might also be experienced in the form of isolation from family and friends, ambiguity in rules of engagement and changing missions, and powerlessness in the form of restrictions and policies, to mention a few (Bartone, 2006). Stressors might initiate a meaning-making process when appraised meaning of an event is discrepant with global meaning (Park, 2010). What stressors that might cause such a discrepancy in a military context is seldom specified. However, predictability and control are probably the most important global meaning (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), and loss of control are typically found among veterans with stress symptoms (Fontana and Rosenheck 1998; Schok et al. 2010a). This is probably why research on meaning within the military context often involves measures of combat and high-perceived threat (Aldwin et al., 1994; Fontana and Rosenheck, 1998; Spiro, Schnurr and Aldwin, 1999) as this address the indivduals perception of controllability. The complexity increases if one distinguishes between contrabillity that refers to the cause of event, outcome of an event and self-control, and if we make a distinction between controllability and self-efficacy (Roesch, Weiner and Vaughn, 2002). However, most research does not empirically test how stressors violate global meaning as it demand a longitudinal design with pre-tests of global meaning before being exposed to stress (Park, 2010). There are also other global meanings or needs for meaning that might be violated within the military context, for instance stressor that challenge the morale of the soldiers, as found in the Moral provocation index (MPI; Hougsnæs, Bøe, Dahl and Reichelt, 2017). Such

measures should probably also be used in research investigating the meaning-making process as it concerns global meaning or needs for meaning, and address moral dilemmas that are present in many conflicts (Bartone, 2005; Franke, 1999; Mæland, 2004).

Acute stressors are typically related to negative health effects, but chronic stressors might also have effect on this relationship. A meta-analysis of risk factors for trauma-exposed adults by Brewin, Andrews and Valentine (2000), revealed that the strongest factors of PTSD symptoms were connected to the severity of the trauma, lack of social support and additional or subsequent life stress. Day and Livingston (2001) argue that research on stress should include both acute and chronic stressors but that this combination of stress is sparsely investigated. They investigated the impact of both acute and chronic stressor on health in a military context, and found by regression analysis that both type of stressors were associated with self-reported health symptoms as measured by the 20-item Symptoms Checklist (Bartone, Ursano, Wright and Ingraham, 1989). Here, acute work stressors events included 15 tragic or life-threatening incidents related to military service in war, and role stressors included four subscales from the Occupational Environmental Scales (OES; Osipow and Spokane, 1983). A similar distinction of stressors is between subjective- and objective stress (King, King, Foy and Gudanowski, 1996). Both types of stressors are found to be predictors of growth as explained below in the section Growth and Identity.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) use terms like trauma, crisis and highly stressful events to describe an experience which challenges established meaning structures that can lead to posttraumatic growth. At the same time, they acknowledge that more moderate stressful events might lead to growth, but at a lower level (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). According to Janoff-Bulman (2006), trauma is to be understood as internal disorganization of our set of fundamental assumptions of our self and the world, which encompass our most general and abstract cognitive schemas termed assumptive worlds. Emotional numbing and intrusive

thoughts that follows trauma are gradually replaced by deliberate cognitive processing or confrontation of the traumatic event, something that would restore such cognitive schemas (Janoff-Bulman, 2006). What is more, Park (2010) emphasizes that highly stressful events appear to be most relevant for change of the established meaning structures. In the process of finding new meaning after stressful events, some believe only accommodation and not assimilation processes might promote growth. Only accommodation involves changing global beliefs and goals, and accommodation might therefore refer to better adjustment to major and irreversible stressors (Joseph, 2009). Thus, one could believe that less stressful events do not change established meaning structures and thus have no potential for growth. However, Helgeson, Raynolds and Tomich (2006) point out that two studies have demonstrated a curvilinear relation between stressor severity and psychological growth, for instance among Vietnam veterans (Fontana and Rosenheck, 1998). Dekel et al., (2012) found that PTSD predicted later growth for personnel with combat experience but not for prisoners of war. They suggested that there might be different pathways to growth and different types of growth. Thus, moderate stress might possibly be optimal for stimulation of processes leading to posttraumatic growth, and that too extreme threats might decrease the likelihood of growth.

The majority of the Norwegian veterans who served in Afghanistan returned without having experienced traumatic situations such as physical injury, loss of colleagues or life-threatening situations such like combat. However, most soldiers have to deal with the continuous risk of being involved in such situations and to handle a range of other stressful situations (Forsvarets Sanitet, 2013). There also exist research on meaning within the military context that include samples of soldiers in low-risk operations such as peacekeeping operations (Britt et al., 2001; Mehlum, 1995).

2.4 Construction of Meaning

Meaning-making refers to processes that follow when people assign meaning to a stressful event and experience a discrepancy between the appraised meaning and global meaning (Park, 2010). In research on illness, bereavement and other personal crises, meaning-making might be operationalized as existence of intrusive thoughts, efforts to answer the question "why me", and the use of different coping strategies. In such circumstances, outcomes often refer to how individuals have accepted or made sense of the spesific stressful event (Park, 2010). Soldiers might also experience single traumatic or highly stressful incidents during their service, such as loss of comrades. However, soldiers find meaning in a range of experiences during a deployment that are not directly connected to any particular stressor. Furthermore, some meaningful aspects of the service are believed to be consistent with several aspects of global meaning at the same time (Lien et al., 2016). In addition, some experiences in war might also be both consistent and inconsistent with global meaning at the same time, dependent on the interpretation. Experiencing threat might be perceived as inconsistent with global meaning as it involves loss of control. Experiencing threat as a soldier might also be perceived as an opportunity to prove your abilities (Lien et al., 2016). By finding positive meaning from such events the veterans might increase their ability to master the situation and find their efforts worthwhile. This indicates that higher stressor load creates a higher need to find meaning (Schok, Kleber, Elands and Weerts, 2008). Thus, finding meaningful aspects of the service is defined in this thesis as an effort to reduce discrepancies caused by threat and other stressors.

Previous research has investigated meaning constructs as predictors of growth in a military context. In their study of US peacekeepers in Bosnia, Britt et al., (2001) define meaning as (a) "*being engaged in important and relevant work and*" (b) "*experiencing events during the course of the deployment that put the deployment in a broader contextual*

framework" (p.54-55). Examples of contextual experiences were how often they travelled outside camp, had contacts with local inhabitants and soldiers of other nations, and how much they saw the destruction of war. These contextual experiences were found to be associated with benefits of the deployment, and here measures of benefits resembled measures of posttraumatic growth. Furthermore, engagement in meaningful work was measured through three dimensions; importance of their job, engagement in their work and to what extent they possessed a peacekeeper identity (Britt et al., 2001). They found that the veterans reported more benefits (growth) from the deployment if they were engaged in meaningful work. The same relation between meaningful work and benefits was found among US peacekeeping soldiers in Kosovo (Britt, Dickinson, Moore, Castro and Adler, 2007). Here meaningful work was described as "*active involvement in challenging and meaningful work during the military operation*" (p. 38). This was measured in four dimensions; task significance, military pride, job engagement and challenge at work. Here, both the experience of specific events and the work itself were found meaningful. Similar to both Britt et al. (2001), this thesis describes meaningful work (meaning constructs from the service) as possible predictors of psychological growth. This thesis also describes contextual experiences (meaning constructs from the service) as possible predictors of confirmation of identity.

Other studies do not separate construction of meaning from outcomes of the service. One example is the qualitative research of Schok et al. (2010a). In this study, Dutch peacekeepers in Cambodia emphasized the bond and support of their comrades, the effect of their efforts, their performance in military operations, and being in a different world as meaningful themes during their deployment. These particular meaning constructs seem to concern experiences from the service itself. It is also likely that they are constructs that fulfil needs for meaning and are consistent with global meaning as argued for in Lien et al. (2016). Furthermore, Schok, et al., (2010a) also describe enhanced professional skills, valuable life

experiences, and increased value for life as meaningful aspects of the service after redeployment. These themes concern meaning constructs that constitute broader concepts of meaning, reach beyond the particular context of serving in international operations, and reflect new acquired competence and motivation. In addition, some of these themes are similar to description of dimensions of growth, such as posttraumatic growth described by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004).

We can do the same division of meaning constructions and positive outcomes found in the research of Gustavsen (2016). She describes three different frameworks for constructing meaning from the experience of Norwegian veterans in Afghanistan. Within these frameworks, there are meaning constructs described by the veterans such as accomplishment of their job, doing a job on behalf of your country and the recognition that follows. These are meaning constructs that refers to the service. Within these frameworks, we also find positive outcomes such as acquiring experience, increase in robustness and new perspectives on life, which seems to refer to broader conspets of meaning, reflect new acquired competence and motivation and resemble discription of growth. Consequently, this thesis separates construction of meaning of service as part of meaning-making processes from broader concepts of meaning that are regarded as positive outcomes of this process.

Another way to operationalize meaning-making efforts is the use of coping strategies (Park, 2010). Several different coping strategies might be described as relevant meaning-making coping strategies (Park and Folkman, 1997). Positive appraisal, revisions of goals and goal-directed problem focused coping are described as meaning-making coping strategies (Park and Folkman, 1997). Use of reattributions to establish causality and responsibility might increase perception of control (Park, 2010), and externalizing responsibility in cases of failure might satisfy the need for moral value (Baumeister, 1991; Sommer, Baumeister and Stillman, 2012). Research from non-military contexts have investigated the use of coping

strategies in relation to growth. For example, in samples of US college students Williams, Davis and Millsap (2002) found that denial and regret were related to higher levels of intrusion and avoidance and lower levels of growth. Linley and Joseph (2004) found in a review study that different coping styles such as emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping and religious coping all correlated with growth. Rosner and Powell (2006) found in a study of former Yugoslavian refugees that different coping styles correlated with posttraumatic growth, in particular to the dimension *Relating to others*. Here, coping styles included task-oriented coping, emotional-oriented coping, and avoidance-oriented coping. According to Helgeson et al. (2006), coping strategies are often positively correlated to each other and might reflect levels of distress rather than effective coping. Thus, it can be difficult to distinguish the effects of the different coping strategies from each other.

2.5 Growth and Identity

According to Park (2010), a meaning-making process might lead to psychological growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) describe posttraumatic growth as a concept of positive change because of trauma, and overall rely on descriptions of assumptive worlds, rumination and discrepancy as found in most descriptions of meaning-making in stressful situations, for instance Park (2010). Elsewhere, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995, 1996) have operationalized posttraumatic growth, a measure that is widely used in research, which include the following dimensions: increased appreciation of life, strengthened relationships, enhanced personal strength, changed priorities and a richer spiritual life. Research on psychological growth typically concerns people who have experienced unexpected stressful events leading to a personal life crisis. For instance is growth found in victims of bereavement (Calhoun, Tedeschi, Cann, and Hanks, 2010), chronic illness (Roussi and Avdi, 2008), and in a range of other stressful experiences (Linley and Joseph, 2004). People who report growth might also

simultaneously report of symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However, this correlation between growth and symptoms of PTSD does not support the notion that psychological growth is actually a denial of the actual hardship (Tedeschi and McNally, 2011). However, the empirical evidence is mixed and some experience both growth and distress and others just distress after being exposed to stressful events (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). Since psychological growth is often accompanied by various degrees of distress, such as intrusive rumination and negative affect, growth should not take attention away from the negative responses people have to cope with (Calhoun et al., 2010).

Some research has also been conducted with a military sample. For instance, the majority of former US aviators and prisoners of the Vietnam War claimed their experience had favorable effect on their personalities, self-confidence and vaule of life (Sledge, Boydstun and Rabe, 1980). Dohrenwend et al. (2004) also found that Vitetnam veterans perceived their service as mainly positive. Posttraumatic growth has furthermore been documented in a US sample of veterans from Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Iraqi Freedom (Pietrzak, Goldstein, Malley, Rivers, Southwick, 2010) and US Prisoners of War (Erbes, et al., 2005). Growth in the form of improved relations is found in several of studies (Aldwin et al., 1994; Elder and Clipp, 1989; Fontana and Rosenheck, 1998, Spiro et al., 1999). However, people seem to report lower levels on some of the dimensions of posttraumatic growth (Pietrzak et al., 2010). These dimensions appear to relate to relational and existential changes as opposed to personal changes (Nordstrand et al., 2017).

Several factors have been identified as predictors of psychological growth, for instance exposure to threat, personality characteristics, social support and coping strategies, as reported by Linley and Joseph (2004) in their review study. In some research of growth, a seemingly adequate distinction is made between objective and subjective stress. Objective stress is often measured by some objective criteria, for instance having, or not having

experienced combat. Subjective stress is measured by some subjective criteria, for instance, to what degree something is perceived as threatening. Maguen, Vogt, King, King and Litz (2006) found an association between perceived threat and posttraumatic growth. Moreover, Fontana and Rosenheck (1998) found both perceived threat and combat-related experiences to be associated with psychological growth. However, neither Maguen et al. (2006) with Gulf War I veterans nor Pietrzak et al. (2010) with veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, found combat exposure to predict posttraumatic growth.

Another factor that could relate to psychological growth is resilience. Resilience is often described as the ability to be resistant to stressors or recover from stressful events and return to normal functioning (Lepore and Revenson, 2006). Resilience is also regarded as the ability to transform traumatic experiences into psychological growth (Lepore and Revenson, 2006). Schok et al. (2010b) found alternative measures of resilience (operationalized as high degrees of self-esteem, optimism and perceived control) to be positively related to indicators of growth (operationalized as personal skills, relationships and life philosophy) in a cross-sectional study of Dutch peacekeepers in Cambodia. Furthermore, Pietrzak et al. (2010) reported a positive relationship between resilience and posttraumatic growth using parts of the Connor-Davidson resilience scale (effort/perseverance). Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge and Martinussen (2003) focused both on personality features, such as a planned future and structured style to describe a person's resilience, and on external support systems, such as family support and cohesion. However, the effects of social support on psychological growth in military studies reveal mixed results. Neither structural social support (sheer degree of social contact) nor functional social support (feeling interpersonally connected) predicted posttraumatic growth in relation to former prisoners of war (Erbes et al., 2005). However, post-deployment social support predicted posttraumatic growth (Maguen et al., 2006).

Pietrzak et al. (2010) found that received support from unit members were associated with posttraumatic growth, but not leader support or post-deployment social support.

Resilience is considered to be conceptually related to the personality characteristic of hardiness (Bartone, 2006). Hardiness is described as a combination of three attitudes: commitment, control and challenge, and it might function as a buffer against negative outcomes of stress (Bartone, 2006; Maddi, 2013). Maddi (2013) argues that hardiness also promotes psychological growth since it stimulates self-care, problem-solving coping and socially supportive behavior. Bartone (2006) finds that individuals who score high on hardiness typically assign positive meaning to a situation. This finds support in a study of US peacekeeping veterans in Bosnia, where hardiness was associated with how meaningful the soldiers perceived their work, which in turn was positively associated with perceived benefits (Britt et al., 2001).

Another positive outcome of a meaning-making process might involve confirmation of identity. Neimeyer et al. (2006) found that change of identity and benefit finding were positively associated with less complication from bereavement. Here, change of identity was described as changing a sense of identity or feeling differently. Zebrack (2000) reported of a changed identity following cancer victims' meaning-making process. This research underlines the discrepancy between the self-image and image of a cancer victim, where the self-image is rooted in social norms and standards. Being diagnosed with cancer might have physical, social, emotional, spiritual and financial consequences and undermine the social identities as a spouse, parent and job identity. Not living up to expected standards might cause distress and initiate a process where meaning from the experience is derived (Zebrack, 2000). Thus, Zebrack (2000) argues that the experience of cancer involves a process where identity is constructed, reconstructed or changed. Research involving revised or confirmed identities as a part of a meaning-making process in a military context seems to be non-

existing. In a military context, changing identity might be relevant for soldiers that involuntarily cannot be soldiers anymore, for instance on account of reduced mental or physical health after service in war. For most soldiers who conduct operations in international operations, we believe that the service rather confirm desired characteristics of a military identity. Thus, in a military context it is therefore more relevant to talk about a confirmation of a social identity rather than change of a personal identity.

