



**UCD GEARY INSTITUTE  
DISCUSSION PAPER  
SERIES**

**The Development of British Military  
Masculinities through Symbolic  
Resources**

**Culture & Psychology, In Print (2007)**

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**08 May 2007**

This paper is produced as part of the Behaviour, Risk & Welfare research programme at Geary; however the views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the Geary Institute.  
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## **Abstract**

Within military culture there is a protected version of masculinity. The theory of symbolic resources (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson & Psaltis, 2003) recognises that people are positioned within different symbolic streams in the socio-cultural world, in which they can be displaced or can relocate themselves (Benson, 2001; Duveen, 2001). So an individual entering the military is relocating him or herself from a civilian socio-cultural world to a military one. 29 semi-structured individual interviews and three focus groups (each comprising three individuals) with male and female military personnel in Britain were conducted. Participants included Royal Marine, Army and Royal Air Force personnel and were of a variety of ranks. In accordance with the theory of symbolic resources, the unit of analysis for psychological development is the unit rupture-irruption of certainty-transition. This implies a process that leads to a new form of stability. This process is that which military personnel undertake in order for that which is uncertain and unfamiliar when they begin their training to become certain and familiar. Through focusing on the rupture that takes place during the training phase within an individual's military career, one can explore how through symbolic resources, military masculinities develop.

**Key Words** Symbolic resources, Masculinities, Military culture, identity

Within the Armed Forces there is a protected version of masculinity. The development of military masculinities has been acknowledged in some of the literature that focuses on issues of gender within Armed Forces throughout the world (Connell, 1995, 2000; Barrett, 2001; Woodward, 1998; Sasson-Levy, 2003; Kronsell, 2005; Lahelma, 2005; Gill, 1997; Agostino, 1998). Military rituals, rites, practices, values and structure reflect accepted conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Barkawi, Dandeker, Wells-Petry and Kier, 1999; Agostino, 1998). Klein (1999) resolutely held that 'military service can be described as a rite of passage to male adulthood, teaching toughness, and trying to eliminate what is regarded to be effeminate' (p.47). These gendered identities are however by no means monolithic as the relationships between different forms of masculinity are increasingly important to consider (Woodward, 1998; Winter and Woodward, 2003). Military culture can be described as a unique way of life and notably distinct from civilian institutions and organisations. There is not the same variety of masculinities within the military as there are within civilian cultures. It is important to consider what is distinctive about military masculinities. In order to do so, one needs to consider what the aims of militarisation as are. Analyses of the present narratives have indicated that an outcome of militarisation is the construction of military masculinities. The military rebuilds or reframes masculinities as a means of meeting the aims of the process of militarisation.

This study draws on the theory of symbolic resources (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson & Psaltis, 2003; Zittoun, 2006). This provides a means of exploring the process-oriented notion of the social representations of military masculinity. Particular aspects of military culture contribute to the construction of military masculinities. This paper questions how specific aspects of military culture contribute to the construction of military masculinities. And what role do symbolic resources play in this?

The fieldwork comprised 28 semi-structured individual interviews and three focus groups (comprising two or three people) with British military personnel from a range of services, divisions and ranks. More details on the methodologies are included in the appendix.

## **The theory of Symbolic Resources**

The theory of symbolic resources recognises that people are positioned within different symbolic streams in the socio-cultural world, in which they can be displaced or can relocate themselves (Zittoun et al., 2003; Benson, 2001; Duveen, 2001). The concept of symbolic streams refers to a perspective of change as it occurs in time and also as it is mediated by semiotic or cultural elements. An individual entering the military is relocating him or herself from a civilian socio-cultural world to a military one. The theory views the person as an agent continuously engaged in an active process of conferring a personal meaning to the symbolic streams and to the locations in which he or she is embedded. This was especially evident during the initial training that military personnel undertake, when they have to relatively quickly confer a personal meaning to an unfamiliar situation. In accordance with the theory of symbolic resources, the unit of analysis for psychological development is the unit rupture-irruption of certainty-transition. This implies a process that leads to a new form of stability. When individuals enter the military, they have to relatively quickly confer a personal meaning to an unfamiliar situation. They have to build their own personal representations of a socio-cultural world, which for many, differs markedly to that which they had previously been immersed in. The theory of symbolic resources allows us to consider the intricacies integral to the process of developing these representations and thus in turn to the construction of military masculinities. It facilitates a specific focus on the resources that are being used in the trajectory of militarisation. It is important to point out that this paper draws from the theory of symbolic resources that Tania Zittoun (2006) has pioneered. Zittoun developed her ideas in response to her work on the processes of development in transitions. This theory has previously been applied in an arena whereby individuals were the focal point. My frame is different as an organisation is the focal point. This does not deter one from utilising this terminology however, as it has been interesting to apply it to a collective of people who's agency on joining the military is minimal.

The cultural field in which people are immersed furnishes us with symbolic means both for managing interactions with others and for making sense of what is happening in our lives. Most interactions occur very smoothly in order to ensure that symbolic means can be 'taken-for-granted'. At the same time, this legitimates the process that generates them (Zittoun et al., 2003). As is the case when people embark on their military training, they find themselves faced with a rupture or break in their ordinary experience. The impact of this experience or the extent of the rupture will vary, depending on for example, whether or not a person has had any previous experience of military culture. Regardless, the individual will have to access the symbolic devices available in order to make a new adjustment to the situation. The person can thus be seen as an agent constantly engaged in an active process of conferring a meaning to the symbolic streams in which he or she is immersed. Therefore, 'the use of symbolic elements by an agent in order to achieve something in a particular social, cultural and temporal context constitutes that symbolic device as a resource that enables the agent to make a transition from one socio-cultural formation to another' (Zittoun et al., 2003. p.416). Situated within symbolic worlds, a person chooses and uses cultural elements as symbolic resources. A person might choose cultural elements within his or her socio-cultural environment or in his or her personal cultures. Cultural elements can be objects particular to a family that are shared over generations, religious traditions, paintings or books. Cultural elements have a material basis to them, and as

such have a historical continuity, whereby continued reading, watching and touching constantly renews their meanings. They have a 'reality' to their existence in that they take on a meaning or a feeling when once they have been read, listened to or felt (Zittoun, 2004a). Military culture comprises strongly structured symbolic systems. It's systems of rules, specific ritual objects and hierarchical social structures confer shared meanings to actions, changes and transitions. Military culture is one of the few traditional social structures which provides people with a time perspective and a consistent system of values, as well as social regulations that are linked to uncertainty and loss. This study is asking what implications do the constraints present in the socio-cultural context of military culture have for the use of symbolic resources?

