

## Research Article

# Self-Reorganization in Transition from Military to Civilian Life: Maria's Way

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### ABSTRACT

Qualitative research has demonstrated that transition from military to civilian life involves narrative identity reconstruction among service members. The reformulation of narrative identities may prove to become an existential quest for service members since the questions of who I am, where I am going, and what is my place in the world need to be (re)answered by the self in a new cultural context. Thus, a reorganization of stories also corresponds to a reorganization of I-positions in the self. This article presents the case study of Lieutenant Maria, one participant derived from a larger longitudinal research project designed to explore this process of transition, and aims

to demonstrate new ways of understanding self-identity work in transition through a Dialogical Self Theory approach. The analysis of the case study suggests that self-reorganization was necessary for adaptation to a civilian cultural context that shaped alternate identities. Four types of factors were observed to have major influence upon the self-identity evolution: contextual promoters, a dialogical self-attitude, meta-cognitive activities, and a group of cooperative positions in the self which could evolve in a new context and through emerging identities.

**MeSh Headings/ Keywords:** Transition; Dialogical self; Self-reorganization; I-positions

### Introduction

At some point every service member has to leave active service and transition from military to civilian life and reintegrate into a civilian population. Such a process involves narrative identity work and calls for a reformulation of the stories of who I am. From a narrative perspective, the stories of who I am still exist but need to be reorganized and retold. Narrative identity reconstruction may become a taxing process for a service member since the cardinal existential question of who I am needs to be (re)answered as I am no longer actively serving as a soldier or an officer [1-7]. Research demonstrates that service members' reintegration into civilian life has the potential to become a challenge for military personnel due to their deeply rooted military self-identities [1,8-13]. A transition from active service to civilian life, however, presents an opportunity to advance the dialogical capacity of the self through reorganization of narrative characters with corresponding I-positions in the self (e.g., 'I as an officer', 'I as a father', 'I as a mother', 'I as a son', 'I as a daughter', 'I as a friend'). Thus, a reorganization of characters corresponds to a reorganization of I-positions in the self and narrative identity claims. This may on the one hand be experienced as demanding, even threatening for a service member's self, but is necessary in order to acknowledge the complexity and multiplicity of the self and to make space for dialogue and growth of preexisting and/or new characters and I-positions in the evolution of the self amid transition. Families, partners, significant others, new employment opportunities, dreams, and/or alternate meanings may prove to be helpful promoters and a useful adhesive in such a process which aids and supports the existential quest of identity reconstruction once service members embark down paths of return to civilian life.

The purpose of this article is to present a dialogical self-

approach which is utilized to advance the understanding of long term self-identity work among Swedish military personnel during transition from military to civilian life. A Dialogical Self Theory framework [14-16] with a narrative methodology, although seldom applied upon military empirical research, may provide relevant and new ways to enrich the insights of self-identity work amid transition. It endeavors to provide a qualitative understanding of psychological processes and thereby add new insights to a topic area where thus far quantitative and correlational studies have been much more common. Longitudinal qualitative approaches in general are seldom present in empirical research to self-identity work in transition from military to civilian life, yet a longitudinal approach may help to illustrate that military and civilian cultures shape different narrative characters with corresponding but diverse I-positions which the self needs to center and integrate. Finally, such a research approach has social relevance since transition from military to civilian life affects a large number of military personnel. The ways in which service members deal with identity issues in transition will have manifold impacts on their social environments such as partners, families, friends, and new potential employers and colleagues, as well as upon global social systems via, for instance, public health questions [17].

This article aspires to answer the following research question: How does the reorganization of I-positions evolve over time through the lens of a dialogical self-framework? One longitudinal case study example of Lieutenant Maria, who served approximately eleven years in the Swedish Armed Forces, most recently as a platoon commander, has been selected in the pursuit of presenting depths and layers of the process. Her case was derived from a longitudinal and qualitative research project which was conducted from 2013-2016 via annual interviews throughout transition (see method section for details).

This article continues with a conceptualization of a dialogical self with a narrative approach, followed by the method, results and discussion.