To measure military identity, Johansen et al. (2013a) developed the Military Professional Identity Scale (NPIS) that measure to what degree soldiers identify with the operational identity, idealism and individualism. The research of Johansen et al. (2013a) follows several studies examining motivation to serve in the military organization (Farris, 1995; Griffith, 2008; Hedlund, 2011; Woodruff, Kelty and Segal, 2006). Based on Moskos's work (1977; 1988), Battistelli (1997) claims that motivation to serve has followed the development of the modern armed forces and that self-oriented and individualistic values have increased, and traditional nationalistic and idealistic values have decreased among the soldiers. Most soldiers today adhere to the operational identity, in particular those willing to deploy to international operations (Johansen et al., 2013a). In general, social identity is confirmed through group distinctiveness and social status dimensions (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje, 2002), and description of relevant status dimensions generally encompasses characteristics such as performance, ability, and moral value of the group (Ellemers, et al., 2002). Alternatively, Woodward and Jenkings (2011) found that military experience to a large part define the identity of veterans.

Harada et al. (2002) described the veteran identity through military status, military experience, and perceptions of the veteran experience. Here, military status referred to participation in different wars, branch of service, and rank. In addition, Harada et al. (2002) examined how veterans with a minority background experienced being treated as veterans in

the US, and Griffith (2009) examined the motivation to identify with the military profession among US military reservist. Other studies typically address military identity from a gender perspective (e.g. DeGroot, 2001; Sasson-Levy, 2003) or prevalence of different military identites (Franke, 1997; Johansen et al., 2013a).

2.6 This thesis

The overarching aims of this thesis have been to explore what meaning constructs veterans assign to service in international operations, and to investigate how meaning constructs affect psychological growth and military identity. We have proposed a meaning-making model in a military context as illustrated in figure 1, and the studies were conducted accordingly.

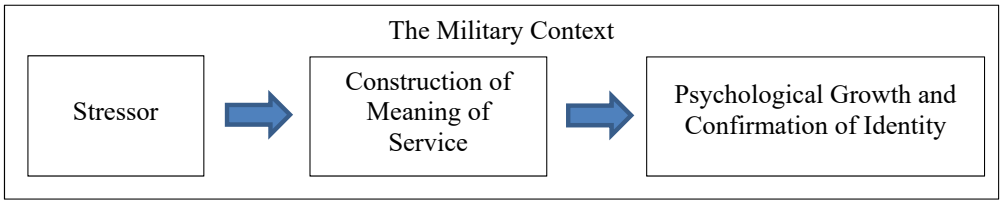

Figure 1, The meaning-making model in a military context

The figure shows that stressors initiate a process where meaning constructs are established. Stressors are here used as a general term throughout the thesis, and migh include a range of different stressors found in a deployment to international operations with varying intensity and duration (Bartone, 2006). Further, this thesis argues for the relevance of construction of meaning of service and use of coping strategies as an important part of the efforts to restore discrepancies between appraised and global meaning, also known as a meaning-making process (Park, 2010). Figure 1 also illustrates that the meaning-making

processes lead to positive outcomes such as psychological growth (Park, 2010). The connection between experiencing negative, stressful and traumatic events and reports of growth or related outcomes are well documented within several contexts, but seems still to be limited investigated in a military context when involving meaning constructs and coping strategies as predictors of growth. Further, the meaning-making process might also lead to positive outcomes such as change in identity (Park, 2010). However, this thesis argues that soldiers rather confirm their military identity as a consequence of deployment to international operations as illustrated in figure 1. The aims of the different studies have been as follows:

The aim of study I was to explore what aspects of the service veterans found meaningful and how these meaningful aspects were related to inconsistencies of meaning and meaning-making coping strategies (Lien et al., 2016). Since this was an explorative study, no predictions were made in advance.

The first aim of study II was to report on the psychometric properties of the current developed questionnaire Meaning of Service, covering the following meaning constructs: meaning themes, inconsistency categories and coping strategies. The second aim was to report on the meaning constructs' associations with psychological growth. We also controlled for other relevant predictors of growth. In study II, the following predictions were made:

1. Meaning themes, inconsistency categories and coping strategies are identified as separate constructs in a principal component analysis.
2. Objective stress, subjective stress, hardiness and resilience are associated with growth.
3. The MoS questionnaire is associated with growth, i.e., Themes of meaning, and coping strategies are positively associated with growth, and coping strategies will be affected by the accompanying Inconsistency categories.

The first aim of study III was to examine how deployment to international operations relates to a strengthening or weakening of military identities, and to examine whether status

dimensions are associated with change in operational identity. Here, status dimensions refer to a specific meaning category as described in study I. The second aim was to examine whether cohesion and employment status are associated with change in operational identity. In study III, the following predictions were made:

1. Operational identity strengthens and individualism and idealism do not change following deployment to international operations.
2. Status dimensions and cohesion are predictors of a strengthened operational identity.

3 Method

3.1 Methodological Approach

Together, the three different studies in this thesis are based on mixed methods research and an exploratory design where quantitative research builds on qualitative research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). In study I, a qualitative exploration of what aspects of the service veterans found meaningful was used. Interviews and interview analyses revealed a model consisting of meaning themes, inconsistency themes and coping strategies. Codes from this model were used to write specific items to develop the questionnaire Meaning of Service (MoS) in study II. In this study, a factor analysis confirmed much of the expected factor structure. A hypothesis of its association to psychological growth was tested and partly confirmed. However, in the factor analysis, one category, status dimensions, did not fit the factor structure and was excluded from the measure. In study III, the description of this particular category of status dimensions from study I was first operationalized through measures of stressor exposure, and then used to test the association between the experience of certain status dimension and confirmation of military identity in a prospective study.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative analysis has been necessary in this project as research addressing Meaning of Service and equivalent constructs are scarcely investigated. Thus, it has been necessary to examine these themes of meaning before developing and validating a quantitative measure. Different samples have been used in the different studies as recommended by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007). Both qualitative methods and quantitative methods have their weaknesses, and in general, use of mixed methods research might offset some of these weaknesses. The qualitative research of study I cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, study II and study III suggested that the conceptual findings in study I can be generalized to still active Air Force veterans and to a larger sample of Norwegian veterans. In addition, the qualitative research adds to the explanation of the results of the quantitative research by its rich description of the different themes and categories.

Every participation in these studies was voluntary, based on written informed consent, and study I and study II were approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). After new regulations concerning research on military personnel within the Norwegian Armed Forces, the use of data collected for study II was also approved by the Norwegian Defense College. As study III was based on a larger study, which included sensitive health information, this research was conducted in accordance with legislation regulating the Norwegian Armed Forces Health Registry.

3.2 Methods study I

Participants. The veterans in study I had conducted Force Protection and Security Operations as a part of the Norwegian military engagement in Afghanistan in the period from 2008 to 2013. The veterans were mostly non-commissioned officers but some officers are also represented. We chose the home base unit to investigate meaning in this study and the

veterans were recruited from the same Force Protection unit. Here they had had a position for at least a year prior to the research, some with longer engagements. The choice of using the home base unit was based on a belief that the culture of the home unit, which they were recruited from and returned to after service abroad, constituted a stronger basis for meaning constructs compared to some of the temporary units and teams that only existed in some months (from pre-deployment training to redeployment). For instance, meaning constructs are known to developed and be refined over time (Skaggs and Barron, 2006) within a particular social context (Bartone, 2005). In addition, we wanted to find common aspects of meaning that not were influenced by a local team culture.

Procedure. Half of the veterans volunteered after information about the research was given in a company meeting, after which thirteen were randomly selected. These veterans signed a voluntary declaration before semi-structured interviews were conducted at the home base of the veterans and the Air Force Academy. An interview guide was prepared and included questions regarding meaningful and meaningless experiences, communication with other soldiers, family and friends during and after the service abroad. The guide only functioned as a basis for the interviews and several topics and experiences were investigated as they emerged during the interviews. During the interviews it was crucial to ask follow-up questions in order to gain insight into why the veterans found aspects of their service meaningful. This included why they acted as they did and spoke about specific themes as they did in order to get higher-order answers to why something is regarded as meaningful, positive or something to strive towards. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and later analyzed as described below.

Analysis. Analysis of the transcribed material followed principles of open and axial coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008) establishing a hierarchy of codes, categories and themes in a matrix and connecting it to theories and previous research (Creswell 2013). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness within qualitative research concerns credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability. Prolonged engagement might be a way to ensure credibility. The lead researcher in this study is an officer who have also recently served in international operations, and who have been physically present at all the different bases where the respondents were located during their service. In addition, the researcher and respondents came from different parts of the military organization and had not had any previous contact. This might be an advantage in order to get the respondent to speak as freely as possible. The lead researcher also conducted all the interviews and transcribed the material.

To ensure transferability the study tried to present rich descriptions of the results. However, emerging categories with low counts were left out from the model presented. The findings were also compared to other relevant studies, most importantly Shock et al. (2010a), whose study seemed best suited for comparison. To ensure dependability and confirmability, a colleague within extensive experience in qualitative research and the military organization commented on the overall research process and reviewed the current coding, categories and themes. However, it was commented in study I that alternative arrangments of codes and categories were possible which would have resulted in an adjusted model than the one presented (Lien et al., 2016).

Meaning of service encompasses reports of meaning that are constructed within the frame of global meaning or needs for meaning. Thus, part of the analysis involved connecting needs for meaning (purpose, efficacy, self-worth and value) to the different categories found in the analysis. Even if the four needs for meaning represent different types of meaning, one

single event might satisfy several of these needs for meaning at the same time (Sommer, et al., 2012). For instance, a personal goal that is assessed to be right and good might also provide a sense of control and the respect of others. Thus, the boundaries between these mental representations in real life experiences might be blurred.

3.3 Methods study II

Study II was based on the results from study I, where the proposed model of study I concerning Themes of Meaning and Related Themes of Inconsistencies and Coping Strategies were operationalized through the developed questionnaire Meaning of Service (MoS). Study II also tested the MoS variables' association to psychological growth.

Participants. 184 veterans completed the questionnaires in this study. All were (still) active personnel from different Air Force bases but who had previously participated in different international operations including UN- and NATO-led missions for instance in Lebanon, Libya, the Balkans and Afghanistan. Some of them had only been serving in non-conflict areas and some of them had not been exposed to stress during their service, for instance support personnel in Crete during the Libyan war. In the analysis of growth, these participants were therefore removed from the analysis and the remaining sample consisted of 151veterans.

Procedure. The researcher visited several different military Air Force Bases and different units within the bases. The veterans were informed orally and in writing about the purpose of this study and procedures to secure confidentiality during local unit meetings. Participation in this study was voluntary. All veterans were given the questionnaire and all returned the questionnaire in a sealed envelope without any identification. Those who did not want to be a part of the research handed in the sealed envelope without filling out the

questionnaire. Twenty-three of the veterans were given the questionnaire by e-mail without violating any principles of confidentiality or voluntariness.

Instruments. Besides the MoS questionnaire, measures of objective stressors, subjective stressors, resilience, hardiness and psychological growth were part of the instruments used in study II. The MoS questionnaire consisted of 16-item and included the three meaning themes: (1) *Confirmation of ability*, (2) *Cohesion of peers* and (3) *Significance of effort*. It also included six-item inconsistency categories and a six-item coping questionnaire which together covered three pairs of inconsistency themes: (1) *Ambivalence to action* which activates the coping strategy *Counterfactual thinking*, (2) *Unreliable team members* which activates *Downward comparison* and (3) *Indifference of civilians* which activates *Justification*. Four different measures of objective stress were used and included (1) Combat exposure index (CEI) and (2) Moral provocation index (MPI; Hougsnæs et al., 2017). These measures were complemented by the use of the (3) War-related threat index (WRT, four items) and the (4) Risk of equipment failure index (REF, four items) from the Critical incidents during mission questionnaire (Moldjord, Laberg and Rundmo, 2015). Subjective stressors were measured with a 27-item questionnaire with four subscales: (1) Experience of threat, (2) Experience of safety and coping, (3) Experience of work and rest, and (4) Experience of family relations (Forsvarets Sanitet, 2013). The 33-item Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) was used and it covers (1) Perception of self, (2) Planned future, (3) Social competence, (4) Family cohesion, (5) Social resources and (6) Structured style (Friborg et al., 2003; Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Rosenvinge and Martinussen, 2006). A 15-item Hardiness scale was also used (Norwegian version–revised; Hystad, Eid, Johnsen, Laberg and Bartone, 2010) covering the three subscales of (1) Commitment, (2) Challenge and (3) Control (Maddi, 2013). Psychological Growth was measured with the 10-item short-form of the posttraumatic growth inventory (PTGI-SF, Norwegian version; Cann et al., 2010)

covering the following dimensions: (1) Relating to others, (2) New possibilities, (3) Personal strength, (4) Spiritual change, and (5) Appreciation of life. In addition, we used the 26-item posttraumatic change scale (PTCS, Nordstrand et al., 2017), with the following four subscales: (1) Self-confidence, (2) Interpersonal involvement (3) Awareness, and (4) Social adaptability.

Analysis. A principal component analysis was conducted of 28 items covering the MoS questionnaire. In addition, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with measures of psychological growth as the dependent variable. In the regression analysis, variables from the MoS questionnaire were independent variables, along with other predictors of growth such as objective and subjective stressors, and hardiness. Resilience was not used in the regression analysis due to no significant correlations with the dependent variables. According to the research model of this thesis, as depicted in figure 1 in this thesis, stressor variables are expected to initiate meaning-making processes defined as Meaning of Service, which then might lead to positive outcomes such as growth. Therefore, the hierarchical analyses were also applied to study possible mediator effects.

3.4 Methods study III

Study III was based on parts of the results from study I. Here, the category status dimensions were used as a guide to define certain stressor exposure as status dimensions. Then, associations between status dimensions and change in professional identity from predeployment to redeployment were tested.

Participants. 549 veterans participated in the whole study, but after missing value analysis, we used a sample of 199 persons in the main analysis. They were mainly a part of a Force Protection Battalion that served in Maymaneh in Afghanistan. Some of the veterans were located in Mazar-e–Sharif, primarily as a part of the National Contingent

Commander (NCC). They volunteered to be part of a prospective study with data collection from T1 (pre-deployment) to T7 (22 months after deployment). The sample included all ranks of conscripts, non-commissioned officers to the rank of colonel. The reduced sample (199) consisted of 180 (90%) men, 15 women (8%) and 4 (2%) had unknown gender. 136 (68%) were permanently employed, 58 (29%) were temporary employed and 5 (3%) had unknown employment.

Procedure. All participants were informed in writing about this study, including means to ensure confidentiality. Participation in the study was based on signed consent. The respondent filled out the questionnaire pre deployment (T1, T2), mid deployment (T3), at homecoming (T4), 3-4 months after redeployment (T5), and then 9-12 months (T6) and 22 months (T7) after redeployment. All procedures collection, storing, and distribution of data were in accordance with the existing Norwegian Armed Forces Health Registry legislation.

Instruments. This study was part of a larger data set, investigating health, growth and coping of soldiers having served in international operations. The measures used in this study were instruments of military identity, objective stressors, cohesion together with demographic variables and mission variables. To measure military identity, the 33-item Military Professional Identity Scale (NPIS, Johansen et al. 2013a) were used, covering three different subscales: Professionalism (12 items), Idealism (11 items) and Individualism (10 items). However, a factor analysis in the current research (extraction: Maximum likelihood, rotation: Oblimin) at T1 and T4 revealed a factor structure of only two subscales: Professionalism (10 items, $\alpha = 0.83$ at T1 and $\alpha = 0.85$ at T4), and Individualism (7 items, $\alpha = 0.72$ at T1 and $\alpha = 0.70$ at T4). Status dimensions were operationalized by the use of parts of the objective stressor variable Combat exposure index (Forsvarets Sanitet, 2013; Hougnæs et al., 2016). Guided by the description of status dimensions in study I (Lien et al., 2016), the variables *Action* (8-items concerning combat and IED attacks) and *Threat* (3-item concerning risky

operations and number of missions) were established. To measure cohesion, a 29 item (T1), 12-item (T2) and 16-item (T3 and T4) version of the Norwegian adaptation the Platoon Cohesion Index (PCI, Siebold and Kelly, 1988; Siebold, 1999) were used. We performed a principal component analysis (extraction: Maximum likelihood, rotation: Oblimin) revealing the two dimension of vertical cohesion (4 items) and horizontal cohesion (8 items). The internal relibilites for cohesion were excellent (vertical cohesion at T1, $\alpha = 0.91$, vertical cohesion at T2, $\alpha = 0.93$, and vertical and horizontal cohesion at T3 and T4, $\alpha = 0.94$).