## **Symbolic Resources in Transitions**

Zittoun states that 'a period of transition in a life-time is a period in which a certain number of taken-for-granted representations, understandings, routines or identities are put at stake' (Zittoun, 2004a, p.134). When a rupture takes place and people lose the 'taken-for-granted', they have to re-create meaning. This process of elaboration related to the construction of meaning is referred to as a transition and always supposes a socio-cultural relocation (Benson, 2001). Individuals may not always perceive the transitions that they experience (Grob, 2001), but activities that relate to the construction of meaning indicate that a person is engaged with a process of change. According to Zittoun et al. (2003), transitions involve the occurrence of a rupture that leads to some outcome, such that action can continue. For example, before joining the Royal Marines, Cliff lived at home with his parents. He described how he enjoyed doing things in his 'own time'. And so Cliff depicted the shock he experienced initially when he entered military culture. Suddenly he had very little control over his actions, as everything he and his fellow recruits did, had to be under the instruction of the commanding staff. An environment that had previously facilitated the construction of his identity was replaced with circumstances whereby he had to share a room with sixty other men. All that Cliff had previously taken for granted in his life as a civilian was no longer available on entering the military. It was however the engagement of representational activity, such as the procedures employed to discipline Cliff, his accommodation arrangements and the various tasks he was instructed to undertake that led to an outcome whereby he no longer found his situation shocking and totally unfamiliar. Instead, this transition meant that his actions began to feel increasingly familiar.

Representational labour can be involved in the construction of new meanings that enable a transition to a new stability. Representational labour refers to for example, skills, identity, narrative or actions. A transition is an 'occasion' for development as it constitutes a new symbolic formation that provides a better adjustment to a new socio-cultural world while at the same time, it protects one's sense of self (Zittoun, 2004b; Zittoun et al., 2003; Hermans, 2001). In fact, every interaction could be considered a transition, but not all interactions lead to new socio-cultural formations. I will shortly go on to discuss how the interactions involved in training almost always lead to new socio-cultural formations, as training requires a movement from a civilian to a military socio-cultural world. Moreover, transitions may always involve some loss, but they also have the potential to open new possibilities. Zittoun (2005) identified three interdependent processes of transition. These relate to identity changes and social repositioning; learning and the development of skills; and meaning-making and the elaboration of emotions.

Symbolic elements can comprise socially acknowledged patterns of interaction, customs that encapsulate experiences or meanings for people, or simply physical objects that are shared and recognised. Zittoun et al. (2003) suggested that what turns a symbolic element into a resource is both '(a) the fact that it is used by someone for something; and (b) that in the context of a transition that results from socio-cultural formation, it entails a significant re-contextualisation of the symbolic element to address the problem opened up by a rupture and to resolve it' (P. 418). The means by which a symbolic element is turned into a resource can be depicted using a semiotic prism, as proposed by Zittoun (2006). The figure below illustrates this:

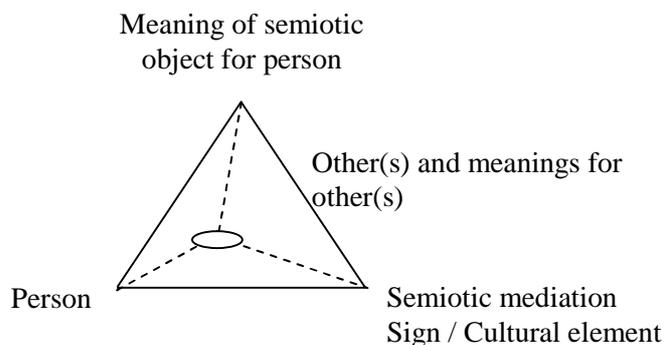


Figure 2: Semiotic prism (adapted from Zittoun, 2006. p.21)

The semiotic prism always focuses on the given person in a given situation. A pivotal aspect of the person is the diversity of his or her experience of for example, images, emotions, or previous understandings. A particular part of this experience can have a meaning for him or her if it is mediated by a semiotic element, such as a sign or a cultural element (Gillespie, 2004; Zittoun, 2006). The part 'other', adds a cultural and social dimension to the prism. From the perspective of the person, the *other's* view about a particular object or on him or her plays a vital role in the meaning it has. This prism is an open system of evolving relationships located in time. Moreover, the part *meaning of semiotic object for person* has a subjective quality of a particular experience. Its anchorage is two-fold – within understandings and embodied memories, and in the shared world. For example, as a cadet in training to be a commissioned officer, Alistair had his own room. The possessions he was allowed to keep in his room were dictated by commanding staff at the beginning, thus controlling the cultural elements within his social space. And for the first six weeks, neither he nor any other personnel were permitted to leave the barracks. Absolute control was maintained. It is this very initial period which is hence fundamental to the development of his military identity. When he reached his second term however, the commanding staff were a little more lenient, allowing the men to have personal possessions of their choosing in their room. However, they maintained a level of control over the symbolic elements that Alistair was allowed to have through regularly inspecting the cadet's rooms. On one occasion, the Colour Sergeant (the 'Other') instructed Alistair to cover his bare walls with posters (cultural element/sign). Alistair had chosen to display very few items that he felt would "convey something about himself". He explained that he knew the Colour Sergeant was not wanting him to do this and would rather he put up posters of women, as did most of his colleagues. So Alistair put up posters of classical architecture instead. Hence these posters had a particular meaning for Alistair. In effect, he managed to impact on the agency with which he could control the cultural elements that he used as resources in this period of transition.

The person develops through numerous interactions with others, objects and the world. These interactions are mediated through evolving semiotic prisms. Semiotic prisms are thus partly internalised and partly positioned externally. Lawrence and Valsiner (2003) proposed an account of internalisation/externalisation processes, whereby collective and personal cultures

constantly influence and constrain each other. 'Within this mutual constraining, people take in social messages encoded into signs, and construct personal meanings that allow them to function and develop in their personal cultures as active constructors' (Lawrence and Valsiner, 2003. p. 724). So in Alistair's situation, he took in the message concerning displaying posters of women, and constructed a personal meaning to these posters by choosing ones that he knew the Colour Sergeant had not expected to see. As a result, Alistair was to a small extent, an active constructor in the development of his personal culture. However, a vital point that will presently be elaborated on is that the nature of the transition military personnel undergo in training, is such that military practices (such as discipline) largely control the personal cultures that develop. This is a crucial component in the development of military masculinities.