### Conceptualization of a Dialogical Self

Dialogical self-theory has been described by Hermans, et al. [18] as a bridging theory in which a larger diversity of theories, research traditions, and practices meet in order to make new and unexpected linkages. A dialogical view of the self combines what Hermans, et al. [16] conceptualize as traditional, modern and post-modern understandings of the self. Such a perspective understands the self as an extension of its military and civilian cultures and societies, and the self is viewed as a “society of the mind” which includes a variety of voices which each have their own unique tensions, conflicting ideas, and potentials for dialogue [19]. The classic definition of a dialogical self [20] emphasizes the dimensions of space, time and relations between positions in the self:

The I have possibility to move, as in a space, from one position to the other in accordance with changes in situation and time. The I fluctuate among different and even opposed positions. The I have the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established.

It has been suggested that a dialogical self-consist of two types of I-positions, and these are differentiated by whether they are linked to the internal or to the external domain of the self [14,15]. I-positions within the internal domain of the self are located inside of a person (e.g., ‘I as a dreamer’, ‘I as an enjoyer of life’) whereas I-positions within the external domain of the self are located outside of the person (e.g., the I-position of my children, the I-position of my colleagues), yet can to varying degrees be internalized as parts of a self as it chooses to acknowledge or ignore the perspectives of others [21]. The theoretical framework of a dialogical self-views the self as an extension to its surroundings; the other is not outside of the self but rather an intrinsic part of it, and this point of view contrasts with classic theories which emphasize a dichotomy between the inner and the outer. The composition of these I-positions creates the position repertoire of the multiplicity of the self [14,15]. Even so, unity is a central concept, and unity and continuity are accomplished through the composite self, which is narrated by attributing I, me or mine to positions which, even if they are contradictory, nonetheless belong to the self [16].

The dialogical self seeks to promote integration between decentralizing and centralizing movements of the self [22]. This movement of the self could be understood as a process of positioning and counter-positioning between I-positions within the position repertoire. The dialogical self may act in the service of integration of diverse positions which from time to time increases in tension or even clash with each other [16]. The challenge of such a dialogical exercise of the self may differ from person to person. The capacity may be highly flexible, or conversely suppressed by a dominant I-position which downplays any attempts for conversation in preference of monologue. The dialogue of the self may be conducted

between two internal I-positions (e.g., ‘I as a dreamer’ agrees with ‘I as an enjoyer of life’), between internal and external or extended I-positions (e.g., ‘I as dreamer’ dislikes working with ‘my efficient and stressed colleagues’) or between two external I-positions (e.g., ‘my children’ enjoy spending time with ‘my colleague’s children’).

The dialogical self may interact in a number of ways and can, for example, engage a coalition of positions in the position repertoire which may cooperatively work together and support shared desires, motives, and interests. Such a coalition may become dominant and could potentially diminish the capacity for broader dialogue, or it could accelerate innovation of the self amid the necessity of addressing change [23]. If a conflict between two powerful I-positions of the self induces tension and friction and severely limits the capacity for dialogue, then the evolution of a third position can potentially unite such conflicting positions of the self. So, called promoter positions serve as innovators of the self on a temporal level and may include real, remembered, anticipated or imaginary significant others. Promoters, for example a religious figure, teacher, parent, partner, or a spiritual leader, may be located within the internal and/or external domain(s) of the self [16]. Valsiner (2004) suggests that promoter positions can be recognized by a number of characteristics such as openness towards the future and a potential to produce specialized and qualitatively different positions in the future self. Such openness also entails the capacity to integrate new and already existing positions. Promoter positions have a central place in the position repertoire which includes the capacity to reorganize the self towards a higher level of development. Another significant position for a dialogical self is meta-position (sometimes described as meta-cognitive activities); meta-positioning allows for self-reflection from a bird’s-eye perspective. Meta-positions have, according to Hermans, et al. [16], specific qualities including, but not limited to, a certain distance from other positions (although they may be attracted towards some positions more than others), an overarching view so that several positions can be observed simultaneously and their mutual relationships better seen, a continuing evaluation of the viewed positions and their organization, and a broader basis for decision making and finding one’s direction in life. Moreover, depending on time and context, different meta-positions may emerge. Meta-positions may have a unifying influence on the self since they permit meaningful linkages between several positions. Yet every meta-position has its own horizon and thereby its own limitation as the self is too complex and multifaceted to consider every I-position simultaneously.