Statistical Analysis. A mixed method hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with change in operational identity and change in individualism as the dependent variable. On account of missing values in the data set, several cases were deleted ($n = 350$). With a monotone missing data pattern (Dong and Peng, 2013) the study were left with a sample ($n = 199$) that only had a missing data rate below five per cent for most of the variables, as guided by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010). Only some of the cohesion variables and the two status dimensions variables had a missing rate over 10 per cent. Only the variables Horizontal cohesion (T2), Horizontal cohesion (T4), and Threat were the variables tested in the mixed method analysis. Zero-order correlation showed that no other variables were significant associated with the dependent varibale change in operational identity.

4 Results

The three research articles in this thesis are the result of the following overarching aims: To explore what meaning constructs veterans assign to service in international operations, and to investigate how meaning constructs affect psychological growth and military identity. The main findings from these studies are reported below.

4.1 Results Study I

The aim of study I was to explore what aspects of the service veterans found meaningful and how these meaningful aspects were related to inconsistencies of meaning and meaning-making coping strategies (Lien et al., 2016). The result of the qualitative analysis is the model in figure 2.

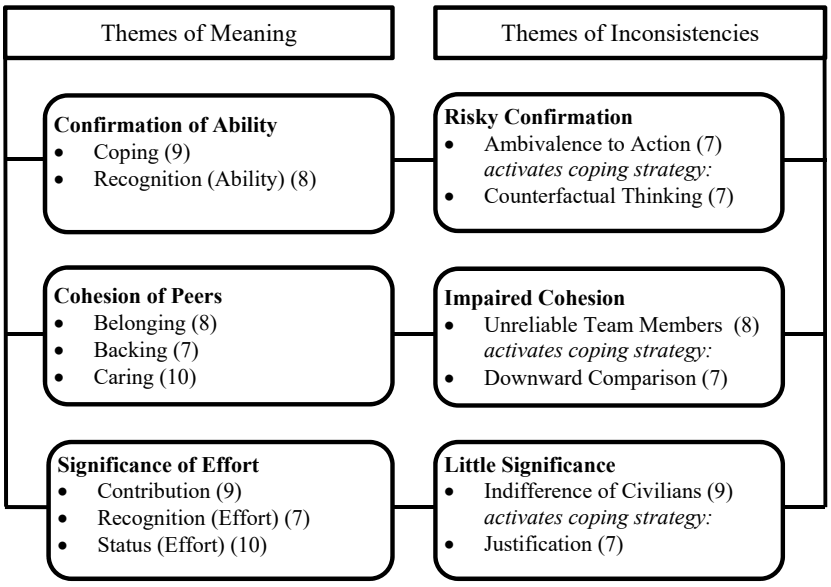

Figure 2, Themes of Meaning and Related Themes of Inconsistencies and Coping Strategies (Lien et al., 2016, p. 34)

The model shows that meaning was found in the following themes; Confirmation of Ability, Cohesion of Peers, and Significance of Effort (Lien, et al., 2016). Confirmation of Ability relates to how the veterans confirm their abilities by coping demanding tasks and working in a threatening environment and being recognized for it. Cohesion of peers relates to the veterans' sense of belonging to their respective units, and how they back each other and care for each other during operations and in camp. Significance of Effort relates to how the veterans perceive the effect of their job, and recognition and status connected to their efforts. Overall, the meaning themes were related to meaningful, significant or important experiences, which refer to meaning constructs being consisten with global meaning (Lien, et al., 2016). The model also shows that for each meaning theme there was one inconsistency theme. Here, the inconsistency theme Risky Confirmation activated the coping strategy Counterfactual Thinking. Impaired Cohesion activated Downward Comparison and Little Significance activated Justification (Lien, et al., 2016). Overall, these inconsistency themes were related to meaningless, frustrating or disappointing experiences, which refers to meaning constructs being inconsistent with global meaning (Lien, et al., 2016).

4.2 Results Study II

The first aim of study II was to report on the psychometric properties of the current developed questionnaire Meaning of Service, covering the following meaning constructs: meaning themes, inconsistency categories and coping strategies. The second aim was to report on the meaning constructs' associations with psychological growth. Here, we also controlled for other relevant predictors of growth. The factor analysis of the MoS questionnaire revealed a factor structure of the meaning themes as expected where *Confirmation of ability*, *Cohesion of peers* and *Significance of effort* loaded on separate components. One inconsistency category and two coping strategies were part of this factor

structure: the inconsistency category *Indifference of civilians* and the coping strategy categories *Counterfactual thinking* and *Downward comparison* also loaded on separate components as expected. However, the inconsistency category *Ambivalence to action* and *Unreliable team members* and the coping strategy *Justification* did not show a consistent factor structure and were left out from further analysis. This also included the inconsistency category *Indifference of civilians* since the related coping strategy already was discarded from analysis. Results from hierarchical regression analysis are shown in the following table for the overall PTGI as dependent variable.

Table 1. *Predictors of Posttraumatic Growth (PTGI). Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis, Trimmed Model (n = 149).* (Lien, Bendixen and Kennair, resubmitted to Military Psychology December 2019).

	R^2	R^2_{adj}	F	B	$SE\ B$	β	t	p
Model 1	0.09	0.09	15.37					
Objective stress – Moral Provocation Index (MPI)				.74	.19	.31	3.92	.000
Model 4	0.21	0.19	18.95					
Objective stress – Moral Provocation Index (MPI)				.66	.18	.27	3.70	.000
Meaning Theme – Confirmation of Ability				.52	.12	.34	4.53	.000
Model 5	0.24	0.22	14.92					
Objective stress – Moral Provocation Index (MPI)				.54	.19	.22	2.96	.004
Meaning Theme – Confirmation of Ability				.50	.11	.32	4.40	.000
Coping Strategy Cohesion – Downward Comparison				.14	.06	.18	2.38	.019

The table shows that the meaning theme *Confirmation of ability* and the coping strategy *Downward comparison* were both associated with overall posttraumatic growth. In several of the analyses, *Confirmation of ability* and both of the coping strategies were

significantly associated with posttraumatic growth and its dimensions Personal strength and Appreciation of Life, and significantly associated with Posttraumatic change and the dimensions Self-confidence and Awareness. Both *Confirmation of ability* and the related coping strategy *Counterfactual thinking* predicted the dimensions Self-confidence. This connects this particular meaning theme to the related coping strategy. However, in most of the other analyses both *Confirmation of ability* and the coping strategy *Downward comparison* were associated with psychological growth. None of the other dimensions were tested due to low scores. Several of the different measures of stressor were also significant in the analysis in Model 1. However, most of them were not significant when meaning themes and coping strategies were included. The moral provocation index was the stressor variable that most often was significant in the analysis, such as shown in model 5 in figure 1.

4.3 Results Study III

The first aim of study III was to examine how deployment to international operations relates to a strengthening or weakening of military identities, and to examine whether status dimensions are associated with change in operational identity. The second aim was to examine whether cohesion and employment status are associated with change in operational identity. The results from the mixed method analysis is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Mixed model analysis of change in Professional identity as a linear function of time and Threat (n=199). (Lien, Bøe and Johansen, submitted to Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies, December 2019).

Effects	*Estimate*	*CI*	*SE*	*df*	*F*	*p*
Fixed effects						
Intercept	4.22	3.97 – 4.47	0.12	169.6	1044.48	.000
Time (T1 vs T6)	-0.43	-0.58 – -0.28	0.08	170.0	32.47	.000
Threat (status dimension)	0.58	0.38 – 0.78	0.10	169.0	33.58	.000

Model fit – 2LL = 939, *df*=6.

The table shows that change of professional identity from T1 (pre-deployment) to T6 (redeployment) was significant. Also the variable *Threat* was significant, indicating that more exposure to threat during the service strengthens the professional identity of the soldier. Other variables tested, such as Horizontal cohesion (T2) and Horizontal cohesion (T4), were not significant in this analysis.

5 Discussion

5.1 Synthesis

The overarching aims of this thesis have been to explore what meaning constructs veterans assign to service in international operations, and to investigate how meaning constructs affect psychological growth and military identity. These research aims are based on a conceptualization of meaning-making as illustrated in the model in Figure 1 above. This model refers to the meaning-making process in a military context and consists of three components: stressors, construction of meaning and outcomes. Stressors refer to a range of events and dilemmas related to war that have the potential to challenge global meaning. Construction of meaning of service includes meaning themes which are believed to be consistent with global meaning. It also includes inconsistency themes which is believed to be

inconsistent with global meaning and thus activates use of coping strategies. Lastly, we describe the outcomes of the meaning-making process as psychological growth and confirmation of identity.

The model indicates that stress exposure should not only be considered as stressor load, but a contextual experience that might generate several meaning constructs, some of which might be both consistent and inconsistent with global meaning at the same time. Further, the model illustrates construction of meaning of service and the outcome of the meaning-making process as two different parts of the process. This is an important part of clarifying the concept of meaning used in this thesis since some research does not distinguish between meaning constructs and psychological growth, such as Gustavsen (2016) and Schok et al. (2010a). Thus, the model used in this thesis implies that finding meaningful aspects of the service is not just an end state of a meaning-making process. These efforts integrate needs for meaning (global meaning) and includes the use of meaning-making coping strategies when experiencing inconsistencies of meaning as described in study I (Lien et al., 2016). Furthermore, we posit that these meaning constructs might lead to psychological growth as argued for in study II, and confirmation of identity as argued for in study III. Overall, this supports the notion of growth not being a result of stress exposure but rather the effort of finding meaning (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004).

The concept of meaning presented here does not necessarily fit all situations in this field of research. We argued that there are differences of conducting service in military international operations versus being a victim or survivor of illness, bereavement and other personal crisis. However, the model of the meaning-making model presented in this thesis will hopefully add another perspective to to the current understanding of meaning-making processes within the specific military context, and particularly the operative setting. Furthermore, Park (2010) criticized this field of research for using a too narrow definition of

the meaning-making efforts and not defining and operationalizing the complete meaning-making process. These studies based on the current model are in part an answer to that criticism.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of what meaning veterans assign to their service, as documented in study I. In study II, we developed the Meaning of Service (MoS) questionnaire and thus presented predictors of growth that most previous research have not found relevant. In study III, we have shown that part of the meaning constructs from service is also relevant for the soldiers' military identity. These associations seem to be scarcely investigated, but are important to explore in order to understand the motivation of today's soldiers. Overall, this thesis describes how meaning-making efforts might result in various positive changes. These changes include increased personal strength, new and positive perspectives on life and motivation to continue to serve in international operations as indicated by the findings of these three studies. Thus, experiences from international operations enhance motivation and competence of the veterans, which reaches beyond military knowledge, tactis and weapon drills. Hopefully, this contributes to balance the story of the veteran as more than a person in distress. To promote and enhance the motivation and competence of the veterans, these findings have consequences for military leaders and personnel, and also some practical applications.

Experiencing stress. To experience threat and other stressors during the service might have several positive effects. For instance, the meaning theme *Confirmation of ability* seems to capture an important part of the veterans' experience as it predicts psychological growth on several dimensions, such as found in study II. This emphasizes the importance of coping with different challenges found within the service during a deployment (Lien et al., 2016). Furthermore, in study III, we found that participation in operations that involve threat is associated with confirmation of operational identity. This was based on findings from Lien

et al. (2016) which connected what meaning constructs soldiers attach to such stress exposure. This further supports the notion that military identity is determined by the experience of the soldier and not only characteristics of the group (Woodward and Jenkings, 2011). In general, this calls for using all deployed military personnel in live military operations and in particular the unexperienced soldiers. At least, as a military leader, one should aim to satisfy motivated soldiers that would like to experience situations that might confirm their ability to cope and consolidate their identity as soldiers. In addition, soldiers who are prepared for, and expect to experience, live military operations, but for some reason do not, should definitely recieve attention from their military leaders in order to prevent boredom and meaninglessness (Bartone, 2005).

The meaning theme *Confirmation of ability*, such as described in Lien et al. (2016) also underlines the willingness to take risk and experience action. This willingness is also found in description of operational identity (Johansen et al., 2013a). The military organization is dependent upon such willingness to deploy personnel to foreign countries. However, this willingness should probably be handled with caution, as it represents a pressure to conduct any military operations involving risk and, fulfill a purpose of its own, such as confirmation of own ability. Bearing in mind that also military leaders possess such willingness, decisions regarding what operations to conduct or not might be influenced by similar motives. Thus, shuch decisions should, for instance include staff or officers that will not be directly involved in the operation.

Getting feedback. The meaning-making process might be described as a learning process where new beliefs, goals or meaning constructs replace previous understanding (Park and Folkman, 1997; Park, 2010). Our research indicates that peers and leaders can influence this process during the deployment. The *Confirmation of ability* meaning theme signifies the importance of regular feedback sessions where soldiers get positive feedback on coping

efforts during operations. Self-efficacy might be enhanced by verbal persuasion (Maddux, 2002) and calls for leaders and peers to emphasize the positive aspects of all coping efforts, in particular of behavior and decisions made in complex and chaotic situations. Study I also found that *Significance of effort* was an important meaning theme. To see the significance of own effort is also found meaningful among soldiers in international operations (Gustavsen, 2016; Lien et al., 2016; Schok et al., 2010a). This actually challenges perception of Norwegian professional soldiers as being motivated by team cohesion rather than serving a superior cause (Johansen et al, 2013a). Consequently, this calls for leaders to inform their soldiers of the purpose of the mission and development of the military objectives related to their effort. This might include a focus on both the overall mission and on lower level objectives as found in study I (Lien et al., 2016).

Other experiences that might lead to growth are morally challenging situations, such as shown in study II. Questions concerning moral dilemmas used in the current research refer to situations where soldiers witness morally questionable behavior of others, or behave in a morally questionable manner themselves. Such situations typically create a need to contextualize and justify own behavior or the behavior of others (Litz et al., 2009). In study II, we found that morally challenging situations were associated with growth but the meaning themes or coping strategies used in the analysis did not mediate these experiences. This absence of mediation indicates that soldiers have established meaning constructs from morally challenging situations that were not part of the analysis. The fact that morally challenging situations were not part of the findings in study I, indicates that this theme is not communicated much among the soldiers either. Discussing and receiving feedback appears to be valuable for soldiers (Moldjord and Iversen, 2015). This might verify that meaning constructs from such experiences serve the person and organisation well, and increase the knowledge of how to act during morally challenging situations. In addition, it might enhance

prevalance of growth among veterans. Besides, an inability to contextualize and justify morally challenging situations into existing schemas might lead to lasting distress (Litz et al., 2009).

Finding meaning. Meaning-making is a process that might continue a long period of time after having been exposed to stress (Park, 2010), and consequently, also after redeployment. For instance, to see the significance of own efforts calls for a military organization that recognizes their veterans, which again might be crucial for how they value their own effort after redeployment. However, the findings in study I indicate that some find medal ceremonies impersonal and a result of institutional practice rather than a genuine sign of appreciation. In addition, veterans seem to be most motivated by gratitude from people outside of the military organization, such as local people in the conflict area and civilians of their own country (Gustavsen, 2015; Lien et al, 2016). In addition, single efforts and stories of veterans and different units have been highlighted and disseminated throughout the military organization and to the civilian society. For instance, TV-documentaries, movies and books have already told stories of Norwegian soldiers. However, we might think differently regarding medal ceremonies, the Veterans' Day and similar celebrations, and consider making them more personal for the veterans. Many of these veterans return to regular service in their homeland after redeployment. Another approach is therefore to highlight the competence and motivation of the veterans within their unit from their daily work. A Veterans' Day could actively involve most of the veterans, and for instance include discussions of groups of veterans of how they influence and can influence unexperienced peers and contribute to the development of their unit. Such interventions could further develop their meaning constructs and would certainly be a personal matter and hopefully be perceived as a recognition of their service in international operations as well. At the same time, it would also benefit the military organization. One way to develop such a programme

is specifically to address meaning constructs that are documented through research like Lien et al., (2016), Schok et al., (2010) and similar studies. Furthermore, interventions among cancer victims are focusing on worthiness, control and justice (global meaning) which reflects reconciliation of shattered assumptions typically found in this context (Lee, Cohen, Edgar, Laizner and Gagnon, 2006). Similarly, meaning-oriented interventions within military units could focus on inconsistencies of meaning, such as described in study I (Lien et al., 2016). Such interventions might open up for both personal experiences during deployment, future possibilites and possible stress reactions, dependent on the needs of veterans. However, the fact that temporarily employed soldiers who return to a civilian life after redeployment do not have the opportunity to further develop their meaning constructs through discussions with peers, poses a serious concern. In this regard, the role and work of the military veteran services and civilian veteran organizations are important.