A useful metaphor accounting for the internalisation/externalisation process is *the architecture of intersubjectivity* (Gillespie, 2004). The architecture of intersubjectivity is the combining of possible positions created when a person interacts with an 'Other', or a 'generalised Other' (Rommetveit, 1974, 1979). By extension, this is referred to as the *architecture of the self* (Hermans, 2001). This metaphor has three dimensions that reflect a person's most important interactions. These dimensions comprise memories of past semiotic dimensions that have engaged with real, internalised and generalised or imagined others. Consciousness can therefore be seen as a focused point within that architecture and moreover, it is constantly relocated (Benson, 2001).

## **Social Representations and Symbolic Resources**

The theories of social representations (Moscovici, 1984; 1988. Also see Duveen 2000) and symbolic resources are to an extent, very much connected. Social representations are of a symbolic nature. Moreover, symbolic resources mediate the co-construction of social representations. They offer a means of conferring meaning to symbolic elements so that a symbolic element is turned into a resource. As inferred above, social representations epistemologically are structures that emerge from patterns of practices and communications that occur within a particular social space. Researchers conceptualise social representations as 'distributed systems of meaning and action, as social facts that exceed the symbolic activity of any one individual' (Zittoun et al., 2003. p. 420). In contrast, symbolic resources have an actual concrete embodiment. This theory focuses on the pragmatic quality within which people confer meaning to things in the environment and make use of that which they find within their field of action. A great deal is to be gained from applying both theories in this research. Social representations are horizontally distributed systems of meanings. Symbolic resources, on the other hand, makes a vertical connection between externalised and internalised meanings through an actual object that is both experienced and symbolic. What the theory of symbolic resources necessitates is an intricate focus on the process by which representations of military masculinities come about. This paper draws from a larger study that focuses on the social representations of military masculinities (see Lambert, 2007). So while the theory of symbolic resources is central to this paper, applications of social representations theory makes a less apparent though notable contribution to the overall framework.

## **Considering the Voices**

### **Entering Military Culture: Confronting uncertainties and the unfamiliar**

One thing that military personnel share is that on entering the military and progressing through the training, they experience a rupture. Of course, their experiences of this vary depending on their personal qualities and background and the specific military service they enter. Regardless however, the transition from belonging only to a civilian culture to belonging also to a military community is one that involves a rupture. When one enters the military, so much of that which is familiar to a person is no longer accessible and replaced with that which is unfamiliar and uncertain. Military culture differs markedly to so many other cultures for a number of reasons but crucially because of the control that is legitimately exerted within the chain of command. This rupture therefore plays a pivotal role in the construction of the identities of military personnel. And as a result, through focusing on the rupture that takes place on entering military culture, a great deal is revealed about the process by which social representations of military masculinities are constructed.

Through applying the theory of symbolic resources to the interviews with the current sample, I focus on the rupture that takes place in the lives of military personnel as they enter the military and embark upon the training. I will now discuss how the participants described their experience of entering the military. I will consider the implications of the feelings of shock, fear and excitement they described. In short, my aim here is to give an overall insight into a rupture that plays an important role in the construction of military masculine identities. Before doing so however, it is important to highlight a methodological point that is important to bear in mind when considering these findings. The data analysed here are retrospective accounts of a rupture. Moreover, these accounts comprise military personnel talking to a female academic. One can therefore view those accounts as acts of positioning. The rupture they spoke about was a rupture that positioned them as different from the interviewer. These differences in positions can be telling in themselves. The extent to which the narratives were likely to be influenced by the researcher being a civilian reflects the evidently perceived differences between military personnel and female civilians.

The words “uncertainty” and “dislocation of expectation” were those that first came to Andrew’s (Commanding Officer, Royal Marines) mind when he was asked to think about his first few days of Royal Marines training. He explained that this was “because it’s just unknown. Because you just don’t know what’s coming.” Ronnie’s (Royal Marines Commando) experience was similar but he went further to speak about the fear that he felt during training.

‘It’s like you are in a constant fear during your training. Fear of your corporal, fear of our sergeant, fear of your commander. You are scared of everyone. It’s like a bunny in headlights kind of thing. Your eyes are open like this all of the time. You do what anyone tells you to do mainly because they can put you in extreme pressure if you don’t.’

*Ronnie, Marine, Royal Marine Commando*

One could question whether this is simply the nature of any rupture. How is it that this contributes to the construction of a military masculinity? Is it not the same emotions that any person experiences on becoming immersed in a different environment? As the fieldwork progressed, it became increasingly apparent that the rupture that individuals experience on entering the military is unlike any other. The following extract explains some of the reasons why:

‘It’s because say you went for a civvy job, they’d have hardly been in shock because they’d have had coffee machines there. There’s your desk. They’re talking to you nice. You can go to the toilet when you want. Anything. When you’re at Lymptone [Barracks where all Marine Commandos train], you can’t do anything unless they tell you and you’re scared to do anything.’

In the civilian context that Larry describes here, the rupture that one would experience has a smaller impact because within the environment are still symbolic elements that are familiar (Zittoun, 2006), such as the coffee machine, a desk and people at hand to support and behave in a way that would be expected on a first day at work. However, Larry's introduction to the Marines and the subsequent training process involved none of these elements but instead circumstances that caused him to feel fear. Moreover, Charlie (Commissioned Officer, Royal Marines Commando) explained that his first few days at University were totally unlike those at Lympstone because "you're in control at University". On entering the military, individuals are no longer in a familiar environment but instead find themselves immersed in uncertainties and circumstances that are out of their control. They do not have access to the symbolic elements that are ordinarily readily available to them and which until the point of training, had been taken-for-granted. Nevertheless, as I will point out throughout this report, nearly all the participants highlighted that it is vital that training is of this nature ultimately because of the purpose and role of military personnel. It is important to keep this in mind as one continues to consider the rupture that takes place as military personnel embark on the training and confront the unfamiliarity.