**A dialogical self as a complex, narratively structured self in transition:** A dialogical self is, from a narrative perspective, equivalent to a dialogical narrator with several I-positions which each have their own unique character and its corresponding story to tell depending upon time and context [22]. The various I-positions of a dialogical self-author a set of corresponding characters that become united, likely with tension and numerous plotlines, in a complex, narratively structured story of who I am which, to varying degrees, is prompted to change during any given

transition. This article suggests that one need in the struggle to advance self-identity work in transition from military to civilian life is a theoretical framework and methodology that can take into account conflict, tension, contradiction and poly-vocality in the storied self of a service member without reducing it to a single personal narrative of ego-identity development [17]. What is opted for instead is a more nuanced understanding of the self as a dialogical narrator with several meaningful yet potentially contradicting I-positions, which are displayed in a storied self as a consequence of being in a world with diverse cultural values, meanings, and practices [24] that shape different voices in the self.

As service members leave active service, their selves may require reorganization as new situations in their lives are encountered. "In the case of a transition, the self is confronted with a new, unfamiliar or even threatening situation that requires an adaption or reorganization of the self" [16]. A transition calls for the adaption of established I-positions, and most likely the formation of new ones, too. A successful transition necessitates at least some degree of reorganization of positions in order to maintain or create a functional dialogical capacity of the self amid a new life situation [25]. Transitions for military personnel imply that the personal narratives are likely to change as the authors of the selves become reoriented, to different degrees, because of new situations and contexts. Thus, a reorganization of I-positions corresponds to a reorganization of stories. This can become a taxing, even an existential process since questions such as who I am, where I am going, and what is my place in the world all call for answers in regard to the reformulation of narrative identities and to the reorganization of I-positions.

## Method

Lieutenant Maria's case was derived from an ongoing longitudinal research project which was approved and commenced in 2013 and designed to gain empirical and deeper qualitative insights into the long term processes of identity reconstruction among voluntarily released Swedish service members during transition from military into civilian life. The objectives of the project were to investigate transitional experiences, identity reconstruction and existential/religious elements in the process. The project included nineteen participants who were interviewed annually during 2013-2016 as they transitioned from full-time military service to civilian life. As the project continued some participants decided to abort the transition fully or partially and returned to active or part-time service. The interview data was processed through a narrative methodology, a productive lens to utilize in regard to narrative identities and selves [26-30]. The analysis was centered on how pre-existing and new narrative characters developed and interacted in the interview narratives [31]. During the preliminary analysis of the material the concept of I-positions, derived from Dialogical Self Theory [16,32-34], proved to be a promising analytical avenue to link narrative characters via I-positions to the self-identity work of the participants.

## Participants

The sample of nineteen service members volunteered through

a snowball sampling method, and each individual was informed about the study by a letter of information which introduced the background of the project (i.e. a need to gain knowledge about the process of transition among service members) and described the purpose of the project, the number of interviews, the research ethics and the anonymity and formalities [35,36]. The participants had to complete a response letter and return it, and this also served as the informed consent agreement. In the response letter the participants were required, among a number of things, to suggest a time and place to conduct the first interview. There was a wide variation among the participants in regard to age, mission experience, rank and regimental background. The largest part of the sample included service member aged between 23 to 35 years old. Four service members were around 60 years old and engaging retirement. Three service members were female. The ranks spanned from Private First Class to Major. The majority of the sample included Caucasian males and females. Twenty participants began with the project, but during the second year one dropped off; thus, nineteen remained till the conclusion of the longitudinal interview phase.

Lieutenant Maria (who is referred to using a fictitious name throughout the study but with correct rank) was selected for this article as a case study example since she represents well the processual development among those within the sample who fully transitioned from military to civilian life. Lieutenant Maria also narrated experiences as a female which provide a unique insight into some of the cultural challenges in self-identity work that some service women may encounter amid transition from military to civilian culture. Some of the presented details of Lieutenant Maria have been slightly altered or omitted to safeguard her anonymity (e.g., explicit information about regiment, unit, names of significant others, explicit work place, specific work task, and so on).

## Interview protocol

The same interview questions were used throughout the project during the repeated interviews which were based on a semi-structured design in order to cover stories of service, transition, relationships, identities, and existential concerns [37-39]. Additionally, follow up questions were employed in response to the stories told by the participants. The questions were designed to open up the topics and allow the participants to construct answers in ways that they found meaningful [40]. The questions were formulated as open questions, and the interview started with the question: "If you think for a while, in what way would you describe your life or service as a soldier or an officer?" The participants were encouraged through this interview method to tell their own stories in their own ways [41,42]. Each interview has been transcribed verbatim into a complete transcript. Transcripts in Swedish and a summarization in English can be provided to other researchers per request.