Restoring cohesion. Peers seem to play an important role in meaning-making processes among soldiers. Study I emphasized the importance of involvement from peers in order to find meaningful aspects of the service. Study II revealed that peer cohesion was associated with growth, but not the resilience measure RSA (Friborg et al., 2003; Hjemdal et al., 2006) that includes support from family and friends. This supports the notion that fellow soldiers are important for construction of meaning in a military context, while family and friends provide needed support in other contexts (Pietrzak et al., 2010). When establishing feedback sessions, both during the deployment and after redeployment, this likely involve sharing vulnerable experiences (Moldjord and Iversen, 2015). Thus, the veterans are dependent on trust among the team members, but most veterans will experience to work with new team members after redeployment. In order to restore cohesion within a group it seems to be critical that leaders and senior personnel within a unit takes responsibility for developing trust by sharing vulnerable experiences (Moldjord and Iversen, 2015). Thus, to be

part of the process of restoring cohesion within any group is central to further develop meaning constructs and promote growth after redeployment.

5.2 Limitations

There are several general methodological limitations of the three studies. Interviews may suffer from leading questions and experimenter expectancy effects (Kvale, 1996). In addition, to be an insider of the military organization is a double edged sword. On the one hand, one might have insight into important processes among veterans. On the other hand, one might represent preconceived attitudes and be somewhat biased throughout the whole research process. This might also influence the analysis of the data, where preconceived attitudes bias the coding, cateogories, themes and the final model presented (Flick, 2009). Thus, the use of other researchers to interpret and comment on the analysis is recommended, and was also employed in study I where a non-military supervisor actively were part of discussions of the categories and themes (Lien et al., 2016). In addition, this study tried to capture meaning-making processes by conducting interviews at only one point in time. However, meaning-making is a process that develops over time (Skaggs and Barron, 2006) and research designs with several measures over time could have documented this process more accurately.

Study II used a cross-sectional design and cannot document any causaulity, only an association between the tested variables. Study III had a prospective design and could neither document any causality. In this study, we cannot rule out confounding variables that were not part of the variables investigated (Sedgwick, 2013). Consequently, we could only document an association between certain status dimensions and increase in operational identity. Furthermore, even if study II was found to be representative for personnel of the Norwegian Air Force, it does not necessarily generalize to other veterans, for instance veterans from

other nations where the military forces have another social standing in society than in Norway. Furthermore, in study III, we used an already established questionnaire developed to measure stress exposure in order to measure status dimensions. Alternatively, we could have used the same procedure as used in study II where we operationalized the meaning categories by developing a questionnaire suited for this purpose. This might have resulted in more accurate and broader measures of status dimensions.

We have described meaning constructs in this thesis also to encompass inconsistencies of meaning. However, we have not empirically demonstrated the effect of any of the inconsistencies of meaning categories described. Thus, their relevance in the meaning-making process might be different from what we have theoritezised in study I and II, and as hypothesized in study II. There were two reasons for this. First, operationalization of the inconsistency themes was not completely confirmed through the factor analysis in study II. Second, inconsistency themes were not part of study III. In addition, due to low levels on growth on some of the dimensions the whole Meaning of Service (MoS) questionnaire was neither tested against all dimensions of growth. This could have given us valuable information about how *Cohesion of Peers* affects relational dimensions of growth and how *Significance of Effort* affects existential dimensions of growth. This might have given the concept of meaning described in this thesis valuable empirical support. Thus, we only partially confirmed that the meaning-making efforts resulted in successful integration of the experiences from service in international operations.

Based on the fact that there are several ways of operationalizing meaning-making processes (Park, 2010), there is a possibility that the model presented in this thesis does not capture the variation and complexity in these processes. Thus, the meaning-making model might not represent all veterans, for instance the segment of veterans that have been exposed to specific traumatic experiences such as loss of close comrades. Loss of comrades in war

will probably resemble meaning-making processes as documented in research of bereavement (Calhoun, et al., 2010). Another possible limitation in this theses involves the use of certain terms. For instance, psychological growth encompasses a range of growth-related terms whose nuances have not been considered here. Also, explanations of differences between the terms needs for meaning (Baumeister, 1991) and global meaning (Park, 2010) and similiar constructs used in this thesis certainly represent nuances worth investigating. For instance, this thesis does not distinguish between a person's sense of control and efficacy, as such terms are often used interchangeably and without being predefined.

5.3 Further research

This thesis has presented a theoretical framework that may be used for further qualitative and quantitative research. All research that deepens the understanding of the meaning-making process should be welcomed in order to define this process more accurately (Park, 2010). Since meaning-making is described as a process that takes time (Park, 2010), more longitudinal research seems warranted. A prospective design might be challenging within research on illness and bereavement since it implies gathering data before the stressful events even occur. However, in the context of service in international operations one could expect that most soldiers will be exposed to some level of stress.

A revised version of the Meaning of Service questionnaire is presented in study II and should be tested further. The MoS questionnaire was not subject to revision and re-testing before being used in the regression analysis in study II. To ensure reliability of the questionnaire, the questionnaire could further be analyzed by a test-retest. The questionnaire could also be tested together with other known questionnaires (for instance measures of cohesion) in order to investigate construct validity (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007).

In some analyses in study II, the stressor variables were not mediated by the meaning themes and coping strategies, indicating that the MoS questionnaire could be expanded to include other meaning themes and inconsistency themes. For instance, morally questionable situations might create uncertainty of how to react (Litz et al., 2009) and based on the analyses in study II, moral dilemmas seem to be stressors that have impact on psychological growth and might also be specified and included as a meaning theme. In addition, further research might also explore whether certain meaning themes, inconsistency themes and copings strategies have impact on specific dimensions of growth: for instance whether cohesion is specifically associated to relational dimensions of growth. Further research might also reveal whether and why relational and existential dimensions of growth are harder to achieve than personal dimensions of growth, such as personal strength (Pietrzak et al., 2010).

What is more, further research might explore the possibility to establish corresponding meaning themes that are associated with measures of military identity. This could provide more knowledge about what other experiences are perceived as status dimensions during service and what effects these might have on military identity. In addition, the results from the factor analysis of the NPIS measure of military identity in study III, excluded one dimension, idealism, from further analysis. It seems that when soldiers are focused on international operations, certain questions in the NPIS-scale concerning idealism are interpreted differently than if they are doing ordinary service at their home base. Thus, further research and development of this scale is therefore recommended.

5.4 Conclusion

The basis of the research in this thesis is illustrated in the meaning-making model depicted in Figure 1. By applying this model we have made a distinction between the construction of meaning of service and outcome of this process, such as psychological growth and

confirmation of identity. Study I described construction of meaning of service through meaning themes and inconsistency themes. Study II operationalized these meaning constructs through the questionnaire Meaning of Service, and found an association between meaning constructs and psychological growth. Study III operationalized status dimensions by using parts of the CEI-index (Hougnæs et al., 2016) and found associations between status dimensions and change in operational identity. The knowledge gained from the research model used and three studies presented in this thesis supplement current research on meaning in a military context. For instance, this thesis suggests that certain meaning constructs should be viewed as predictors of growth and military identity. A logical next step would be to add relevant meaning themes and themes of inconsistencies into the model. In addition, this thesis might add to the understanding of the competence and motivation of the veterans. For instance, this thesis brings up different ways to promote relevant meaning constructs that consequentially suggest directions for military leaders to improve the competence and motivation of the veterans. It is important to understand how soldiers experience operations in war and what possible positive effects might follow. Since the veterans often represent experience and continuity within their units, their motivation and competence will undoubtly be important the day they are needed in new operations abroad or at home.

6 References

Aldwin, C. M., Levenson, M. R., and Spiro, A. (1994). Vulnerability and resilience to combat exposure: Can stress have lifelong effects? *Psychology and Aging, 1*, pp. 34-44. https://doi.org/10.1037//0882-7974.9.1.34

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Meanings of Life*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Bartone, P. T. (2005). The need for positive meaning in military operations: Reflections on Abu Ghraib. *Military Psychology, 17*, pp. 315-324. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327876mp1704_5

Bartone, P. T. (2006). Resilience under military operational stress: Can leaders influence hardiness? *Military Psychology, 18*, 131-148. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327876mp1803s_10

Bartone, P. T., Ursano, R. J., Wright, K. M., & Ingraham, L. H. (1989). The impact of a military air disaster on the health of assistance workers: A prospective study. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 177*, 317-327. https://doi.org/10.1097/00005053-198906000-00001

Battistelli, F. (1997). Peacekeeping and the postmodern soldier. *Armed Forces & Society, 23*, 467–484. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9702300308

Brewer, M. B., and Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "We"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, 83-93. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.71.1.83

Brewin, C. R., Andrews, B., & Valentine, J. D. (2000). Meta-analysis of risk factors for posttraumatic stress disorder in trauma-exposed adults. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 68*, 747–766. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-006x.68.5.748

Britt, T. W., Adler, A. B., and Bartone, P. T. (2001). Deriving benefits from stressful events: The role of engagement in meaningful work and hardiness. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6*, 53-63. https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.6.1.53

Britt, T. W., Dickinson, J. M., Moore, D. W., Castro, C. A. and Adler, A. B. (2007). Correlates and consequences of morale versus depression under stressful conditions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 12,* 34–47. https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.1.34

Calhoun, L. G., Tedeschi, R. G., Cann, A., and Hanks, E. A. (2010). Positive outcomes following bereavement: Paths to posttraumatic growth. *Psychologica Belgica, 50*, 125-143. https://doi.org/10.5334/pb-50-1-2-125

Cann, A., Calhoun, L. G., Tedeschi, R. G., Taku, K., Vishnevsky, T., Triplett, K. N., and Danhauer, S. C. (2010). A short form of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping, 23*, 127–137. https://doi.org/10.1080/10615800903094273

Corbin, J., and Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures to Developing Grounded Theory,* 3rd edn. Sage, Los Angeles, CA.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches.* Sage Publication, London.

Creswell, J. W., and Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Day, A. L., and Livingstone, H. A. (2001). Chronic and acute stressors among military personnel: Do coping styles buffer their negative impact on health? *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6*, 148-360. https://doi.org/10.1037//1076-8998.6.4.348

DeGroot, G. J. (2001) A few good women: Gender stereotypes, the military and peacekeeping. *International Peacekeeping, 8*, 23-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310108413893

Dekel, S., Ein-Dor, T., and Solomon, Z. (2012). Posttraumatic growth and posttraumatic distress: A longitudinal study. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 4*, 94–101. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021865

Dohrenwend, B. P., Neria, Y., Turner, J. B., Turse, N., Marshall, R., Lewis-Fernandez, R., and Koenen, K. C. (2004). Positive tertiary appraisals and posttraumatic stress disorder in u.s. male veterans of the war in vietnam: The roles of positive affirmation, positive reformulation, and defensive denial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 72*, 417–433. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.72.3.417

Dong, Y., & Peng, C.-Y. J. (2013). Principled missing data methods for researchers. *Springer Plus, 2*, 222. https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-2-222

Edström, H., Lunde, N. T., & Matlary, J. H. (2009). *Krigerkultur i en fredsnasjon [Warrior Culture in a Peace Nation]*. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag AS.

Elder, G. H. Jr., and Clipp, E. C. (1989). Combat experience and emotional health: Impairment and resilience in later life. *Journal of Personality, 57*, 310-341. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1989.tb00485.x

Ellemers, N., Spears, R., and Doosje, B. (2002). Self and social identity. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*, 161–186. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135228

Erbes, C., Eberly, R., Dikel, T., Johnsen, E., Harris, I., and Engdahl, B. (2005). Posttraumatic growth among American former prisoners of war. *Traumatology, 4*, 285-295. https://doi.org/10.1177/153476560501100407

Faris, J. (1995) The looking-glass army: Patriotism in the post-Cold War era. *Armed Forces & Society 21*, 411–434.

Flick, U. (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications, London.

Fontana, A., and Rosenheck, A. (1998). Psychological benefits and liabilities of traumatic exposure in the war zone. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 11*, 485–503. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024452612412

Forsvarets Sanitet [Norwegian Defense Medical Service]. (2013). *Afghanistanundersøkelsen 2012. En undersøkelse av psykisk helse hos norsk militært personell som har tjenestegjort i Afghanistan fra 2001-2011. [The Afghanistan survey. A survey of psychological health among Norwegian personnel serving in Afghanistan 2001-2011*]. Office for Psychiatry and Stress Management, Oslo. Retrieved from https://forsvaret.no/tjeneste_/ForsvaretDocuments/Afghanistanundersøkelsen2012.pdf

Franke, V. C. (1997). Warriors for peace: The next generation of U.S. military leaders. *Armed Forces & Society, 24*, 33-57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9702400102

Franke, V. C. (1999). Resolving identity tension: The case of the peacekeeper. *The Journal of Conflict Studies, 19*, 124-143. Retrieved from: http://works.bepress.com/volker_franke/35/

Franke, V. C., & Heinecken, L. (2001). Adjusting to peace: Military values in a cross-national comparison. *Armed Forces & Society, 27*, 567-595. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X0102700404

Frankl, V. E. (1946/1984). *Man's search for meaning*. New York, NY: Washington Square Press.

Friborg, O., Hjemdal, O., Rosenvinge, J. R., and Martinussen, M. (2003). A new rating scale for adult resilience: what are the central protective resources behind healthy adjustment? *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research, 12*, 65-76. https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.143

Griffith, J. (2008). After 9/11, What kind of reserve soldier? Considerations given to emerging demands, organizational orientation, and individual commitment. *Armed Forces & Society, 35,* 214-240. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X07312490

Griffith, J. (2009). Being a reserve soldier. A matter of social identity. *Armed Forces & Society, 36*, 38-64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X08327819

Gustavsen, E. (2016). The construction of meaning among Norwegian Afghanistan veterans. *International Sociology, 31*, 21–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580915613191

Harada, N. D., Damron-Rodriguez, J., Villa, V. M., Washington, D. L., Dhanani, S., Shon, H., Chattopadhyay, M., Fishbein, H., Lee, M., Makinodan, T., and Andersen, R. (2002). Veteran identity and race/ethnicity: Influences on VA outpatient care utilization. *Medical Care, 40*, 117–128. https://doi.org/10.1097/00005650-200201001-00013

Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J. and Anderson, R.E. (2010) *Multivariate data analysis*. 7th Edition, Pearson, New York.

Hedlund, E. (2011). What motivates Swedish soldiers to participate in peacekeeping missions: Research Note. *Armed Forces & Society 37*, 180–190. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X10372597

Helgeson, V.S., Reynolds, K.A., and Tomich, P.L. (2006). A meta-analytic review of benefit finding and growth. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 74*, 797-816. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.74.5.797

Hjemdal, O., Friborg, O., Stiles, T. C., Rosenvinge, J. H., and Martinussen, M. (2006). Resilience predicting psychiatric symptoms: a prospective study of protective factors and their role in adjustment to stressful life events. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, 13*, 194-201. https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.488

Hougsnæs, S., Bøe, H. J., Dahl, A. A., and Reichelt, J. G. (2016). Norwegian male military veterans show low levels of mental health problems four years after deployment in Afghanistan. *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry, 71*, 26-32. https://doi.org/10.1080/08039488.2016.1201529

Hystad, S. W., Eid, J., Johnsen, B. H., Laberg, J. C., and Bartone, P. (2010). Psychometric properties of the revised Norwegian dispositional resilience (hardiness) scale. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 51*, 237–245. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9450.2009.00759.x

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1989). Assumptive worlds and the stress of traumatic events: Applications of the schema construct. *Social Cognition, 7*, 113-136. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1521/soco.1989.7.2.113

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered Assumptions. Towards A New Psychology of Trauma*. The Free Press, New York.