The physical demands of basic training comprise a means of maintaining discipline. For example, Kevin emphasised that the perceptions one might have of discipline in the Army do not apply in the Marines.

'What gets me though and I try to stress it to so many people - you see all these Army programmes and the way the recruits there get spoken to. Royal Marines, I believe, the way my team spoke to me was not a bit like that. It would basically be nice and calm and the way they restore respect on you is by physically degrading you. They would give you a good hard thrashing as we call it basically.'

*Kevin, Corporal, Royal Marine Commando*

Marine Commandos use the word 'thrashing' to describe being pushed to one's limits physically. For example, through walking over hills for thirty kilometres carrying over fifty kilograms of weight in adverse weather conditions. Kevin considered this treatment to be a means of exerting control, which brought about a respect for commanding staff. By being 'physically degraded', that which is familiar and certain is taken away. And the identities of such individuals that were being built in the context of a civilian life were as a result no longer accessible. On the other hand, Ed considered discipline to be extremely important as it contributed to the self-discipline that as a result of the training, all Marine Commandos share.

'Discipline has always been there in the background. You always know it's there. And you always know when you're in the poo. ...To put yourself through the commando tests requires a lot of self-discipline to achieve it and do it. Um, and from that, that gives you inherent discipline and inherent pride. You don't want to upset that cart. But again it comes down to the process you go through, you come up with an individual who has got a whole number of values all inherent in them because of what they've been through.'

*Ed, Captain, Royal Marine Commando*

Therefore, training acts to hinder one's access to the symbolic resources that contributed to the construction of one's identity prior to entering the military. A vital part of training however is the endurance of discipline as a means of proving one's mental and physical strength, resilience, determination and pride; characteristics that can be considered necessary for the construction of hegemonic masculinity within military culture. Discipline influences the perceptions that

military men have of themselves. Thus discipline plays a role in the development of military personnel's hegemonic masculine identity.

Therefore, most of the participants found the training and their introduction to the military shocking. Both the physical and mental pressures were very much unlike anything these individuals had experienced before. And discipline plays a prominent role in necessitating this. It was thus clear in the interviews analysed that the training period comprises a significant rupture in the lives of military personnel. Throughout the interviews, the discussion, even on its own accord, frequently returned to the very initial stage of their careers. The theory of symbolic resources allows one to explore ruptures of this kind and the transition that takes place during this period. Additionally though, we will see that this study can open the parameters of this theory as it focuses on a very different cohort to any of the civilian samples previously explored.

## The Transition

The rupture that takes place when an individual enters the military marks a significant point in a transition that could also be referred to as a process of militarisation. Ruptures are not confronted however without enabling means or facilitators. Thus, the nature and duration of the transition varies considerably between individuals, obviously depending on their age when they enter the military, their personal background, the military service and their gender. Regardless, integral to this process is the construction of a military masculine identity. I want to consider this process by looking closely at how the training itself contributes to the construction of military masculinities.

Many of the participants spoke about how through the training, they could see that they had changed. They evoked that the way they were treated by commanding staff and the mental and physical demands placed on them played a crucial role in these changes. For example, the following analogy that Aaron used was particularly apt:

Aaron: When we started off we were called shit. And then after we started off we worked up into the maggots on the shit. And then that just kept working up into loads of different names and that. Lots of different filth and as the names were getting better and that. But once we got to our Commando tests, they gave us a bit of lei-way.

Bryn (Marine, Royal Marine Commandos): They gave you a bit of a break once you get to the tests don't they? Just a little one.

Aaron: But up from week 1 to week 15, it were just total nightmare weren't it because they try and like break you and get the ones out that they don't like and the people they think they don't want.

*Focus Group, Marine, Royal Marine Commandos*

Aaron here, as well as did many participants, conveyed that commanding staff in the military (and especially in the Royal Marines) have an idea about the characteristics that are required of military personnel. Individuals without these qualities are very unlikely to get through the training. It is evident in this extract that regardless of the personal qualities that one enters military culture with, it is most important that individuals enter with an attitude that will enable them to develop particular characteristics that make them suited to the military. These qualities include being proud, determined, competitive but a good team-player and not selfish. All of these attributes can be described as those befitting a hegemonic masculine identity. In order to either augment or develop these qualities among personnel in training, the commanding staff however, break individuals down so that they are all initially at the same point. To begin with,

they are all nothing and have nothing – they are considered to be nothing other than “shit”. As discussed above, they are suddenly immersed in a world that is totally unfamiliar to them and in which they have lost all cultural elements that had until now maintained the construction of their civilian identities. This was evident also in the following:

Cliff: when you start training, however fit you are when you go in, they will bring you all down to the same level and they will build you up from there. So it is sort of staggered that way. And I suppose by about week nine, they have got the same physical ability across the board. And then when you get to 9, 10, 11 it starts to put them into the mental side and the attitude side I think.

*Focus Group, Corporals, Royal Marine Commandos*

Over the course of the training, they gradually move up in the estimations of the commanding staff. They do this through succeeding in the tasks they are set to perform, through the physical and mental hardships that they survive. So we can identify one of the three interdependent processes of transition, namely that which relates to learning and the development of skills. The challenges that they are set are intended to test whether they will ‘break’. And those that do ‘break’ are no longer wanted in the military as they are not suited to the process of militarisation and as a result would not perform well enough in the position. It was apparent that this is very much the case in the Royal Marines. The process of militarisation of course varies depending on the particular service and the regiment within that service.

As a result of the rupture that individuals experience on entering the military, they find themselves stripped of all that would otherwise enable them to portray or hide particular qualities. Ronnie suggested just this in the following extract:

Ronnie: You usually find in the corps that with the guys there's nothing false about them. You know who they are. You know, it's like Big Brother. You know, you can pretend to be someone else but at the end of the day your true self comes out and at the end of the training you can see that everyone's naked. Do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Ye ye. And that happens at different points though?

Ronnie: Yes it does. You'll find that in the first couple of weeks, guys will come in, the big rough tough. I've shaved my head. I've got muscles out to here. No-one can take me on. And you'll find that that kind of arrogant attitude doesn't last long in the corps. Everyone's in the same boat, you know and you usually find that the ones that act that tough are not that tough and the quieter guys who aren't going around pushing people about are in fact the guys that go in and dig in and deal with hardship when it comes to it.