In addition to the fact that I conducted the interviews as a researcher with a stated research purpose, the participants were explicitly informed in the letter of information of my earlier military service as an officer in the Swedish Armed Forces.

I experienced that my military background facilitated the interviews in regard to military cultural knowledge [2,43,44].

### Narrative analysis

**Step 1:** The transcripts and digital recordings from the three interviews (Time 1-3) were used in close re-reading and re-listening to summarize the content and abstract story lines, themes and tones of the interviews to get a general picture of Lieutenant Maria's self-identity work amid transition from military to civilian life [26,41,45,46]. The analysis of this "global reading" was summarized in a short story for every transcript [47].

**Step 2:** Explicit descriptions made by Lieutenant Maria were considered to represent identity claims of different characters, voices, or points of view which populated the self at that time [43-46,48], and these were interpreted as I-positions of the self [14,22,49]. A qualitative software analysis program (i.e. Atlas.ti) was used in the analytical process to code and keep track of the narrative evolution of characters, voices, or points of view in the transcripts.

**Step 3:** The rearrangement of preexisting and new characters, voices, or points of view in the self was compared and understood as the actual process of reorganization of I-positions across the interviews 1-3. The movement, contradiction, tension, conflict or dialogue between the narrative characters, voices, or points of view, expressed in the storied accounts of the interviews, was perceived as the self-identity work [50,51]. The concepts from a dialogical framework were then used to interpret the evolution of the self amid transition.

## Results

### Background

Lieutenant Maria was in her early thirties when she volunteered for the project and had by that time served for about eleven years in the Swedish Armed Forces, most recently as a platoon commander. Maria left military service for a number of reasons such as stagnation amid such a long waiting time before she could attend military academy for the advancement of rank, a growing will to test her wings outside of the military context, and her own recognition of the consuming character of military service. Maria had begun her transition from military to civilian life about one year prior to her participation in the study and decided to participate because of her experiences of self-identity work in the process and her desire to contribute so as to expand the knowledge upon the subject matter. According to Maria, the year post exit had been spent focusing on learning a new civilian language and cultural mindset throughout an intensive job hunt. She described this process as the actual military deprogramming, and narrated that it was a taxing process. Maria's family was crucial, throughout that year, in order to assist her in how to express herself in job interviews, how to write a CV, and just to keep her going in spite of hardship and job interviews which resulted in frustration instead of employment. By the conclusion of that year Maria was employed as a consultant at a civilian company to work with human relations. Shortly thereafter she volunteered in the research project.

Three significant characters or voices were discovered in the analysis of the interviews (e.g., the creative one, the one who likes developmental challenge, and the analytical one), and Maria testified that these points of view had been with her as long as she could remember. These storied voices of herself, understood through a dialogical lens, were three internal I-positions which populated herself (e.g., 'I as creative', 'I who likes developmental challenge', and 'I as analytical'). Each of these three I-positions, depending on time and context, demonstrated to be influential in the reorganization and evolution of Maria's self-identity work.

### The first interview (T1) 2013

Maria's emphasis in the first interview was partly focused upon her transitional experiences (e.g., loss of camaraderie, community, identity, identity reformulation) and primarily perceived through the voice of her military character. Maria's character of an officer and platoon commander was described with narrative features such as efficiency, responsibility, commitment, and dedication to the task and the troops. Maria narrated that it was an honor to be appointed to train and lead a platoon, and her commitment then was absolute. But the way Maria operationalized and embodied her military identity into active service also consumed all of her time in her private life. As Maria transitioned from military to civilian life, she gradually perceived that her military cultural character was not well understood or received in the job search within a civilian context. The way Maria was accustomed to describing herself as an officer and platoon commander in a military context made little sense to civilian employers. The cardinal identity question: "who am I if I am not an officer?" grew more pressing as Maria engaged in dialogue with the responses she received from the potential employers, and Maria recounted:

Then I have understood that my speech has not, it is like no one understands it, so that then I have needed to redefine myself in new language... so that, so that it makes sense for people who I meet. Before I had of course mostly met people within the Armed Forces, and there it is of course that jargon; they see who I am. And it has been a, it has been a journey to train this here civilian language. The language that, yes, becomes much more conscious about what I illustrate without having something which has been a part of the uniform or insignia [e.g., a military uniform is designed as an obvious testimony of one's rank and experience and therefore could be compared in some ways to a resume or CV]. Because it is also of course the possibility to have the mandate to express oneself in certain situations, in the meeting or in life, dependent upon who, who one is and which rank one holds... I have not understood really that it plays such a big role. So, a little like this cousin-from-the-countryside feeling of not understanding the code... but I believe that it is, something embodied in this here that does not endure the transition, a socialization to the civilian, it becomes too strange so that one wants to return home where one understands the language and codes and the cultural standards.

Towards the end of the first year of transition she attained employment as a consultant at a company which worked with

developing human relations. Maria recounted that this company appreciated some of her military skills and experiences such as leadership, responsibility, and efficiency. Maria's new character as a consultant was embryonic at the time of the first interview, but her formulation and construction of a civilian identity had evolved during the past year and in particular addressed the cultural idea of being a woman in a civilian context and the evolution of the preexisting analytical voice as Maria testified:

I have also developed a number of other behavioral patterns in my civilian identity. I was then much more results-oriented and yes, that typical leader, square officer in the past. Now nothing, it is nothing which reaches home and absolutely not if the one in question is a woman; in the civilian reality it is no one who think that it is admirable, maybe a person would win points with it if one was a man, but as a woman I have discovered that it is not, not so valuable so instead one should, yeah, be a little different and then, so I believe that I have also moved myself towards other behaviors; I am rather analytical and reflective, and I cherish to work in that way and that I could have been as an officer also, but, that it must also be a little action behind it and now I can allow myself to, to take it a little more at my own pace and in fact retrospect a little longer before I do something, so that it is nothing which interferes in my work now without that, yeah, so am I. But, it is rather not really through and through ok when I worked in the Armed Forces instead it was a little more that something should happen so that a person reacts, so that it is indeed, and I believe that that there is indeed a shift of sorts between two cultures...

In summary, the reorganization at this time implied that the military I-position had to take a step back in Maria's self while a new I-position of a consultant had begun to form along with a new cultural idea of how to be a woman in this civilian context, all within a self which was acquiring a growing military/civilian cultural awareness in general. All three of Maria's internal I-positions, but particularly the analytical one, were cooperating with the new civilian character of a consultant. Important promoters during the first year of the transition were her family and the civilian employment which made it possible to construct a new character on a temporal level with a capacity to dialogically unite several significant I-positions of the self. Additionally, many of Maria's leadership skills and experiences of human relations from military service were appreciated and allowed, with certain modification and moderation, in her new profession, and this suggests that her 'military I' to a certain degree collaborated with 'I as a consultant'.

### The second interview (T2) 2014

Maria's new character as a consultant had grown firmer, more detailed, and was allowed to claim much more space in the second interview narrative. Internal positions such as 'I as creative' and 'I who likes developmental challenge' demonstrated to cooperate with this character, and Maria recounted in regard to her civilian employment:

It doesn't need to be so much bullshit to consider, so burdensome, and if one comes with good ideas which move the company forward then we do it, that it feels, and it feels very

liberating for a creative soul like me... I feel that I have cherry-picked the best in some way, and so I get to work with human relations in any case. Develop people, yeah, so here, this here creative side, to develop people, leadership, it is indeed so to say a common thread and a big degree of freedom... yeah, but, it is maybe just that, that from to have been, yeah, I am rather familiar to be able to do it, to be able to challenge myself, and now can I challenge myself in another way, it can be to go to a customer meeting and attempt to sell something; that I feel is very remarkable, and I feel that I, it is more common in the civilian that it is a part of the job and conditions, but for me it becomes very exotic.