Janoff-Bulman, R. (2006). Schema-change perspectives on posttraumatic growth. In L. G. Calhoun & R. G. Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook of posttraumatic growth: Research & practice* (pp. 81-99). Mawah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Johansen, R. B., Laberg, J. C., and Martinussen, M. (2013a). Measuring military identity: Scale development and psychometric evaluations. *Social behavior and Personality, 41*, 861 – 880. https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2013.41.5.861

Johansen, R. B., Laberg, J. C., and Martinussen, M. (2013b). Military identity as predictor of perceived military competence and skills. *Armed Forces & Society, 40*, 521–543. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X13478405

Joseph, S. (2009). Growth following adversity: Positive psychological perspectives on posttraumatic stress. *Psychological Topics, 18*, 335-344.

King, D. W., King, L. A., Foy, D. W., and Gudanowski, D. M. (1996). Prewar factors in combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder: Structural equation modeling with a national sample of female and male Vietnam veterans. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 64*, 520-531. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-006x.64.3.520

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews. An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Larner, B., and Blow, A. (2011). A model of meaning-making coping and growth in combat veterans. *Review of General Psychology, 15*, 187-197. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024810

Lee, V., Cohen, S. R., Edgar, L., Laizner, A. M., and Gagnon, A. J. (2006). Meaning-making interventions during breast or colorectal cancer treatment improves self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy. *Social Science & Medicine, 62*, 3133-3145. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.11.041

Lepore, S. J., and Revenson, T.A. (2006). Resilience and posttraumatic growth: Recovery, resistance, and reconfiguration. In L. Calhoun R. G. Tedeschi (Eds.), *The Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice* (pp. 24-46). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Lien, R., Firing, K., Bendixen, M., and Kennair, L. E. O. (2016). Meaning and inconsistencies of meaning – exploring the perspectives of Norwegian veterans in Afghanistan. *Journal of Military Studies, 7*, 31-43. https://doi.org/10.1515/jms-2016-0004

Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Linley, P. A., and Joseph, S. (2004). Positive change following trauma and adversity: A review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 17*, 11-21. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOTS.0000014671.27856.7e

Litz, B. T. (2007). Research on the impact of military trauma: Current status and future directions. *Military Psychology, 19*, 217–238. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995600701386358

Litz, B. T., Stein, N., Delaney, E., Lebowitz, L., Nash, W. P., Silva, C., and Maguen, S. (2009). Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review, 29*, 695-706. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003

Lomsky-Feder, E. (1995). The meaning of war through veterans' eyes: A phenomenological analysis of life stories. *International Sociology, 10*, 463-468. https://doi.org/10.1177/026858095010004007

Maddi, S. R. (2013). Personal hardiness as the basis for resilience. In S. R. Maddi (Ed.), *Hardiness: Turning Stressful Circumstances into Resilient Growth* (pp. 7-17). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Maddux, J. E. (2002). Self-efficacy: The power of believing you can. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 277-287). New York: Oxford University Press.

Maguen, S., Vogt, D. S., King, L. A., King, D. W., and Litz, B. T. (2006). Posttraumatic growth among Gulf War I veterans: The predictive role of deployment-related experiences and background characteristics. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 11*, 373–388. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020600672004

Mascaro, N. and Rosen, D. H. (2008). Assessment of existential meaning and its longitudinal relations with depressive symptoms. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 27*, 576-599. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2008.27.6.576

Mehlum, L. (1995). Positive and negative consequences of serving in a UN peacekeeping mission. A follow-up study. *International Review of Armed Forces Medical Services, 68*, 289-295.

Moldjord, C., Laberg, J. C., & Rundmo, T. (2015). Stressors, social support and military performance in a modern war scenario. *Journal of Military Studies, 6*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1515/jms-2016-0194

Moldjord, C., and Iversen, A. (2015). Developing vulnerability trust in temporary high performance teams. *Team Performance Management 21*, 231-246. https://doi.org/10.1108/TPM-08-2014-0050

Mooren, T., Schok, M., and Kleber, R. J. (2009). De zin van ingrijpende gebeurtenissen: een vragenlijst over betekenisgeving na oorlogs- en geweldservaringen. [The significance of disruptive events: A questionnaire on the assignment of meaning after experiences of war and migration]. *Psychologie & Gezondheid, 39*, 101-109.

Moskos, C., Jr. (1977). From institution to occupation: Trends in military organization. *Armed Forces & Society, 4*, 41-50. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X7700400103

Moskos, C. (1988). Institutional and occupational trends in armed forces. In C. Moskos & F. R. Wood (Eds.), *The military – More than just a job?* (pp. 15-27). Washington, DC: Pergamon.

Mæland, B (2004). *Skadeskutt idealisme: Norsk offisermoral i Kosovo*. [*Wounded idealism: The morality of Norwegian officers in Kosovo*] Bergen: Eide.

Nordstrand, A. E., Hjemdal, O., Holen, A., Reichelt, J. G., & Bøe, H. J. (2017). Measuring psychological change after trauma: Psychometric properties of a new bi-directional scale. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 9*, 696-705. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0000270

Neimeyer, R. A., Baldwin, S. A., & Gillies, J. (2006). Continuing bonds and reconstructing meaning: Mitigating complications in bereavement. *Death Studies, 30*, 715–738. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180600848322

Osipow, S. H., & Spokane, A. R. (1983). *A manual for measures of occupational stress, strain, and coping*. Columbus, OH: Marathon Consulting Press.

Park, C. L. (2008). Overview of theoretical perspectives. In C. L. Park, S. Lechner, M. H. Antoni, & A. Stanton (Eds.), *Positive life change in the context of medical illness: Can the experience of serious illness lead to transformation?* (pp. 11–30). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, 257–301. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0018301

Park, C. L., and Ai, A. L. (2006). Meaning making and growth: New directions for research on survivors of trauma. *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on Stress & Coping, 11,* 389-407. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15325020600685295

Park, C. L., and Folkman, S. (1997). Meaning in the context of stress and coping. *Review of General Psychology, 1*, pp. 115-144. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.1.2.115

Pietrzak, R.H., Goldstein, M.B., Malley, J.C., Rivers, A.J., Southwick, S.M. (2010). Structure of posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and psychosocial functioning in Veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. *Psychiatry Research, 178*, 323–329. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2010.04.039

Roesch, S. C., Weiner, B., & Vaughn, A. A. (2002). Cognitive approaches to stress and coping. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry, 15*, 627–632. https://doi.org/10.1097/00001504-200211000-00012

Rosner, R., and Powell, S. (2006). Posttraumatic growth after war. In L. G. Calhoun & R. G. Tedeschi (Eds.), *Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice* (pp. 197–213). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Roussi, P., and Avdi, E. (2008). Meaning-making and chronic illness: Cognitive and narrative approaches. *Hellenic Journal of Psychology, 5,* 147-178.

Sasson-Levy, O. (2003). Feminism and military gender practices: Israeli women soldiers in «masculine» roles. *Sociological inquiry, 73*, 440-465. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-682X.00064

Schok, M.L., Kleber, R.J., and Boeije, H. R. (2010a). Men with a mission: Veterans' meanings of peacekeeping in Cambodia. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 15,* 279-303. https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020903381873

Schok, M.L., Kleber, R.J., and Lensvelt-Mulders, G. J. L. M. (2010b). A model of resilience and meaning after military deployment: Personal resources in making sense of war and peacekeeping experiences. *Aging and Mental Health, 14*, 328–338. https://doi.org/10.1080/13607860903228812

Schok, M.L., Kleber, R.J., Elands, M., and Weerts, J.M.P. (2008). Meaning as a mission: A review of empirical studies on appraisals of war and peacekeeping experiences. *Clinical Psychology Review, 28*, 357–365. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2007.04.005

Sedgwick, P. (2013). Prospective cohort studies: advantages and disadvantages. *BMJ, 347*, f6726. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.f6726

Siebold, G. L. (1999). The evolution of the measurement of cohesion. *Military Psychology, 11*, 5-7. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327876mp1101_2

Siebold, G. L., & Kelly, D. R. (1988). *Development of the Platoon Cohesion Index* (Tech. Rep. No.816). Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences. (DTIC No.AD–A204 917)

Skaggs, B. G., & Barron, C. R. (2006). Searching for meaning in negative events: concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 53*, 559-570. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2006.03761.x

Sledge, W. H., Boydstun, J. A., & Rabe, A. J. (1980). Self-concept changes related to war captivity. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 37*,430–443. https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.1980.01780170072008

Sommer, K. L., Baumeister, R. F., and Stillman, T. F. (2012). The construction of meaning from life events: empirical studies of personal narratives. In: Wong, P. T. P., & Fry, P. S. (Eds.). *Handbook of Personal Meaning: Theory, Research, and Application* (pp. 297-313. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Spiro, A., Schnurr, P. P., & Aldwin, C. M. (1999). A life-span perspective on the effects of military service. *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 30*, 91−128.

Tedeschi, R., and Calhoun, L. G. (1995). *Trauma and transformation: Growing in the aftermath of suffering.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tedeschi, R., and Calhoun, L. G. (1996). The posttraumatic growth inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 9*, 455-471. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490090305

Tedeschi, R. G., and Calhoun, L. G. (2004). Posttraumatic growth: Conceptual foundations and empirical evidence. *Psychological Inquiry, 15*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1501_01

Tedeschi, R. G., and McNally, R. J. (2011). Can we facilitate posttraumatic growth in combat veterans? *American Psychologist, 66*, 19–24 https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021896

Williams, R., Davis, M., & Millsap, R. (2002). Development of the cognitive processing of trauma scale. *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy, 9*, 349-360. https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.343

Woodruff, T., Kelty, R., and Segal, D. R. (2006). Propensity to serve and motivation to enlist among American combat soldiers. *Armed Forces & Society, 32*, 353–366. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X05283040

Woodward, R., and Jenkings, K. N. (2011). Military identities in the situated accounts of British military personnel. *Sociology, 45*, 252–268. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510394016

Zebrack, B. J. (2000). Cancer survivor identity and quality of life. *Cancer Practice, 8*, 238–242. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1523-5394.2000.85004.x

Research Studies

Study I

Lien, R., Firing, K., Bendixen, M., and Kennair, L. E. O. (2016). Meaning and Inconsistencies of Meaning – Exploring the perspectives of Norwegian veterans in Afghanistan. *Journal of Military Studies, 7*, 31-43. https://doi.org/10.1515/jms-2016-0004

Study II

Lien, R., Bendixen, M., and Kennair, L. E. O. (2019). Developing the New Meaning of Service Questionnaire and Assessing its Association with Psychological Growth among Veterans. (Currently under review in *Military Psychology*, submitted October 2018, resubmitted December 2019).

Study III

Lien, R., Bøe, H. J., and Johansen, R. B. (2019). Confirmation of Military Identity after Exposure to Stress - the Influence of Status Dimensions. (Submitted to Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies, December 2019).

Study I

Research Article **Open Access**

Roger Lien*, Kristian Firing, Mons Bendixen, and Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair

Meaning and inconsistencies of meaning – exploring the perspectives of Norwegian veterans in Afghanistan

DOI 10.1515/jms-2016-0004
Received February 17, 2016; accepted August 31, 2016

Abstract: This qualitative study explores the meaning-making process of veterans to address the positive aspects of military service in international operations. Thirteen veterans from a Force Protection Unit in Norway were interviewed about their deployment to Afghanistan. A thematic analysis revealed three main themes reflecting meaningful aspects of the service. "Confirmation of ability" refers to finding meaning by coping with stressful situations and being recognized for it. "Cohesion of peers" refers to finding meaning by belonging to a team and giving mutual support within the team, such as backing up each other and caring. "Significance of effort" refers to finding meaning by seeing their efforts as a contribution, as well as by receiving recognition and gaining status for their efforts. The analysis also revealed accompanying themes of inconsistencies, which in turn activated different coping strategies. The findings have been substantiated through a functional exposition of meaning: purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth, as advocated by Baumeister (1991), and are discussed in the context of previous research and a theoretical concept of meaning making. Steps for future research are proposed.

Keywords: meaning, inconsistency, coping, veteran, military

1 Introduction

Military personnel from several nations have been deployed to different conflict areas abroad, such as Afghanistan. The personnel who have worked in a threatening environment or have been exposed to stressful events might initiate a meaning-making process, as such experiences have the potential to be inconsistent with global meaning (Park 2010). Global meaning is described as our goals and the established beliefs about the world, the self, and the self in the world (Park and Folkman 1997). Such goals and beliefs constitute a framework from which we can assess new experiences (Park 2010). A meaning-making process is initiated by an appraisal of an event, and in cases of inconsistencies, coping strategies are used to attribute meaning to the event and ourselves in it. This line of reasoning is found in the cognitive theories of Horowitz' Stress Response Theory (Horowitz 2001) and the Theory of Assumptive Worlds (Janoff-Bulman 1989). The outcome of this process might lead to improved personal skills, resources, and relationships, as well as to new perspectives on life, sometimes called personal growth or benefit finding (Park 2010).

Finding meaning after being exposed to stressful events has been investigated in the military context (refer review by Schok et al. 2008). Veterans report stress responses and positive effects, benefits, or growth after war-related experiences (Aldwin et al. 1994; Elder and Clipp 1989; Fontana and Rosenheck 1998; Forsvarets Sanitet 2013; Mehlum 1995), and most veterans experience more positive than negative outcomes of serving in war (Schok et al. 2008). Qualitative research has explored those aspects of veterans' experience that are found meaningful (Britt et al. 2001; Mooren et al. 2009; Schok et al. 2010a) and how they correlate with positive outcomes, such as stress-related growth and benefit finding (Britt et al. 2001; Fontana and Rosenheck 1998; Schok et al. 2010b). However, in a military context, this area of research seems to be limited, and different ways of conceptualizing meaning sometimes restrict comparison (Schok et al. 2008). This study

***Corresponding author: Roger Lien,** Major, Royal Norwegian Air Force, E-mail: roger.lien@lksk.mil.no
Kristian Firing, Associate Professor, Department of Leadership, Royal Norwegian Air Force Academy
Mons Bendixen, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Leif Edward Ottesen Kennair, Professor, Department of Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

© 2016, Roger Lien et al., licensee De Gruyter Open.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License.

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

explores the aspects of service that veterans find meaningful after being redeployed from Afghanistan. Moreover, it explores inconsistencies in appraisal of meaning that activate coping strategies in order to attribute new meaning to such events.

2 Concept of meaning

There are different ways of conceptualizing meaning (Bellin 2012; Park 2010; Park and Folkman 1997). Mascaro and Rosen (2008) define meaning as the "*possession of a coherent framework for viewing life that provides a sense of purpose or direction, which, if lived with in accord, can bring about a sense of fulfillment*" (p. 578–579). According to Janoff-Bulman (1989), such a framework relates to how we view benevolence in the world, whether distribution of outcomes is a result of justice, control or chance, and beliefs about ourselves regarding morale, self-control, and luck. Several such categories that constitute a coherent framework are suggested in the literature (Park 2010). For instance, Baumeister (1991) points out that we need our life to make sense with respect to four universal needs for meaning: purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth. Purpose refers to goals described as future objective outcomes, and fulfillment of goals is described as future subjective states of being. Fulfillment is often connected to positive emotions, e.g., feelings of pride in reaching a specific goal. Value refers to the labels attached to some behavior as right and good in order to give a sense of goodness and avoid moral distress. Baumeister (1991) describes a value base as something good in itself that does not need any further justification. Efficacy refers to a belief that one can influence the surroundings and execute a degree of control in certain situations. Self-worth refers to self-respect and respect of others. This often involves ranking oneself in relation to others to feel superior in some domains. In this respect, belonging to a group seems to be important as it gives individuals access to others' perceptions of them and the possibility to draw self-esteem from group membership (Baumeister 1991). Such terms as self-worth, self-esteem, and self-concept are used interchangeably here (Baumeister 1991; Oyserman 2004).