*Ronnie, Marine, Royal Marine Commandos*

It is interesting to also consider the similarity here with a previous quote mentioned. Kevin spoke about how on entering the Marines, individuals have to ‘expose themselves’ and ‘give’ the commanding staff ‘everything’. Similarly, Ronnie suggested that by the end of training, ‘everyone is naked’. Also, considering this extract from the interview with Ronnie, might it be the case that the ‘big rough tough’ men enter the military with attributes that in a civilian context prove their masculinity? And so the challenge for these individuals to adapt to a community where they are not automatically hegemonic, is more difficult than for ‘the quieter guys’. In the following extract, Mark refers to similar observations that he has made.

‘The more Martial Arts they had, the quicker they left because they thought they would be on one leg karate chopping everything. And the reality of it was that they were polishing boots and packing stuff and doing drill and all that kind of stuff and thought bollocks to it, I'm not doing this.’

Therefore, the men who came to the training with martial arts skills were less likely to persevere with the training because they had expected their skills to benefit them when they didn't. And apparently for many, this presented an unwelcome surprise. Skills such as Martial Arts had enabled these individuals to maintain a hegemonic masculine identity in civilian culture. However, on joining the Marines they lose this as in order to succeed they have to start off at the same point as every other recruit and build their military masculine identity by carrying out the tasks that are specific to the military (such as drill and polishing their boots) and developing the qualities considered essential of a Marine Commando.

Moreover, because of the emphasis on team work and the importance of sharing qualities rather than differing to each other, they would alienate people who were behaving differently or threatening the all important cohesion integral to military culture. The way that they treat each other as well as the way they are treated by commanding staff are prominent means by which one is stripped of one's civilian identity and by which a military masculine identity is constructed. This highlights another process of transition, as suggested by Zittoun (2006): a process that relates to identity changes and social repositioning. Evident also in these extracts is the importance of power, control and the hierarchies that contribute to the construction and negotiation of military masculinities. From the point at which an individual enters the military, there is an onward struggle to ensure that an appropriate position is maintained within the community. Progression can only be made through proving one's dedication, determination, physical and mental strength and competitiveness while maintaining a loyalty to the team. Hence, an individual progresses within these hierarchies through constantly developing his or her military masculine qualities.

### **Symbolic Resources - Cultural Elements**

As already mentioned, what has been particularly interesting in applying the theory of symbolic resources in this study, is the implications of the military culture separating individuals from the symbolic resources that were integral to the construction of their civilian identities. Moreover, commanding staff have a definitive control over the symbolic elements that military personnel have available to them during training. During training, and thus the transition integral to it, various aspects of military culture constantly modify different aspects of the semiotic prism. Military culture thus controls the semiotic dynamics that occur during the transition so that military masculinities are constructed. It is often the case that at the beginning, military personnel share a room with other recruits and sometimes with up to sixty other men. They have a very limited amount of personal physical space. So what implications does this have for the construction of their military masculine identities? This is an interesting question that not only relates to the experience of sharing a dormitory with many other men but also to a situation whereby military personnel, certainly at the beginning of their training, are not free to leave the confines of the unfamiliar military barracks. Casey (1993) suggested that, 'where we are – the place we occupy, however briefly – has everything to do with what and who we are (and finally, *that* we are)' (p.xii). It is therefore useful to understand self as a locative system. In abstract terms, who I am is where I am (Benson, 2001). So it is where when and how military personnel are located at the point of rupture and then throughout the transition they undergo during training, that contributes to the development of the *ever-fluid* self. Harré (1993) considers the self to be a location and not a substance or an attribute. But he also asserts that 'it is not having an awareness of an entity at the core of one's being' (p.4). So what is important to emphasise

here is the utility of acknowledging the eminence of location in the construction of military masculinities. And moreover, what one will not be identifying is a monolithic military masculine identity, but rather aspects of the self that within particular locations and over time, are constructed and re-constructed military masculinities.

The military places a great deal of importance on appearance. The rules regarding how short one's hair must be and the absence of facial hair, are stringent. Again, participants explained that this is for reasons of practicality when one is for instance on exercise or in a combat situation. I am interested in the implications of the extent to which commanding staff are aware of the function of cultural elements that had played an important role in the development of their civilian identities. What implications does this have for the construction of military masculinities? It is exactly this knowledge that enables commanding staff to ensure that at the beginning, every individual is the same; they are all 'broken down'. Beyond this point, as an individual's military career progresses, one's access to cultural elements builds. However, the control of cultural elements that played a vital role in the rupture experienced during training, is poignant in the development of social representations of military masculinity.

However, when one distinguishes between symbolic resources and social resources, it is apparent that through controlling the symbolic resources that military personnel have access to, commanding staff in effect promote social resources. One of the most prominent social resources evident in the interviews was the relationships that military personnel develop with one another during the training. The fact that others were in exactly the same situation as themselves made an enormous difference to their experience of this rupture on entering a military community. In fact, by controlling the social resources that military personnel have access to, commanding staff reinforce social cohesion. Both the importance of teamwork and bond as well as conversing with fellow recruits is especially evident in the following focus group's discussions.

Charlie: I suppose, ye, I still liken it to a team, a very close-knit, maybe professional team, who are constantly training together. All the time. I mean, that is probably as close an analogy that I can get to it. You constantly train together. Maybe you get beaten together, you get injured together, whatever it is... You get drunk together.

Andrew: [...] And you go through so many peaks and troughs and it is an emotional roller coaster. So you do share a lot. Um and ye I suppose that is a good way of compressing a lot of experience but ye it is um... I don't think there is anyone I wouldn't speak to - other Bootnecks I know. But er I wouldn't er, I wouldn't pin some poor bloke in the corner and pour my heart out to him but ye.

Charlie: [laughs]

Andrew: There's very few things if anything that I wouldn't talk about.

*Focus Group, Royal Marine Commandos, Commissioned Officers*

We can see in this extract that the conversations that Commandos such as Charlie and Andrew have with fellow personnel, provides them with a social resource. As a result of experiencing the training together, they have developed relationships where they are extremely open with each other. This indicates the impact that training has on the construction of one's identity. It appears that because they have been through the training together, they automatically have a mutual understanding of each other. This is the case, regardless of their backgrounds prior to joining the military. Andrew suggests that the relationships and conversations he has with fellow commandos is unlike that which is possible in civilian culture. It is hence a social resource that contributes to representations of military masculinity. This was especially evident in the following extract from the same focus group.