Another observable change was Maria's capacity to engage in meta-positioning and reflect upon what happens within herself (e.g., positioning and counter-positioning between positions) dependent upon situation and context, and she testified:

I do not identify myself to be an officer anymore; it is not as obvious as it was a year ago. Instead it now feels more like I see it a little more objectively as an employee in the Armed Forces, but thereby I also realize that if I sit and talk with old colleagues or if it becomes quick reaction and a decision must be made then can it in fact come a little of this order-like form, that can be very structured, then it is indeed something from the very core which kicks in so it is clear that it exists, it exists indeed, it exists in that part in me also but it feels not, yeah, not to the same impact in the day to day anymore, but instead it is a little more in if one sits up and shares old memories and, or if I meet people from that culture, so it is indeed easier to float back. I notice in fact also if I encounter old battle buddies that this here has happened often with me also for that, I suppose that I was exactly like them, a year ago, and so now I feel that I stand with at least one but perhaps at times two feet in like another culture.

Maria continued to experience a mismatch between what was expected of her as a woman in a civilian context compared with how she performed as a female platoon commander (e.g., female combatant, explicit, firm, and commanding). This had evolved so far that by the second interview Maria seldom to never mentioned in the civilian work settings that she had served since Maria experienced that it affected people's perceptions of her as a consultant in undesired ways.

New to the second interview narrative was a distinct vocalized existential position in regard to Maria's former dedication and commitment as a platoon commander, and she testified:

I have indeed seen that I have invested extreme amounts of energy and time, yeah, there in that the platoon should indeed be the best, then it came at the cost of pretty much everything, yeah then, rather everything. And I do not regret that I did it in that way, I understand why I did it, I think that it was right then and there but I feel that I will not do it again in any employment. Now it is a little more a feeling that a job is a job, it should be done in the best way, but it will not get, I will not allow myself that it takes over my life more than is reasonable. It is an employment, and it maybe is not so existential for many people but for me it was just that, in and with that my job had been such

an extremely big part of my life there I, it wasn't to say that I work like an officer; instead "I am an officer!" And then, it is a stance which I will not choose to return to, and it feels great to take a little more distance, even if I thrive wonderfully in my job and have no thought to stop, so it is, I feel will indeed not be so emotionally intertwined with my career.

In summary, by the second interview Maria's character as a consultant had developed and was more vocalized while the military I-position was acting less and less within the day to day events amid the reorganizational process. But, depending on the situation Maria still found herself positioning and counter-positioning between 'I as a consultant' and 'I as an officer'. Her capacity for meta-cognitive activities through a meta-position attracted to 'I as a consultant' was frequently demonstrated in the second interview narrative. Additionally, a new existential voice was forming in cooperation with her consultant character.

### The third interview (T3) 2015

At the time of the third interview, three years post exit, Maria had been employed for two years at the same company. Her identity reconstruction as a civilian had advanced even further, and she declared that her military service was experienced to be distant within her mind, which corresponded to the decreased level and occurrence of military claims in the interview narrative. Maria's relational positioning was often directed to preexisting and new civilian colleagues and friends and seldom towards former military colleagues. Maria rather distanced herself against much of the military culture and stereotypical behaviors and testified:

It is like there are other truths, other interpretations, another perspective on this and that in the Armed Forces. And it deals not so much with this here that we get to carry weapons or go in uniform. Neither is it different or wrong truths or perspectives on either side. So, it is rather without judgement just that we perceive something from different sides. It is like a shift of perspectives. What exactly it is afterwards, I do not know. It is a little like I said before about these here principles, that it is something arising from this truth which feels very black and white in some way. And those principles sit rather entrenched. It is maybe something which a person learns under conscription itself, how we perceive the hierarchy or how we talk with each other. There were several which I talked with during that military reunion who were out in the civilian, who had worked as long as I have, maybe a little longer, but who were extremely critical of the civilian side. And then I think just like: "but screw it then if it feels so difficult, you are surely welcome back if it now feels so extremely burdensome." It is of course that there to not accept the new circumstance, and to be able to contemplate... it becomes in some way, in the Armed Forces so exists that which is right and true, and if you are placed in another situation and then it doesn't fit. And then it becomes that reality doesn't match with the map, or like it becomes a mismatch between the two. Instead to say that you must look at this in another way and not judge it, it is just that they are different.

Maria's character of a consultant continued to gain more space in the interview narrative and further develop vocalized

counter-features in comparison to the dedicated and committed military character, and Maria recounted:

I look after myself rather deliberately to not become overly engaged. I want to be engaged, but to a degree which I can terminate with short-term notice. When I work I want to do things which I thrive with but not to identify myself with a career. So, it is something which has changed. To not be a so strong part of a work culture. It was fun and gave much, but not again.