People do not necessarily consciously identify their global meaning structures or think in terms of the needs for meaning (Baumeister 1991; Park 2010). Moreover, meanings can also be uttered at different cognitive levels (Baumeister and Vohs 2002; Vallacher and Wegner 1989). Previous research illustrates the aspects of service that military personnel report finding meaningful. Such common meaning assigned to service in war seems to concern comradeship and social support, purpose of mission, and significance of work (Schok et al. 2010a). For instance, the gratitude of the local people is meaningful to soldiers, as it seems to be a reward for their presence and efforts (Schok et al. 2010a). Team cohesion and receiving gratitude from locals are also what motivate US combat units to continue fighting (Wong et al. 2003). Britt et al. (2001) also pointed out that in a US peacekeeping operation in Bosnia, meaningful service was related to the significance of the work. Here, significance was described in terms of how soldiers reported the importance of their job, commitment to their job, and how much they identified with the mission.

Categories of global meaning might also be related to incongruence or inconsistencies of meaning. Global meaning directs what to expect and, consequently, allows one to determine whether the appraised meaning in a certain situation is regarded as consistent or inconsistent with global meaning (Park and Folkman 1997). For instance, an experience might be inconsistent with global meaning if it involves loss of meaning, fear for one's life, or a feeling of helplessness, which indicate a loss of control, as found among veterans with stress symptoms (Fontana and Rosenheck 2005; Schok et al. 2010a). Thus, coping with stressful situations is meaningful as it gives a sense of control. According to Janoff-Bulman (1992), control and predictability are the most important global categories of meaning. Meaning-making coping strategies refer to the effort to reduce any presence of inconsistencies between global meaning and situational meaning (Park 2010) so that congruence of meaning can be restored (Skaggs and Barron 2006). The outcome of this process might be twofold: finding new global meaning or situational meaning (Park 2010). However, several meaning-making coping strategies are described in the literature (Park 2010). Park and Folkman (1997) refer to positive appraisal, revision of goals, and planning of goal-directed problem-focused coping, as well as activating spiritual beliefs and experiences, as meaning-making coping. The use of attributions or reattributions is often seen as applying cognitive strategies to establish causality and responsibility for an event to change situational or global meaning, something that often relates to the perception of control (Park 2010; Park and Folkman 1997). According to Baumeister (1991) and Sommer et al. (2012), the need for value might be satisfied by externalizing responsibility for one's own behavior or stating one's own good intentions in cases of failure, and the need for self-worth by comparing oneself with others less fortunate, thus asserting superiority or assuming credit for success.

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

3 This study

Being deployed to a war zone likely includes experiences of stressful situations. Some of the experiences will be found meaningful, as documented in previous research (Britt et al. 2001; Schok et al. 2010a; Wong et al. 2003). However, people who have experienced stressful situations often initiate a meaning-making process as it might challenge established meaning structures. Experiences appraised as incongruent with such established meaning structures are here termed as inconsistencies of meaning. Previous research also includes examples of what veterans report as inconsistencies of meaning (Schok et al. 2010a) and general descriptions of meaning-making coping strategies used to restore meaning congruence (Park 2010; Park and Folkman 1997; Skaggs and Barron 2006). The problem statement of this study is twofold: what aspects of the service do veterans find meaningful, and how are these meaningful aspects related to inconsistencies of meaning and meaning-making coping strategies? To answer these questions, 13 members of a Norwegian Air Force Protection Unit were interviewed about their service in Afghanistan, as described later. The findings in this study have been substantiated through a functional exposition of meaning: purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth, as advocated by Baumeister (1991).

4 Method

4.1 Context

From 2008 to 2013, personnel from an Air Force Protection Unit in Norway took part in three military operations under the Norwegian military engagement in Afghanistan. Some participated in a Force Protection Company (FPCOY) in Maymaneh, serving for 6 months. The overall mission of FPCOY was to protect the camp and adjacent areas, as well as providing escort service to and from Maymaneh City. Some personnel participated in the Task Unit (TU) in Maymaneh, serving for 6 months. The TU conducted operations all over the province of Faryab, sometimes in cooperation with, or as protection for, other military units. Some participated in the Fly Away Security Team of the Tactical Airlift Detachment (TAD) for the Hercules transport aircraft based in Mazar-e-Sharif, for 2 months at a time. FAST teams guarded the aircraft and aircrew during flights and at airports all over Afghanistan. In the following, such service is referred to as Force Protection and Security Operations.

4.2 Participants

After a presentation about this study at a regular company meeting, half of the veterans present volunteered to participate, and 13 were randomly selected. The selected veterans signed a voluntary declaration according to the ethical guidelines and approval protocol of the Norwegian Social Science Data Service. The veterans were low-rank personnel on contract as well as officers. Nine had two or more deployments, but their most recent deployment was service in FPCOY, TU, or TAD. The veterans had worked in a threatening environment, and the majority of the respondents spoke about at least one highly stressful incident, e.g., handling a mass demonstration outside their camp that resulted in injured Norwegian personnel.

4.3 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted in September 2013 at the Air Force Academy or the respondents' home base, depending on the choice of the respondents. We identified resource personnel (military priest, military psychologists, and medical personnel) at these locations before conducting the interviews, as a service to the respondents if requested. Semistructured interviews were conducted, recorded, and later transcribed by the first author (RL). An interview guide that included questions concerning experiences they remembered well and would describe as meaningful or meaningless was used.[1] Questions also included communication with other military personnel, team members, and family and friends during and after the deployment to Afghanistan. The interview guide was only a basis for the interview as other topics emerged according to the veterans' answers.

4.4 Analysis

The software NVIVO Version 10 was used for data analysis. The data were analyzed according to open and axial coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008). This included writing notes that included the description of codes, possible underlying mechanisms, or use of language, and later,

1 Several respondents seldom used the words "meaningful" or "meaningless" when speaking of their experiences but rather used "positive", "negative", and similar terms to express their feelings and thoughts. Thus, we often used questions, in particular follow-up questions, during the interviews that reflected these words used by the respondents.

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

relation to other codes (Smith et al. 2009). For instance, "caring", "cohesion", "recognition", "coping", and "ambivalence toward action" were codes that emerged early in the process. Later, patterns across all the interviews were used to establish a simple matrix of themes and categories. Codes were compared with others for similarity in words, content, and frequency. Interpretation of codes into categories and themes started early in the process, but this was more prevalent during the final stages of the analysis when determining categories and linking to previous research and theories within this field (Creswell 2013). Statements that were presented as significant, meaningful, and important, or otherwise a positive experience, in relation to the service were included as potential meaning themes. This also included goals that the veterans set for themselves during service and the motivation to serve in such operations in the first place. Statements that were presented as meaningless, a source of frustration, or disappointment, or otherwise a negative experience, were included as potential inconsistency themes. Moreover, descriptions and explanations of how to think or act on such inconsistency themes were included as meaning-making coping strategies. The most frequently used themes and categories were used to establish a final matrix as presented in the findings that follow.

5 Findings

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, we identified three main themes of meaning, each theme being specified with keywords for each of the categories. The themes of meaning were as follows: 1) "Confirmation of ability", 2) "Cohesion of peers", and 3) "Significance of effort". We also identified three themes of inconsistencies, specified here with a brief description of what constituted the inconsistency theme and an accompanying meaning-making coping strategy. The themes of inconsistencies were "Risky confirmation", "Impaired cohesion", and "Little significance".

We believe that the themes of meaning and the themes of inconsistencies are interrelated as illustrated. The number assigned to each category indicates how many of the respondents have at least one quote within the category in question. In the following sections, each of the themes is described more thoroughly and exemplified with quotes from the respondents, designated by numbers 1–13, starting with the first theme of meaning and then the first theme of inconsistency. During these descriptions, we also use the following wording about frequency: "Most respondents" is used when referring to at least seven respondents. "Many" refers to five or six, "some" refers to three or four respondents, and "few" refers to one or two respondents.

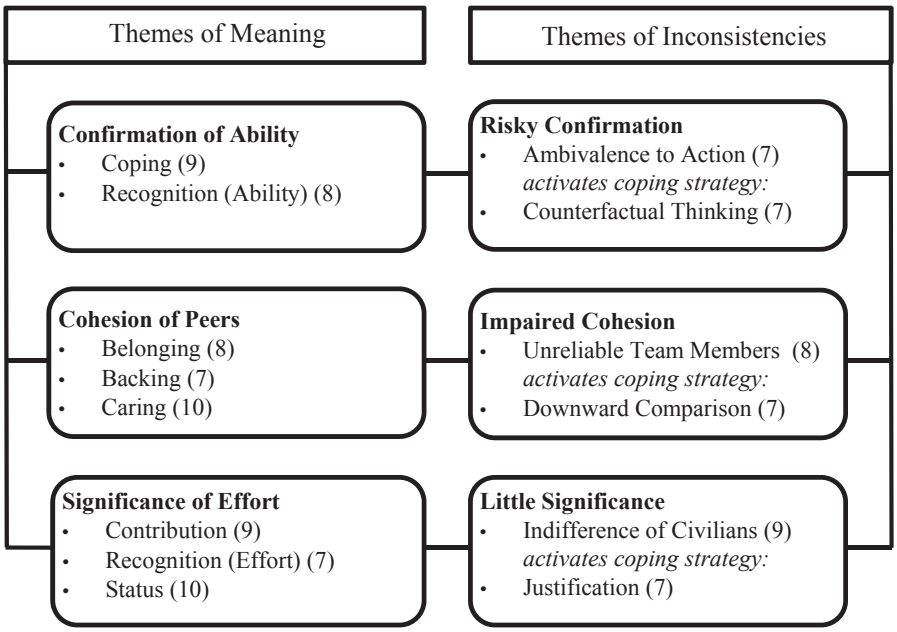

Fig. 1: Themes of Meaning and Related Themes of Inconsistencies and Coping Strategies.

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

5.1 Confirmation of ability

The first theme, Confirmation of ability, relates to how the veterans confirm their personal abilities through Coping and Recognition of abilities. This is accomplished by handling one's job well when working in a threatening and demanding environment and being involved in hostile acts, often termed as action.[2]

5.1.1 Coping

Most of the veterans expressed a desire to cope with stressful situations, as illustrated in the following quote:

> *I don't have a good explanation for this, but it's something I have always wanted to try. To see whether I cope (in combat). And if I don't handle it well, then I quit, it's no worse than that, but I actually believe I can handle this very well. (10)*

The quote points to a specific goal to confirm that he can cope in combat. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to experience such stressful situations. A few who had experienced combat describe this in positive terms for such reasons:

> *What should I say? To know that you cope with the situations you have been through, so that you can use what you have, what you are working and training towards all the time when you are in the Armed Forces, and that you get to practice this, you can say. (2)*

Veterans often referred to coping with stressful events as a way of testing themselves or testing prior training, and a few spoke of an end state of "making the grade". Here, we relate coping to purpose and efficacy. Personal goals are also often seen in relation to efficacy (Sommer et al. 2012). In general, efficacy is a perception of being competent to complete a certain task (Bandura 1997), and coping with a challenging task is a strong confirmation of one's sense of efficacy (Crescioni and Baumeister 2013).

5.1.2 Recognition (ability)

Here, recognition reflects the importance of others confirming their ability. Such recognition of ability refers to feedback often given within a team or unit.

> *In (name of unit) we had much direct feedback, and there you got feedback on what you were bad at and good at. (....) And I find it satisfying when the boys and the lower-ranked personnel give me positive feedback. I appreciate that a lot, more really, than when superiors say I've done a good job. (1)*

Such recognition often referred to the performance of the work and not only the effort, as found in this quote: "what you were bad at and good at". Several of the veterans pointed to the importance of receiving such recognition from other team members. In general, feedback is related to efficacy when it is task and context specific (Bong and Skaalvik 2003), as indicated in the first part of the quote. However, feedback from significant others is also an important source in the formation of self-concept (Bong and Skaalvik 2003), as indicated in the last part of the quote. Thus, one's own team members may provide feedback that relates to both efficacy and self-worth.

5.2 Risky confirmation

We have connected the theme of meaning Confirmation of ability to the theme of inconsistency Risky confirmation. Risky confirmation relates to how confirmation of ability is only accomplished in the presence of risk. This fact seemed to be on the veterans' mind, described through an ambivalence toward action that activated a meaning-making coping strategy referred to as Counterfactual thinking.

5.2.1 Ambivalence toward action

Most respondents wanted to experience action to confirm their own abilities. However, most of the veterans also uttered an ambivalent attitude to experiencing action as, at the same time, they feared the possible consequences of the risk involved.

> *...you hope that something will happen but at the same time you hope that nothing will happen, if you understand. It's a little like that. Yes, it's a little strange really. I think so, I believe it matters a bit. You're there, at least I'm there to try to test myself and what limits I have. And if nothing happens, you can't do that. (11)*

This quote illustrates the fact that the veteran both wanted and did not want something to happen during his deployment. The veterans related this ambivalence to the risk involved. To deal with such conflicting thoughts, the veterans often used the strategy of counterfactual thinking.

2 This included specific tasks of a team outside camp that involved potential or actual threat, e.g., contact with enemy forces, handling mass demonstrations, or handling improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

5.2.2 Counterfactual thinking

Counterfactual thinking refers to a possible outcome that did not happen, e.g., a possible (counterfactual) negative outcome (Teigen 1998). By imagining a negative outcome, the veterans could assess their experience in positive terms, whether or not they had been involved in action-related situations.

> In a way, everybody wants to be part of action and something cool. That is, until it happens. But nobody it has happened to thinks it's kind of cool afterwards, so it's like that, one is lucky if nothing happens. (9)

Here, the respondent utters a general wish to experience "action and something cool" but also believes that those who have experienced action do not find it "cool afterward". Thus, the respondent refers to the good luck of not having experienced action. Perception of such good luck is dependent upon a counterfactual negative outcome, referred to as downward counterfactual thinking (Teigen 1998). A few of the veterans who had experienced action, e.g. combat, also expressed their concern due to the risk involved. They also used downward counterfactual thinking and referred to their good luck after having experienced action that went well. Thinking of a counterfactual negative outcome might be a result of a reduced perception of control and function as a mood repair strategy (McMullen et al. 1995) and a self-enhancement strategy to boost self-esteem (White and Lehman 2005).

5.3 Cohesion of peers

The second theme Cohesion of peers relates to bonding, trust, and mutual support among personnel within a unit, both in operations and in camp. In general, cohesion is viewed as a sense of belonging and helping behavior (Chan et al. 2006) and is revealed here through the veterans' expressions of "Belonging", "Backing", and "Caring".

5.3.1 Belonging

Here, Belonging reflects the veterans' explicit or implicit description of bonding or having a sense of belonging to their unit. Most often, belongingness was described implicitly:

> *It's most about that, now, one does the job together with the guys, you know. After practicing and working hard, now one finally is out and gets a real feeling of us being on a journey. (5)*

Here, a sense of belongingness is disclosed through such utterances as "together with the boys", "a feeling of us being on a journey". Phrases such as "together with" and the use of the pronoun "us" indicate a sense of belonging to a specific group (Brewer and Gardner 1996). Other such oft-used implicit terms that reflected belongingness were descriptions such as "being united", "comradeship", and "friendship".

A few of the veterans explicitly described how they were integrated in the unit:

> *.... they were very including from the start, from the leadership and down through the hierarchy in that unit. So it was easy to become part of it, you know. (2)*

This quote is an example of an explicit description of how one participant is "becoming a part of it" as a consequence of other team members being inclusive. In general, belongingness is related to self-esteem (Baumeister 1991) and collective self-esteem, also given the term "social identity" (Abrams and Hogg 1988; Crocker and Luhtanen 1990). A few veterans also described the effect of such belongingness on future deployments:

> *I'm part of the team. And if I'm not there filling my spot, others have to do it for you. So, it's perhaps a sense of duty. (4)*

This quote shows that group membership is a motivation to make a contribution to the team (Baumeister and Leary 1995), indicating that such a sense of duty might also give some veterans a sense of purpose and direction (Baumeister 1991).