Interviewer: Because the friends you develop through Uni, it's strong but it's different.

Charlie: Oh ye it is different. I think it was touched on earlier that the friendship you developed in the corps is through mutual hardship I think and through that you know someone very well. Particularly in training. If you go through training with a batch of mates, um, it's not the most enjoyable part of life and through that shared hardships. But I liked it because again, playing in a team. Because you have a mutual suffering if you like and without sounding over-hard here, it brings you closer cos it does. I mean guys get worn away to the minimum and everyone struggles at some point and you get together and help each other. So by the end of training, you know someone as well as anyone probably as well as their girlfriends or whatever.

*Focus Group, Commissioned Officers, Royal Marine Commandos*

Andrew and Charlie also convey in the following extract that not only do these relationships provide support, but they also apply a pressure. There is a relentless pressure among military personnel to be determined, not give up, succeed and show strength. All of which are masculine qualities. Consider the following extract.

Andrew: It is as a result of training but also a strong factor of peer pressure. You are set the goals that you must attain. And if you don't attain them then your peers will notice and comment upon the fact basically.

Interviewer: So ye. If you've given up on something then it's walking around being labelled the person that gave up on that something.

Charlie: Ye exactly.

Andrew: Exactly. Exactly that.

Charlie: And it is quite a lot of pressure. I suppose some people could say it is unfair and all that sort of stuff but it does breed a good quality and a good individual at the end of it.

Andrew: Because it pushes you.

Charlie: Ye it pushes you.

Interviewer: Oh right.

Charlie: And it's not the person to be to be honest. It's even worse as an officer to be honest. You don't want to be an officer who gave up on something. Because it's bad for the lads but I'd say it would be a hundred times worse, A for the credibility of an officer... It's just not a place you want to be really.

*Focus Group, Commissioned Officers, Royal Marine Commandos*

As Zittoun et al. (2003) maintained, symbolic resources are located 'within a context of interaction in which the gaze of the (real or symbolic) other is always present' (p.420). The social interaction within military communities means that if someone does not succeed, this will not go unnoticed by fellow military personnel. This contributes to the pressure that one is under constantly to prove one's strength, determination and competency - one's military masculinity. I learnt in these interviews that pride plays a crucial role in the construction and maintenance of their hegemonic masculine identities. One is reminded in the above extract however that this is always relative. The cost of leadership is such that commissioned officers, under the gaze of those they command, are under an even greater pressure to constantly prove and maintain their hegemonic military masculinity.

Finally, it was apparent in many of the interviews that uniform plays an important role in military culture. Edward (Army Brigadier) felt immensely proud to wear his uniform. He said that it makes one feel, 'half an inch taller because you know the majority of people will respect you and those who don't, don't understand.' The way that Edward feels when wearing his uniform is an aspect of military culture that enables individuals like himself to proclaim and sustain the hegemonic positioning of his masculine identity. The uniform comprises a symbolic resource as it contributes to the construction of strong, superior and determined qualities that are

integral to military masculine identities. Consider another extract from a focus group that took place on a day when it was raining heavily:

Kevin: It [becoming a Marine / the training] changes your mind about a lot of things as well. I'm not just talking about things on a social front.

Interviewer: Right.

Kevin: Like today, for instance, with it raining, I feel really down in the dumps when it's raining.

Interviewer: Do you?

Kevin: Because automatically, I think of times when I've been in the field and it's rained on me constantly.

Interviewer: So you go out in this, and you're taken instantly to say being out in XXXXX [the hills where they are frequently on exercise]?

Kevin: Ye. Ye.

Larry: See, say I'm dressed like this or in Civvies and I'm going somewhere and it's cold and wet, I hate it.

Kevin: I do.

Larry: Oh it's just horrible. But if I'm on exercise it's different.

Kevin: Ye I know what you mean... In this stuff [uniform] I don't mind because I think, well I'm getting paid for it so ye I will.

Larry: You haven't got a choice.

Interviewer: It's part of your responsibility. It's part of who you are in your uniform?

Kevin: Ye.

*Focus Group, Corporals, Royal Marine Commandos,*

Evident in the way they talk about their uniform here are the hierarchies of meaning within the architecture of the self. As discussed above, 'semiotic means can designate punctual experiences, but can also be distant from the immediate experience and thus have a more general scope' (Zittoun, 2006. p.23). Therefore, in relation to this experience that Kevin and Larry discuss, at level 1 (where one addresses the here-and-now of a given embodied experience), they draw on the experience of being outside when it's raining and they are not dressed in uniform. This makes them feel "down in the dumps" however (level 2). At the third level, semiotic mediations can acquire a categorical function and thus confer some constancy to properties of the self. Therefore, Kevin and Larry convey that when in uniform, they can cope with any conditions they find themselves in because they are Marines. The importance of the uniform here though is especially interesting. In the context of adverse weather conditions, it is almost as though in order that they have a military masculine identity, they need to be in their uniform. This is because when in those situations, they have always been in uniform. It is a crucial aspect of military culture that contributes to the construction of military masculinities as it is one thing that will regardless, separate them from any civilian.

Also in relation to uniform, it is interesting to return to Zittoun's (2006) semiotic prism. This prism model needs to be seen as an open-system of evolving relationships located in time. It allows one to alternate between two analytical lenses. We can observe micro-genetic processes, but we can also examine semiotic processes mediated by cultural elements. Consider the following extract

Interviewer: Would you ever wear your beret when you go out?

Bryn: No no.

Ray: [Laughs, shaking head]

Aaron: We would get blacked out even before we get out of the main gate like. You just don't do it.

Interviewer: And uniform. You don't wear your uniform outside of barracks or basically in civvy street at all?

Aaron: No. They keep putting notices in our payslips telling us to do it but it's just the way we've been brought up in it? We can't just change summit like cos er that's why we call Army "Pongos" cos they're like right dirty when they go to have something to eat. They don't even polish their boots. They could have been in the field for 17 weeks and just walk all over the shop. As soon as we get to the main gates we are all dressed in civvys. Unless we have to leave in a military truck going somewhere.