Maria's existential voice had grown in herself and was first and foremost engaged in the search of life-balance which had developed into an existential quest in her ideas about how to live her life from now on and prospectively. This position suggestively cooperated with Maria's growing desire to keep a tempered and restrained approach to her civilian employment. A new and embryonic position was vocalized through a sincere relationship with a partner which had developed quite recently, a relationship which was influential for Maria and her wishes for such a dimension in life.

In summary, Maria's reorganization of the self in the final interview demonstrated an evolution through a group of cooperative vocalized positions which found fertile ground for dialogue in a civilian context. The meta-cognitive activities or meta-positioning over the second and third interviews suggest that this self-reflection was attracted to her preexisting internal analytical I-position as well as new positions, too, especially 'I as a consultant' and even nascent ones such as the existential voice and 'I as a partner'. Illustrated in the interview narrative was a much more critical stance against military culture(s), mind-set(s), and behavior(s). Even so, Maria's 'I' sometimes counter-positioned for a brief time to the military position in her self-depending on situation and context. The dialogical capacity of Maria's self throughout the transition allowed for the military position to cooperate with new positions in regard to earned experiences of leadership and human relations.

### Discussion

Maria's way of self-reorganization encapsulates a number of demonstrated factors which supported her evolution of self-identity work amid transition from military to civilian life: promoters, a dialogical self-approach, meta-cognitive activities, and a group of cooperative positions which could evolve in a new context and through emerging identities.

The observed importance of significant others or promoters within a civilian context in this case study resonates with much of the recent research on transition from military to civilian life from a variety of angles [7,8,11,52-54]. An implication of active service and thus a challenge in active service, especially when considering mandatory postings and deployments to conflict zones, is that these pose serious risks of weakening the connections between service members and their families, partners, and/or significant others [8,11,55]. Additionally, active service may challenge the possibility for the family members or partners who follow service members on mandatory postings across bases inside and outside of a country to likewise sustain

the continuity of their social networks. In contrast, active service has been demonstrated to provide service members with strong bonds to battle buddies, the military community, unit commanders, and ideals worth dying for such as freedom and democracy, which may work as a glue which sustains the journey upon a military path [56-58]. Much of this, maybe even all, will be lost during transition from military to civilian life, and this loss may create feelings of grief as part of a process wherein identity reconstruction in an alternate culture is about to begin, a process which is very dependent of and responsive to support from a potentially fragile civilian social network. This loss of a strong, established, and familiar military network during a transition to a relatively foreign civilian culture which is potentially very taxing to navigate highlights how pivotal guidance and assistance can be in providing contextual promoters which can aid the evolution of civilian promoter positions which may with time take a central place in the position repertoire, integrate new and already existing positions, and thus serve as innovators of the self on a temporal level [16].

A transition from military to civilian life implies that a service member has to go from one cultural identity to another cultural identity which most likely emphasizes an opposing set of values, meanings, and practices [59-63]. Maria demonstrated that this military deprogramming, the reformulation of who I am, was a taxing and layered process. Maria not only had to formulate a new professional identity but also how to perform as a woman in a new cultural context [64]. Additionally, self-identity work may prove to be even more challenging when taking military cultures, and warrior cultures in particular, into consideration. Warrior cultures value strength, resilience, courage, and personal sacrifice [9]. Mental toughness is saluted and reinforced as a cultural norm, with an emphasis on inner strength and self-reliance [65]. Warrior cultures explicitly train their members to "suck it up", and "a warrior who admits to mental health problems and seeks out mental health care might view these actions as signs of weakness" [9]. Such cultural identities may work as an opposing and powerful force against change. To open up the self to a dialogue with other cultural ideas, represented by preexisting and new but potentially weaker positions, suggests that 'the military I' with its cultural truth claims agrees to allow the process to advance. Such an evolution was demonstrated in Maria's long-term self-identity work; this was Maria's way of doing it, and she thought that some of the keys to the process were to hold on to and endure the military deprogramming and cultural reformulation of who I am with the assistance of the promoting family and a supportive employer which appreciated some of her military experiences related to leadership which could thus be exercised in a personally stimulating job developing human relations. Families, partners, and/or significant others may prove to be particularly helpful as promoters in this process. This observation suggests that these possible promoters could, potentially to great benefit, be invited into the process before it begins. Service members may also benefit from exposure to a dialogical self-approach some time prior to a transition in order to cultivate the self for a growing dialogue with alternate cultural values, meanings, and practices which are embodied and vocalized by significant others within a civilian context.