5.3.2 Backing

Backing reflects the trust among peers to support each other during missions, if necessary (Siebold 2007), and relates to the instrumental aspect of cohesion (Siebold 2012). Reference to backing each other up was normally made in cases involving threat. The following quote is an example:

> *It becomes a special comradeship, when you live so close together and have to trust each other with your life when you're out there. In that way it was awesome. You know that the guys you're out there with, they would support you if you were exposed to something. But that's not always the case back home. (8)*

Illustrated in this quote, we find that the "comradeship" is unique and that team members have to "trust each other with your life" and believe that they will be supported if needed. The willingness to back up each other was often

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

described as an effect of comradeship or being united, as the quote describes. How teams achieve common goals relates to collective efficacy (Bandura 2000; Griffith 2007), and this idea of having each other's back describes the essence of cohesion (Siebold 2007).

5.3.3 Caring

Here, caring reflects the emotional support through conversations among peers during the deployment. Caring reflects a trust among peers to support each other emotionally during missions, if necessary (Siebold 2012). Most veterans mentioned the act of caring:

> *By the time we had been in MeZ (Mazar-e-Sharif) for some days, the largest demonstration started, where, for example, this one guy was wounded and injured. He was from our troop, so the positive in that situation was perhaps that we got, he was sent to a hospital in MeZ. So at least, we got to meet him and talked with him, and tried to support him in all that. (7)*

The quote describes how an injured team member is supported emotionally by other team members. Most respondents said they talked to others about feelings and thoughts from experiences during action and missions, in addition to recognizing the importance of doing so. Support given through this type of caring was primarily received through conversation with team members one could trust and, thus, was more typical in informal contexts than in formal debriefing. Such emotional support is often related to psychological health, but also reflects acceptance, belonging, and a way of being esteemed and valued (Langford et al. 1997).

5.4 Impaired cohesion

We have connected the theme of meaning Cohesion of peers to the theme of inconsistency Impaired cohesion. Impaired cohesion relates to how trust and bonding might be broken within a team, described through "Unreliable team members", and this activates the use of a meaning-making coping strategy referred to as "Downward comparison".

5.4.1 Unreliable team members

The respondents found meaning in experiencing cohesion in their unit. However, most respondents also told stories about personnel within their unit who were perceived as unreliable during stress and did not earn the respondents' confidence when it came to their safety.

> *Yes, because I didn't feel as safe among the guys then. It went well, also then, on the whole. There wasn't anything, (name) was injured, and of course the guy from the (name of unit) who was injured. But it turned out OK, we solved the situation well I think. There was nothing about it, the tactical dispositions and such. But I didn't feel as safe in that situation, almost less than I did when I was shot at (during another deployment)... (1)*

The quote describes one veteran who feels unsafe around some of the personnel in his unit. Several stories like this were told by the respondents wherein they felt unsafe or otherwise did not receive the necessary support in situations due to others' lack of individual military skills, their inability to perform under stress, or their lack of experience in a particular job position. This mostly concerned their team members but, sometimes, also senior officers. In general, trust in peers' skills relates to perception of collective efficacy (Bandura 2001), but belonging to such a group might also affect their self-esteem (Baumeister 1991). To deal with such an inconsistency, most respondents typically used downward comparison.

5.4.2 Downward comparison

Downward comparison refers to comparing oneself to others who are worse off (Buunk and Gibbons 2007).

> *...If we had been in the established teams, at first, had the capacity ready, then we would have been much more prepared, mentally and much more familiar with the personnel we were working with. And we would have avoided bringing, call them empty shells, with us. It's a cruel expression, but we're talking about people who are not capable during stress situations. When there is more than one thing to think about. (6)*

The quote describes a veteran who had to cooperate with personnel other than his regular team members from the home base during the deployment. Some of them are described as "empty shells" as they are not perceived as being able to handle stressful situations adequately. Similar characterizations were "people off the street", "paper pushers", and "old men", and these refer to active downward comparison, the creation of a downward target through derogatory comments or mocking (Buunk and Gibbons 2007). This might represent a strategy to distance themselves from a specific prototype and the group it represents, indicating that this relates to a threat to self-esteem (Buunk and Gibbons 2007; Gibbons and Gerrard 1997). Some of the veterans also said that

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

they did not want to redeploy if it involved being part of such ad hoc teams, something that might be regarded as a problem-focused coping strategy if faced with the same threat.

5.5 Significance of effort

The third theme, Significance of effort, relates to how veterans view the significance or importance of their work. This is described through the veterans' perception of the effect of their job, how they were recognized by others, or how they gained status due to their efforts.

5.5.1 Contribution

"Contribution" reflects the participants' view of their efforts as something important. Often, this was judged by seeing the effect of their job.

> *We have driven many important people and kept them safe out there, during escorts through the city. To get things to function, that people can coordinate at high (organizational) levels. We have also helped and contributed to surveying changes in the situation, from before we arrived in Maymaneh and till now. And to hear that there have been improvements, that it's possible to call the police to get help, and such things, that's good to hear. Also, that the ones before us have done the job the right way, that things have improved. And here, I am a small piece in the game having contributed to that. (12)*

Seeing themselves and their efforts within a bigger context made the respondents feel they did something significant, in particular, if they could relate to some concrete effects of their job, as quoted here. Potentially, such a contribution can be related to several of the four needs for meaning. Some utterances were seen as support for other military personnel or units, as well as the local Afghan people, again as in the preceding quote. This indicates the need for value, doing something for the sake of others (Baumeister 1991). Seeing some concrete effect of their efforts could be related to collective efficacy, the feeling that they were achieving something or making a difference (Bandura 1997; Baumeister 1991). This also seemed to give some of the veterans a sense of fulfillment, being proud or content with their achievements, indicating that they obtained a sense of purpose from their efforts (Baumeister 1991). However, no quotes referred to a contribution to the overall security development in Afghanistan. On the contrary, a few veterans even said that this was of no importance to them.

5.5.2 Recognition (effort)

Recognition of effort relates to how feedback from personnel, mostly outside the team or organization, functions as a verification of their work having an effect, as the following quotes indicate:

> *On the whole, it's to secure personnel on the aircraft, and we got very good feedback afterwards that they (the aircrews) had felt safe, and that is good enough for me. (8)*

In this quote, the veteran emphasized that the core mission of his team was verified by others and that this mattered to the veteran. Most of the respondents believed that they had received recognition for the work they had done. Their effort was most often judged in relation to military objectives and most important to them was recognition from other military units they were cooperating closely with. The importance of medal ceremonies was downplayed by some of the respondents, and a few even said the medal ceremony after redeployment did not matter much. In general, feedback from significant others is mostly related to self-worth (Bong and Skaalvik 2003; Sommer et al. 2012), or others' evaluation of the group is related to their social identity (Crocker and Luhtanen 1990), ceremonies included (Griffith 2012).

5.5.3 Status

Having participated in numerous missions, having experienced action, and being exposed to risk were factors that gained the respect of others, as the following quote illustrates:

> *But I won't deny that I would like to be part of the troop that went far from the camp. I would like much more to be part of that troop. Because I don't want to get stuck in camp and you know (...). Had respect for all those who did the job out there. (...). But the PRT Chief was very good at praising, there was nothing condescending from him, but anyway I believe everybody goes and thinks that it's ten, twenty or thirty kilometers away that you make a difference, and not just around here. Even if we did have more incidents in the town than they had out there. (13)*

The quote describes that service far from camp was regarded as more valid than service close to the camp, as one could make a difference in such operations. Several of the veterans made such comparisons, which upgraded or downgraded the importance of their own efforts. This also included comparison within a team, e.g., the number of missions one went on. A few of the veterans said that such status was seldom addressed directly but seemed to

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

be an implicit part of stories being told from the service. In general, comparison with other individuals or units relates to self-worth (Baumeister 1991) and social identity (Crocker and Luhtanen 1990).

5.6 Little significance

We have connected the theme of meaning, Significance of effort, to the theme of inconsistency, Little significance. Little significance relates to how the perception of significance of the veterans' efforts is challenged by the indifference of civilians, something that activates a meaning-making coping strategy referred to as Justification.

5.6.1 Indifference of civilians

The respondents found meaning in the significance of their efforts by making a contribution, receiving recognition, and gaining status for their efforts. However, most of the respondents believed that many civilians did not understand why they had deployed voluntarily and that they were generally not interested in their experiences.

> *They aren't interested; they don't know what it's all about. Yes, you have parents who certainly do not want you to travel abroad; they're not the ones who especially want to talk about missions abroad. That's one thing you notice, it's not upsetting, but it's kind of strange that people really don't care much about it, what you have done. (3)*

According to this respondent, civilians are not interested in hearing about their experience and they do not know what it is all about, something that is perceived as peculiar. Most respondents said they did not find civilians as interested in their service as expected, even though there were exceptions, something that relates to how others evaluate or value the group, termed as "public collective self-esteem" (Crocker and Luhtanen 1990). The veterans' experience indicates a gap between expected and received attention and recognition, something that relates to the value that others place on their social identity (Crocker and Luhtanen 1990). To make sense of these inconsistencies, strategies of justification were used.

5.6.2 Justification

Some of the veterans described the lack of interest from civilians with an account of why they chose to deploy to Afghanistan, as the quote below illustrates:

> *You had perhaps, not from family and acquaintances, but generally in society, expected more acceptance for the efforts you put into it, you know. That you, in a way, aren't regarded as a maniac for traveling to Afghanistan. It's the Government that has decided to send us. (7)*

This veteran expected more acceptance from civilians and refers to his deployment as a result of a political decision. Thus, his reasoning serves as an explanation that goes beyond personal goals or needs and therefore is justification of his actions. Other veterans externalized responsibility by referring to obligations toward other team members and professional requirements, or they reported their good intentions by referring to the protection of the Afghan people. Such strategies serve to preserve the idea of being a good and moral person (Sommer et al. 2012) and satisfy the need for value (Baumeister 1991; Schwarzer and Taubert 2002).

6 Discussion

This study explored the aspects of military service that veterans find meaningful. The findings show that meaning was found in the following themes: Confirmation of ability, Cohesion of peers, and Significance of effort. We believe that the following aspects of service satisfy the needs for meaning: purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth (Baumeister 1991). We have further explored how some experiences are inconsistent with such meaningful aspects of the service and found one theme of inconsistency for each theme of meaning, specifically, Risky confirmation, Impaired cohesion, and Little significance. We also found that these inconsistencies of meaning activated certain meaning-making coping strategies. The coping strategies found in this study, Counterfactual thinking, Downward comparison, and Justification, are described as meaning-making coping strategies used to alter the meaning of a situation by reappraisal of an event (Baumeister 1991; Park 2010; Park and Folkman 1997). The veterans' description of inconsistencies of meaning and coping strategies does not indicate any contemplation over the global and appraised meanings of their experiences. For example, indifference from civilians is coped with by justifying one's own choices. In this lies a sense of acceptance of reality. In comparison, Schok et al. (2010a) reported that veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms were more preoccupied with negative notions that also had an emotional impact, such as feeling disconnected from the civil society and being irritated by ignorant and spoiled civilians (Schok et al. 2010a).

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

Finding meaning in a military context might be somewhat different from other contexts. Military personnel are not random victims of negative life events. They are selected and trained to cope with stressful situations (Larner and Blow 2011). Thus, soldiers have probably already found some purpose for the mission before being deployed. In this study, Coping, as a test of oneself, was sometimes phrased as a goal. Here, Coping connected prior training to active service in war, as well as personal qualities to qualities needed in the role of a soldier. To our knowledge, finding purpose in coping as a test of oneself has not previously been found within the research on meaning-making process in a military context. However, it has been documented that soldiers who volunteer for military service abroad are sometimes motivated by the adventure and opportunities to test themselves in a stressful environment (Battistelli et al. 1999). On the other hand, the importance of cohesion resonates with previous research on meaning making, whereby strong cohesion or comradeship represents trust and safety during the deployment (Schok et al. 2010a). Such commitment to each other's safety and common goals are in the soldiers' self-interest (Siebold 2007) and might be viewed as a reasonable adaptation to the context. However, only a few of the veterans spoke explicitly of this theme as a goal. The theme Significance of effort relates to how the veterans established the belief that their efforts had an effect. Knowing that your efforts matter is probably important to most veterans as it gives a sense of purpose to the mission (Schok et al. 2010a), making the burden, stress, and risk involved in such deployments worthwhile. In this study, some veterans expressed a sense of fulfillment, indicating that they had found purpose in their deployment.

Furthermore, finding meaningful aspects of the service, such as value, efficacy, and self-worth, also fulfilled the other needs for meaning (Baumeister 1991). First, meaning was found in Confirmation of ability through the experience of Coping and Recognition of ability. This indicated that the veterans confirmed or enhanced their perception of their efficacy and self-worth. This theme was related to the inconsistency theme Risky confirmation, which related to a reduced perception of control and an effort to reestablish self-esteem through Counterfactual thinking. Second, meaning was found in Cohesion of peers through Belonging, Backing, and Caring. This indicated that the veterans enhanced their perceptions of collective efficacy and collective self-esteem. This theme was related to the inconsistency theme Impaired cohesion, which possibly concerned a reduced perception of collective efficacy and collective self-esteem through unreliable team members, as well as an effort to reestablish mainly collective self-esteem through Downward comparison. Third, meaning was found in Significance of effort through Contribution, Recognition of effort, and Status from effort. This indicated an enhanced perception of value, collective efficacy, self-worth, and collective self-esteem. This theme was related to Little significance, which was possibly related to the reduced moral value of their efforts and a strategy of Justification to defend this reduced moral value.

We argue that meaning constructs and the meaning-making process are to be understood in terms of needs for meaning. However, people rarely think and speak in such terms (Baumeister 1991; Park 2010). For instance, people might report thoughts and behavior known as coping strategies, but they are not necessarily aware of why they are using these strategies (Park 2010). Thus, we can only substantiate the connection of meaningful aspects of the service to such needs for meaning. At the same time, we might not pick up important nuances when using the wording of the respondents. In this study, recognition was expressed as an important part of the experience, but there might be a difference between positive feedback received for one's skills or effects of efforts, and the gratitude received from people who are personally affected by the war. The former might mostly respond to the need for efficacy and self-worth and the latter to the need for value. Gratitude is described as a response to moral behavior and an emotion that connects people to society, as people might be grateful toward people they have never met (McCullough et al. 2001). Thus, feeling a sense of value in this particular context might be largely dependent on gratitude from people outside the military organization. This might explain why recognition from civilians seemed to matter so much in this study. In comparison, medal ceremonies were sometimes described as being of little importance. Such ceremonies can probably refer to several needs for meaning, but recognition from people who are personally involved and have first-hand knowledge probably matters more than recognition from others. Thus, medal ceremonies might be perceived as a result of institutional practice rather than personal involvement.

Another problem of connecting meaning to needs for meaning is that some experiences of the veterans might be substantiated within several needs for meaning. In this study, the inconsistency theme Unreliable team members was presumed to predominantly affect collective efficacy when experiencing lack of trust and backup from other team members. However, the strategy of downward comparison indicated a need to protect one's

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

own self-worth. Efficacy and self-worth might often work together in real-life experiences. The situation of unreliable team members might comprise a threat to both collective efficacy and self-esteem, as it might be perceived as both a threat to trust in others' support and a threat to belongingness to the team. In general, group belonging provides a basis for receiving support (Haslam et al. 2005), but support also functions as an affirmation of group belonging (Thoits 1986). Alternatively, there is a close relationship between the constructs of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Bong and Skaalvik 2003; Judge and Bono 2001), even though they are also described as two separate constructs (Chen et al. 2004). The same connection is found between self-esteem and value, whereby self-enhancing evaluation, such as perceiving one's action as morally good, might be viewed as maintenance of self-esteem (Sommer et al. 2012).