*Focus Group, Marines, Royal Marine Commandos*

Evident here is the micro-genetic process whereby these Marines choose not to wear their uniform outside of the military social space. The way in which semiotic processes are mediated by cultural elements can also be seen by the way that Aaron associated wearing his uniform outside of a military context, with the behaviour of Army personnel, who he also mentioned "even wear their beret down town". We are reminded here that while being intensely personal, cultural experiences at the same time are extremely social, as they rely on socially shared semiotic systems and conventions. When with others, as were these Marines in this focus group, people can co-construct reflective positions and interpretations of the whole experience. In the presence of each other, the interpersonal dynamics and the social situation of eating next to an Army soldier meant that this experience was transformed into that which represented the identities of 'Pongos' in comparison to them. It conveyed their position as Marines in relation to the 'Other', Army personnel.

Military uniform is a symbolic element turned into a resource through its use by military personnel. And in the context of the transition experienced from the moment a rupture takes place when an individual begins his or her training, the uniform is re-contextualized so as to symbolise the development of a military identity. In short, military uniform is one symbolic element integral to military culture, which contributes to the construction of military masculinities.

### **What is Distinctive about Military Masculinities?**

A prominent aim in this paper has been to consider what is distinctive about military masculinities. In order to do so, one needs to consider what the aims of militarisation are. Analyses of the present narratives have indicated that an outcome of militarisation is the construction of military masculinities. Within the military context, masculinities are reframed as a means of meeting the aims of the process of militarisation. These aims include developing qualities such as discipline and interdependence. Both are imperative to the underlying pursuit of the armed forces; to take necessary measures to defend and fight for one's nation. Throughout the process of the fieldwork, participants frequently emphasised to the interviewer that crucial to who they are as military personnel is what the armed forces employ them to do.

With regards to interdependence, it was very much apparent in the present narratives that trust, teamwork and pride are integral to the armed forces and vital for the development of representations of military masculinities. Interdependence is a quality unique to the military. It sets personnel apart from their civilian counterparts. It is developed from the onset of basic training and through the process of militarisation. Not only is interdependence a crucial aspect of the military role, but it also enhances the masculine qualities of military personnel. This thus partly goes towards addressing the question, if interdependence plays this role in the development of military masculinities, what is it that determines their identities as anything other than merely military identities? The strength they gain in the trust they have together, in

the effectiveness by which they work as a team and in the pride they feel for the community to which they belong, is a strength that contributes to their masculinities.

## Comparing Civilian Masculinities with Military Masculinities

The propensity of perceived differences between civilians and military personnel for the construction and maintenance of military masculinities was particularly apparent throughout the narratives. Some participants spoke about these differences however explicitly in relation to concerns of gender. Consider for example, the following extract:

Interviewer: What would you say the Marines has given you the most?

Ronnie: A pair of bollocks. [pause] Honestly. When I'm around the men here I feel like I'm still a boy. I'm still a sprog. When I go home and measure myself up to my friends.

Interviewer: Your male friends?

Ronnie: My male friends. I look at the people they are. Everything about them but my ability to have a pair of bollocks about something. If I want to go and do something I'll do it. There's no fucking about with me. I've matured a lot earlier than my friends...

Interviewer: Yeah it's made you develop in all sorts of ways.

Ronnie: Only out of necessity. Like I said, it's because you have to.

*Ronnie, Marine, Royal Marine Commandos*

In conveying that what distinguishes himself from his civilian counterparts is 'a pair of bollocks', Ronnie explicitly evokes a means by which these differences play a part in the construction of military masculinity. As a result of his training and 'out of necessity', Ronnie has developed and continues to develop a military masculinity. 'Everything about' his civilian counterparts is in comparison less masculine.

Moreover, both Doug and Ronnie explained that they were aware that they were and had been involved in things that civilians would be unlikely to ever experience in their lives.

'No matter how many times you tell people how bad it is... I remember when I came home for the first time after a few weeks. I had weekend leave. They had no idea how hard it is. And you try to tell them but they couldn't really grasp it. No-one can grasp it.'

*Ronnie, Marine, Royal Marines Commando*

'And I think that undoubtedly to me, it's doing something, not different every day, but it's different to the normal walk of life and I think that's the appeal to a lot of people.'

*Doug, Army Captain*

Here, Ronnie evokes civilians as simply unable to comprehend the harsh experiences he had been enduring during his training in the Marine Commandos. Moreover, Doug explained that the differences between military personnel and civilians are particularly evident. However, he also highlighted that it is this aspect of the profession that attracts many men. Graham elaborated on this theory. He gave examples of experiences that he had had and that civilians were unlikely to ever have met. One example he gave was seeing a friend injured or killed in a bomb explosion in Northern Ireland. With reference to this, Graham goes on to explain what he feels the Army has given him that civilians are unlikely to ever have:

'It's probably given me a tiny bit of hardship and actually having to overcome the hardship – that's all it has given me is hardship because some people, they don't experience hardship you know. People are born with silver spoons. You know they don't have that hardship...some people probably think that hardship is not being able to use their mobile phone.'

Graham asserts that he has had experiences that civilians will never have had and probably never will have and evokes the perspective that this constitutes a disparity that places him at an advantage over non-military individuals. Moreover, Graham said, ‘...when you are actually in the Army and you have actually experienced the hardships, then that’s when you actually overcome them and if you don’t then...it’s a case of being stuck out in the field.’ Hence, the act of overcoming hardships can be viewed as not only a means of coping with military life, but also as one of the strategies enacted in developing and sustaining military masculinities.

There are civilian institutions that are similar to the military. For example, at the centre of some religious, educational or corporation cultures is discipline and uniform. However, these civilian cultures or institutions fundamentally differ to that of the military because their underlying aims are not to pursue and maintain the process of militarisation for the purpose of defending and fighting for one’s nation.

## Concluding Thoughts

A crucial question to ask is whether one is actually identifying the development of social representations of military masculinities as oppose to merely a military identity. This question has continually come to the fore, not merely because it is an important epistemological consideration, but also because participants have frequently emphasised that *they do what they do and they are who they are simply because that is their job*. So with the propensity of the nature of the work of military personnel being to fight for and defend one’s country, is it possible that one is in fact identifying merely the development of social representations of military identity? As did Barret (1996), Sasson-Levy (2003), and Connell (1995), this paper identifies militaries as masculine institutions not only because the majority of its population is male, but also because it constitutes a crucial arena for the construction of masculinity in the larger society. Despite vast technological, social and political changes, the military person remains a key symbol of masculinity (Morgan, 1994) and militaries are often described as ‘the last bastion of masculinity’ (Addelston and Stirratt, 1996).