The progression of meta-cognitive activities which Maria demonstrated both more frequently and in greater detail across the study resonates in particular with another dialogical research study which focused upon narrative processes of innovation within a dialogical self [66]. This study through its consideration of meta-positions has found a connection or linkage between transforming self-narratives and meta-positions. Empirical research on therapeutic processes supports and suggests that a reconceptualization of a self-narrative involves a meta-position which articulates a past position (e.g., in Maria's case the military one) and emerging positions (e.g., in Maria's case the consultant, existential voice, and partner). This suggests, in accordance with Gonçalves, et al. [66] that meta-positioning (attracted to some positions more than others) does not only have a unifying, executive, and liberating function but also a developmental one. This developmental function implicates that through the continuation of meta-positioning involved in self-reorganization a dis-identification with the past I-position occurs, simultaneously with a progressive identification with emerging new ones.

Maria's self-reorganizational evolution was led by a collaborative group of positions which found fertile ground in a civilian context and emerging identities and which grew more articulated and assertive throughout the self-adaption [16]. Three of her demonstrated long-lasting internal I-positions were particularly obvious in their ability to participate together even more than they had in the past when supporting the emerging identity of a consultant. This was a group of positions which cooperated through shared desires and motives. This suggests that a group of collaborative positions may advance service members' self-reorganization amid transition. However, such a group of voices could potentially become dominant in self at the expense of dialogue with, for example, a military position which represents other values, meanings, and practices. In contrast to this possibility, the self-adaption in Maria's case allowed for the military character to make its voice heard within the dialogue, even amid a growing dis-identification through meta-positioning, so that ultimately the interaction promoted the integrating and centering capacity of the self in the process [16,22]. A military character may equate a deeply ingrained I-position in the self, with a long story of experiences, memories, sacrifices, and losses which stem from the cumulative years of active service, and such a voice cannot simply vanish in the self amid transformation of a self-narrative. In fact, it can enrich the self with a voice which potentially broadens and illuminates cultural reflections and thus widens the understanding and potentials of self-identity work throughout the transitional journey from military to civilian life.

A final insight from the larger longitudinal project was derived through the evaluation letters which each participant was encouraged to respond to and return (which all nineteen participants did) once the interviews were completed. The evaluation letters were partly designed to investigate how the repeated interviews had affected the participants' self-identity processes, and the results showed that they had explicitly positive effects among the majority of the sample. As presented

elsewhere, one participant, Sergeant Erik, testified that through the interviews [34]:

I experienced that my understanding of my own process of leaving the Armed Forces was increased. I understood more about why I sometimes become disappointed or upset with myself when I in my civilian “me” couldn’t perform in the same way as in my military “me.” I experienced that the interviews have helped me to organize my thoughts and get a better sense of understanding of how my military background affects my identity, and why it was so difficult to stop serving in the Armed Forces.

Maria’s self-identity work, according to her evaluation letter, was promoted in the following way:

It has been very enriching to reflect upon the journey that I have made once per year under structured circumstances. I have felt myself that my answers have evolved throughout the time which has past, which also suggests that I have evolved. I have scheduled time for reflection in a more structured manner than if I would not have participated in this study. Not just the time during the actual interviews but also prior to and afterward them. It also feels good to have been participating in something which will contribute to important research.

Considering the responses from these evaluation letters, this study design with a longitudinal approach built around semi-structured and repeated interviews promoted self-reflection and thus self-identity work in transition from military to civilian life. A broader notion of a partner ‘as someone to talk to in more organized ways’ about self-identity work may serve as one, among several beneficial methods, which could potentially be combined, which dialogically may facilitate and support the evolution of self-reorganization among service members in transition to potentially positively affect their selves, families, partners, friends, employers, colleagues, and global social systems.

### Concluding remarks

This article has presented Maria’s way, which was one example taken from a larger research project which has found a dialogical self-methodology to be a useful analytical tool to help understand self-identity processes among service members in transition from military to civilian life. Similar approaches have been applied in a variety of therapeutic and counseling contexts [66-68]. Future research is encouraged to widen the methodology and knowledge about self-adaption in transition from one culture to another.

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