7 Limitations and future research

The findings in this study are the result of researchers' interpretations and abstractions and might be biased due to leading questions and experimenter expectancy (Kvale 1996). This is a well-known criticism of qualitative research, for instance, when preconceived attitudes and insider perspectives influence the research process (Flick 2009). However, being an insider from the military organization might also be an advantage as trust can be established with the respondents. This research also involves researcher subjective abstraction during analysis, e.g., the abstraction of quotes to coding and coding to themes of meaning. In this study, the second author investigated the proposed coding and themes to ensure that they were grounded in relevant quotes (Creswell 2013), as well as including discussions on alternative understanding.

The retrospective nature of this study also has its limitations. Development and refinement of meaning structures over time is an important attribute of the meaning-making process (Park 2010; Skaggs and Barron 2006). Thus, a longitudinal design with two or more concurrent measurement points could have reflected this process better. For instance, longitudinal research using measures from the pre-deployment to the post-deployment periods would allow for examination of change in meaning structures over time. Moreover, even though we identify inconsistencies of meaning and accompanying coping strategies, we do not capture the end state of this meaning-making process. Thus, this study does not document whether the coping strategies are effective and result in successful integration as we have anticipated (Park 2010). However, we believe that this study concerns veterans without severe stress responses and acknowledge at the same time that the meaning-making process, in particular, of veterans with stress responses, also covers other categories or needs for meaning than those chosen in this study, e.g., as found in the study by Schok et al. (2010a). Furthermore, meaning structures are also constructed within a particular social context (Bartone 2005; Weick 1995) such that there may be differences in the beliefs and goals of soldiers from different nations, branches, and units. The veterans in this study have returned to the same home base unit, which also represents a certain social context. A comparison group of veterans could have demonstrated influence from different social contexts on meaning making, for instance, a study of veterans having served within the same unit but returning to military versus civilian lives afterward.

The findings of this study are in line with those of Schok et al. (2010a), who explored the meaning-making proess among Dutch peacekeeping soldiers in Cambodia, in particular, the themes Cohesion of peers and Significance of effort. Bearing this in mind, one should note that in our study, the veterans most often saw their efforts in relation to lower-level military objectives and not the overall development in the country as found in the study of Schok et al. (2010a). Further research might reveal whether military campaigns regarded as unsuccessful in the overall mission by the majority of the veterans (Forsvarets Sanitet 2013) intensify the veterans' focus on lower-level mission objectives, as found in our study. Further research could also explain differences between these two studies, such as the theme Confirmation of ability, which was found in our study but not reported in the study by Schok et al. (2010a). Furthermore, finding meaningful aspects of the service is associated with better adjustment to stress and personal growth, in particular, for units experiencing high-threat situations (Fontana and Rosenheck 1998; Schok et al. 2010b). Finding meaning is also related to personal growth, such as the enhanced self-esteem and self-efficacy among Norwegian veterans having served in Afghanistan (Forsvarets Sanitet 2013). The findings in this study and previous research indicate what might be regarded as common aspects of meaning found by veterans. A measure covering such common aspects of meaning might be constructed for use in quantitative surveys to explain what part of the experience leads to such personal growth in terms of purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth.

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

8 Conclusion

We have explored the aspects of military service that veterans find meaningful and how these aspects are related to inconsistencies of meaning and meaning-making coping strategies. We found that meaning and inconsistencies of meaning relate to such themes as Confirmation of ability and Risky confirmation, Cohesion of peers and Impaired cohesion, as well as Significance of effort and Little significance. We also found that veterans use different meaning-making coping strategies, such as Counterfactual thinking, Downward comparison, and Justification in an effort to restore meaning congruence. To the best of our knowledge, no other research has explicitly separated themes of meaning, themes of inconsistencies, and coping strategies, as done in this study. Thus, we argue that the current study contributes to a thorough understanding of the difference between meaningful aspects of the service and the process of meaning making. This seems to be important within a field of research with different ways of operationalizing meaning. It also lays the grounds for further investigation into how meaningful aspects of the service and the meaning-making process independently might be determinants of personal growth among veterans.

References

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (1988). Comments on the motivational status of self-esteem in social identity and intergroup discrimination. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 18*, pp. 317-334.

Aldwin, C. M., Levenson, M. R., & Spiro, A. (1994). Vulnerability and resilience to combat exposure: Can stress have lifelong effects? *Psychology and Aging, 1*, pp. 34-44.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. Freeman, New York.

Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 9*, pp. 75-78.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Reviews Psychology, 52*, pp. 1-26.

Bartone, P.T. (2005). The need for positive meaning in military operations: Reflections on Abu Ghraib. *Military Psychology, 17*, pp. 315-324.

Battistelli, F., Ammendola, T., & Galantino, M. G. (1999). The fuzzy environment and postmodern soldiers: The motivations of the Italian contingent in Bosnia. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 10*, pp. 138-160.

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Meanings of Life*. Guilford, NY.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*, pp. 497-529.

Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2002). The pursuit of meaningfulness in life. In: Snyder, C. R., & Lopez, S. J. (eds.). *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 608-618.

Bellin, Z. (2012). The quest to capture personal meaning in psychology. *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy, 4*, pp. 4-26.

Bong, M., & Skaalvik, E. M. (2003). Academic self-concept and self-efficacy: How different are they really? *Educational Psychology Review, 15*, pp. 1-40.

Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this we? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, pp. 83-93.

Britt, T. W., Adler, A. B., & Bartone, P. T. (2001). Deriving benefits from stressful events: The role of engagement in meaningful work and hardiness. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6*, pp. 53-63.

Buunk, A. P., & Gibbons, F. X. (2007). Social comparison: The end of a theory and the emergence of a Weld. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 102*, pp. 3-21.

Chan, J., To, H., & Chang, E. (2006). Reconsidering social cohesion: Developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research. *Social Indicators Research, 75*, pp. 273-302.

Chen, G., Gully, S. M., & Eden, D. (2004). General self-efficacy and self-esteem: Toward theoretical and empirical distinction between correlated self-evaluations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25*, pp. 375-395.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures to Developing Grounded Theory,* 3rd edn. Sage, Los Angeles, CA.

Crescioni, A. W., & Baumeister, R. F. (2013). The four needs for meaning, the value gap, and how (and whether) society can fill the void. In: Hicks, J. A., & Routledge, C. (eds.). *The Experience of Meaning in Life. Classical Perspectives, Emerging Themes, and Controversies*. Springer Science + Business Media, New York, pp. 3-15.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage Publication, London.

Crocker, J., & Luhtanen, R. (1990). Collective self-esteem and ingroup bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*, pp. 60-67.

Elder, G. H. Jr., & Clipp, E. C. (1989). Combat experience and emotional health: Impairment and resilience in later life. *Journal of Personality, 57*, pp. 310-341.

Flick, U. (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications, London.

Fontana, A., & Rosenheck, R. (1998). Psychological benefits and liabilities of traumatic exposure in the war zone. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 3*, pp. 485-503.

Fontana, A., & Rosenheck, A. (2005). The role of loss of meaning in the pursuit of treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 18*, pp. 133-136.

Forsvarets Sanitet [Norwegian Defense Medical Service]. (2013). *Afghanistanundersøkelsen 2012. En undersøkelse av psykisk helse hos norsk militært personell som har tjenestegjort i Afghanistan fra 2001-2011.* [*The Afghanistan Survey. A Survey of Psychological Health Among Norwegian Personnel Serving in Afghanistan 2001-2011*]. Office for Psychiatry and Stress Management, Oslo.

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

Gibbons, F. X., & Gerrard, M. (1997). Health images and their effect on health behavior. In: Buunk, B., & Gibbons, F. X. (eds.). *Health, Coping and Well-being: Perspectives from Social Comparison Theory*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 63-94.

Griffith, J. (2007). Further considerations concerning the cohesion-performance relation in military settings. *Armed Forces & Society, 34*, pp. 138-147.

Griffith, J. (2012). Cohesion forgotten? Redux 2011 – knowns and unknowns. In: Salo, M., & Sinkko, R. (eds.). *The Science of Unit Cohesion – Its Characteristics and Impacts*. The Finnish National Defence University, Järvenpää, Finland, pp. 11-32.

Haslam, S. A., O'Brien, A., Jetten, J., Vormedal, K., & Penna, S. (2005). Taking the strain: Social identity, social support, and the experience of stress. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 44*, pp. 355-370.

Horowitz, M. J. (2001). *Stress Response Syndromes. Personality Styles and Interventions*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1989). Assumptive worlds and the stress of traumatic events: Applications of the schema construct. *Social Cognition, 7*, pp. 113-136.

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered Assumptions. Towards A New Psychology of Trauma*. The Free Press, New York.

Judge, T. A., & Bono, J. E. (2001). Relationship of core self-evaluations traits – self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability – with job satisfaction and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, pp. 80-92.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews. An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Langford, C. P. H., Bowsher, J., Maloney, J. P., & Lillis, P. P. (1997). Social support: A conceptual analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 25*, pp. 95-100.

Larner, B., & Blow, A. (2011). A model of meaning-making coping and growth in combat veterans. *Review of General Psychology, 15*, pp. 187-197.

Mascaro, N., & Rosen, D. (2008). Assessment of existential meaning and its longitudinal relations with depressive symptoms. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology, 27*, pp. 576-599.

McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S. D., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. B. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin, 127*, pp. 249-266.

McMullen, M. N., Markman, K. D., & Gavanski, I. (1995). Living in neither the best nor worse of all possible worlds: Antecedent and consequences of upward and downward counterfactual thinking. In: Roese, N. J., & Olson, J. M. (eds.). *What Might Have Been: The Social Psychology of Counterfactual Thinking*. Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 133-167.

Mehlum, L. (1995). Positive and negative consequences of serving in a UN peacekeeping mission. A follow-up study. *International Review of Armed Forces Medical Services, 68*, pp. 289-295.

Mooren, T., Schok, M., & Kleber, R. J. (2009). De zin van ingrijpende gebeurtenissen: een vragenlijst over betekenisgeving na oorlogs- en geweldservaringen. [The significance of disruptive events: A questionnaire on the assignment of meaning after experiences of war and migration]. *Psychologie & Gezondheid, 39*, pp. 101-109.

Oyserman, D. (2004). Self-concept and identity. In: Brewer, M. B., & Hewstone, M. (eds.). *Self and Social Identity*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, pp. 5-24.

Park, C. L., & Folkman, S. (1997). Meaning in the context of stress and coping. *Review of General Psychology, 1*, pp. 115-144.

Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, pp. 257-301.

Schok, M. L., Kleber, R. J., Elands, M., & Weerts, J. M. P. (2008). Meaning as a mission: A review of empirical studies on appraisals of war and peacekeeping experiences. *Clinical Psychology Review, 28*, pp. 357-365.

Schok, M. L., Kleber, R. J., & Boeije, H. R. (2010a). Men with a mission: Veterans' meanings of peacekeeping in Cambodia. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 15,* pp. 279-303.

Schok, M. L., Kleber, R. J., & Lensvelt-Mulders, G. J. L. M. (2010b). A model of resilience and meaning after military deployment: Personal resources in making sense of war and peacekeeping experiences. *Aging & Mental Health, 14*, pp. 328-338.

Schwarzer, R., & Taubert, S. (2002). Tenacious goal pursuits and striving toward personal growth: Proactive coping. In: Frydenberg, E. (ed.). *Beyond Coping: Meeting Goals, Visions and Challenges*. Oxford University Press, London, pp. 19-35.

Siebold, G. L. (2007). The essence of military group cohesion. *Armed Forces & Society, 33*, pp. 286-295.

Siebold, G. L. (2012). The science of military cohesion. In: Salo, M., & Sinkko, R. (eds.). *The Science of Unit Cohesion – Its characteristics and Impacts*. National Defence University, Finland, pp. 45-64.

Skaggs, B. G., & Barron, C. R. (2006). Searching for meaning in negative events: Concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 53*, pp. 559-570.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Theory, Method and Research*. Sage Publications, CA.

Sommer, K. L., Baumeister, R. F., & Stillman, T. F. (2012). The construction of meaning from life events: empirical studies of personal narratives. In: Wong, P. T. P., & Fry, P. S. (eds.). *Handbook of Personal Meaning: Theory, Research, and Application*, 2nd edn. Taylor & Francis, NY, pp. 297-313.

Teigen, K. H. (1998). Hazards mean luck: Counterfactual thinking in reports of dangerous situations and careless behavior. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 39*, pp. 235-248.

Thoits, P. A. (1986). Social support as coping assistance. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 54*, pp. 416-423.

Vallacher, R. R., & Wegner, D. M. (1989). Levels of personal agency: Individual variation in action identification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*, pp. 660-671.

Weick, K. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organization*. Sage Publishing, CA.

White, K., & Lehman, D. R. (2005). Looking on the bright side: Downward counterfactual thinking in response to negative life events. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*, pp. 1413-1424.

Wong, L., Kolditz, T. A., Millen, R. A., & Potter, T. M. (2003). *Why they fight. Combat Motivation in the Iraq War*. Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle.

Unangemeldet
Heruntergeladen am | 31.10.17 10:39

Study II

This paper is awaiting publication and is not included in NTNU Open

Study III

This paper is awaiting publication and is not included in NTNU Open

Appendices

Appendix I: Interview guide of study I.

Appendix II: Survey of study II.

Appendix III: Survey of study III.

Appendix I

Intervjuguide studie I

Innledning

- Kan du beskrive kort hvilke arbeidsoppgaver du hadde?
- Kan du beskrive kort hvilket oppdrag avdelingen hadde?
- En typisk dag på jobben, hvordan så den ut?
- Hvilken risiko ble du utsatt for?

Betydningsfulle opplevelser

- Fortell om en situasjon som du husker godt fra tjenesten
- Hva var den beste og verste opplevelsen?

Prosess / refleksjon

- Tenker du over slike hendelser som du har vært med på i dag? Tidligere? I tjenesten, etter hjemkomst?
- Har du fortalt eller diskutert hendelser med andre under tjenesten?
- Hva med familie, venner eller kolleger etter hjemkomst? Hvilken kontekst?
- Hvordan opplever du å snakke med andre om hendelser fra tjenesten?
- Har du skrevet noe ned under eller etter tjenesten?
- Hvilke type historier eller informasjon deles kun internt?

Sosial Støtte/Relasjoner

- Har noen relasjoner i familie, blant venner eller kolleger, endret seg?
- Hvordan var det å dele personlige tanker/følelser med andre kolleger? (formelt/uformelt)
- Etter hjemkomst, hvordan har det vært å snakke med andre om tjenesten? (familie, venner og kolleger).

Bidrag

- Hvilke av dine karaktertrekk blir spesielt synlig når du tjenestegjør?
- Hva synes du om eget bidrag?
- Hva synes du om din avdelings bidrag?
- Norges bidrag

Identitet

- Hvordan var det å være "rolle" blant "andre roller" i avdelingen/leiren? (Status, anseelse).
- Hva synes familie og venner om det?
- Hvilke andre personer som du traff i tjenesten fikk du respekt for? I avdelingen og leiren- hvem har mest anseelse og hvorfor?

Benefits

- Hva har du personlig fått ut av tjenesten i int ops?
- Hva har du erfart eller lært, som du tar med deg videre i livet?
- Hva er det viktigeste tjenesten har gitt deg?
- Hva tenker du vanligvis på når du ser tilbake på tjenesten i dag?

Motivasjon

- Hvorfor reiste du nedover?
- Hva mener du om din avdelings innsats? Forsvarets øverste ledelse? Politisk nivå? Media?
- Hva synes du om din egen innsats?
- Hva bidro til at du kunne gjøre en god jobb? Hva ble mest meningsfylt å gjøre?

Det meningsløse

- Hva kunne vært bedre ift opptreningen, under tjenesten og etter tjenesten? Hva synes du om det i dag?
- Noe du reagerte på, ikke forstod hvorfor dere gjorde/ikke gjorde, noe som fremstod som meningsløst for deg?
- Hadde du noen uforklarlige opplevelser?

Avslutning

- Hvordan har det vært å fortelle om tjenesten?
- Har du noe å fortelle til slutt?
- Takke av!

Appendix II

The paper which is related to this appenidix is awaiting publication and is not included in NTNU Open

Appendix III

The paper which is related to this appenidix is awaiting publication and is not included in NTNU Open