It has been my intention to not only convey that the material analysed reflects social representations of masculinity in the British Armed Forces but also advocate the theory of symbolic resources in socio-cultural research of this kind. An individual entering the military relocates him or herself from the familiarity of a civilian socio-cultural world to the unfamiliarity and uncertainty of a military one. Therefore, one thing that military personnel share is that on entering the military and progressing through the training, they experience a rupture. The rupture of transition implies a process that leads to a new form of stability. Crucial to this transition is a progression within military hierarchies through proving one’s dedication, competitiveness, determination, discipline and interdependence. As from the point of rupture, when an individual embarks on the training, social representations of military masculinities are developing.

## Appendix: Methodologies

In applying the theories of symbolic resources and social representations to questions regarding the development of military masculinities, a qualitative approach is very much necessary. Only this approach can enable an exploration of the experience of rupture as individuals embark upon their military career. It can help one consider the dynamics of change engaged during the period that follows the rupture and learn whether he or she finds a stable organisation of experience. A combination of semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups were carried out.

### The Participants

This paper focuses on 28 individual interviews and 3 focus groups. This comprises a total of 36 participants. 33 of which were male and 3 were female. The participants were from a range of military divisions and ranks. They were from the Army, Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Air Force. Details of each participant are outlined in the following table.

*Figure 2: Table Outlining Participants' Details*

Pseudonym	Military division	Rank (if known)	Currently in service? If so, for more or less than 4 years?	Gender
Aaron	Royal Marine Commandos	Marine	Less than 4 years	Male
Andrew	Royal Marine Commandos	Captain (commissioned)	Over 4 years	Male
Angus	Army (Parachute regiment)	Infantry soldier	Over 4 years (retired now)	Male
Bryn	Royal Marine Commandos	Marine	Less than 4 years	Male
Charlie	Royal Marine Commandos	Captain (commissioned)	Less than 4 years	Male
Chrissie	Army Nurse	Sergeant	Over 4 years	Female
Cliff	Royal Marines	Corporal	Over 4 years	Male
Clive	Royal Marine Commandos	Marine	Less than 4 years	Male
Dan	Territorial Army (Intelligence unit)	Sergeant	Over 4 years	Male
Dorothy	Army Nurse	Major	Over 4 years	Female
Doug	Army	Captain	Over 4 years	Male
Dwayne	Royal Marine Commandos	Corporal	Over 4 years	Male
Ed	Royal Marines	Captain	Over 4 years	Male
Edward	Army	Brigadier	Over 4 years	Male
Ewan	Royal Marines	Major	Over 4 years	Male
Freddie	Royal Marine Commandos	Marine	Less than 4 years	Male
Graham	Army	Sergeant	Over 4 years	Male
Ian	RAF	Lance Corporal	Over 4 years	Male
Jerry	Army	Sergeant	Over 4 years	Male
Jim	Army	Staff Sergeant	Over 4 years	Male
Joe	Royal Marine Commandos	Lance Corporal	Over 4 years	Male
John	Royal Air Force	Officer	Over 4 years	Male
Kenneth	Territorial Army	Infantry soldier	Over 4 years (retired now)	Male
Kevin	Royal Marine Commandos	Corporal	Over 4 years	Male
Larry	Royal Marine Commandos	Corporal	Over 4 years	Male
Leo	Navy	Marine Soldier	Over 4 years	Male
Mark	Royal Marine Commandos	Major	Over 4 years	Male
Michael	Territorial Army	Infantry soldier	Over 4 years	Male

Michelle	Army Nurse	Corporal	Less than 4 years	Female
Noel	Royal Air Force	Cadet	Less than 4 years	Male
Peter	Royal Marines	Captain	Over 4 years (retired now)	Male
Ray	Royal Marine Commandos	Marine	Less than 4 years	Male
Sean	Army (Parachute regiment)	Officer in training	Over 4 years	Male
Teddy	Royal Marine Commandos	Lance Corporal	Over 4 years	Male
Thomas	Royal Air Force (tactical communications unit)	Corporal	Over 4 years	Male
Tod	Royal Marine Commandos	Marine	Less than 4 years	Male

## Individual Interviews

A semi-structured interview method was adopted. The style of interviewing (conducted only by the author) could be described as non-directive as the questions aimed to encourage the participant to talk about his or her life or experiences as a member of the British military. The interview schedule consisted of approximately forty open-ended questions. The first half mostly involved general questions about the participant and his or her background (e.g. How long have you been in the armed forces? How does the time when you first started your military career compare to your subsequent experiences in the armed forces?). The second half becomes a little more in-depth and asks questions that relate more directly to issues of gender and identity (e.g. Imagine a man who you would deem perfect for being [participants role]. Could you describe this person please? Do you think that the armed forces being predominantly a male institution is an important feature of this organisation?). The duration of the individual interviews was between one to one and half hours.

## Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted with a total of 8 men. Two groups comprised three military personnel and another group comprised 2 individuals. One group comprised military personnel with less than four years experience in the military. The other two groups had had over 4 years experience.

Each focus group involved first asking each individual to say a little about what they are doing now and a little about their background, before and on joining the military. They were then given a piece of paper on which they were asked to write three words that first came to mind when they thought about the military service to which they belong. They then discussed the reasons why they had chosen those words. The second task involved writing three words that first come to mind when they thought about their training. This initiated conversations about their first impressions of the military and their subsequent experiences of training. The interviewer then proceeded to ask questions that encouraged discussion about qualities that make one suitable to the military and about issues of gender and sexuality.

## **The Analysis**

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis of the data obtained was carried out using Atlas ti, which enables one to store and organise quotations and integrate analytical comments into transcripts. Codes were chosen to enable the selection of extracts from transcripts that reflect relationships between the discourses and military culture. The 49 codes developed focus on discourses that reflect the ways in which the participants organise, administer and regulate their lives. This paper focuses in particular on extracts assigned to the code, 'military practices: training/assessment'. Extracts for this code (of which there were 108) were further assigned to 'secondary codes', such as 'rupture', 'shock' and 'pride'.

## **Acknowledgements**

I thank Gerard Duveen, Alex Gillespie and Tania Zittoun for their editorial comments.

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