



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid



Social intensity syndrome: The development and validation of the social intensity syndrome scale



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 February 2014

Received in revised form 4 September 2014

Accepted 6 September 2014

Available online 2 October 2014

Keywords:

Social intensity syndrome

Military

Socialization

Men

Gender

Group dynamics

Group cohesion

ABSTRACT

Social intensity syndrome (SIS) is a new term coined to describe the effects military culture has on the socialization of both active soldiers and veterans. Through literature reviews, interviews, and ideas generated by {author's name} SIS model, a questionnaire was created to measure the unexplored psychological phenomenon that is reported in the present paper. An exploratory factor analysis, internal consistency and validity tests were used to provide robust evidence for SIS as an index of a fundamental psychological construct of measuring military socialization. This scale promises to offer a glimpse into the military community to gain better insight and understanding about both positive and negative effects that military culture can have while serving, and later as a veteran.

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1. Introduction

Much social psychological research has found that the social environment has powerful effects on individual behavior, often changing the way people normally act. The social context that persons find themselves in is a powerful influence on their behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions (Zimbardo & Ebbesen, 1970). Socialization refers to the process by which an individual is taught, through ones social environment, the proper ways to behave as a member of a community (Maccoby, 2007); when someone adopts a new culture, the process is called *resocialization* (Dyer, 1985). Organizational cultures are structured in a way to teach newcomers the attitudinal and behavioral norms that are appropriate and inappropriate through social pressure and local policies (O'Reilly, 1989). The military, a widely accepted organization, creates an environment to align its members tightly along its desired path. In order to be successful, the military must replace much of what their recruits have previously learned in their civilian life. The intensity of this environment is greater because every aspect of the lives of servicemen is controlled and manipulated to socialize them to adopt new specific attitudes and behaviors (Dyer, 1985) that last

through their service contract; consequently, these military-created attitudes tend to last well beyond their service (Zimbardo, Sword, & Sword, 2012), spilling over to their civilian lives, impacting their subsequent interactions with family (Basham, 2008) and friends (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011).

2. Social intensity syndrome

Social intensity syndrome (SIS), a new theoretical concept that describes the phenomenon of socialization in the military, is the descriptive term for this complex set of values, attitudes, and behaviors organized around personal attraction to, and desire to maintain association with these male-dominated social groupings. Socialization, as it occurs in the military, specifically in combat zones, is so intense that the military way of life solidifies within one's mentality. The socialization and situational pressures that transform ordinary men into servicemen follows them beyond their service and into their civilian lives, which may cause problems for those who cannot completely readjust to civilian culture. The effect is similar to work-family life spillover and conflict, in which aspects of work permeate family boundaries creating family dissatisfaction and conflicts (Clark, 2001), creating decreased social support or negatively impacting their recovery from traumas or psychological problems (e.g., Batten et al., 2009; Keane & Barlow, 2002). The behavioral effects of SIS are theorized as several observable symptoms and can range from having little to profound

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effects on veterans' lives. SIS is a multidimensional construct with the following factors: (1) the need to be around particular others, especially men, (2) self-isolation from civilians, (3) poor bonding with family, and (4) participation in high-risk behaviors.

2.1. Groups

Over time, veterans adapt to a level of social intensity which becomes a “set point”.

The overwhelming presence of men in the military might attract male veterans to social environments that include the pervasive presence of a group of other men over an extended time period. To match the exclusivity of military membership, the appeal to the group is probably greater the more intense the nature of the relationship, the more exclusive it is of tolerating “outsiders” and the more embedded each man is perceived to be within that group creating an in-group out-group mentality. They might only feel comfortable in such settings leading them to isolate themselves from being intimate with others who are not part of these groups. When they are in groups, they prefer all-male groupings over mixed gender ones. This attraction to all male groups could increase the negative behavior of self-isolating from females.

2.2. Friendships

Past research has shown that being part of a military unit creates an uncommonly strong bond. Both military training and culture cultivate the concept of developing deep dependence on one's comrades (Little, 1981). Through physical and social isolation, experiencing life threatening risks and deprivations, military units act as surrogate families by fulfilling social and emotional support, which understandably fosters strong attachments. Friendships are essential when creating unit cohesion and are linked to how well members identify with the unit, combat effectiveness (Oliver, Harman, Hoover, Hayes, & Pandhi, 1999), group performance, job satisfaction, and overall well-being (Dion, 2000). Research shows that even after discharged, veterans tend to seek out other veterans for friendships due to the assumed common understanding of central life issues and brotherhood (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011).

2.3. Family

Due to the intense social environment and socialization in the military, a strong connection to other members is created that cannot be replicated outside of the culture. The social intensity experienced by military unit members has been cited as a hindrance to civilian family reintegration (Karney & Crown, 2007). Studies show that post 9/11 married personnel had a harder time readjusting after returning home from deployment than those who were unmarried and 48% reported an overall negative affect on the relationship with their significant since leaving the military (Morin, 2011b).

2.4. Transitioning back to civilian life

When transitioning from the military back to civilian life, the change is typically abrupt and without adequate re-entry training. Service members leave their environment to return to the civilian culture for which they have little or no training to deal with its responsibilities and military-discrepant cultural norms. Civilian society expects immediate readjustment to their former way of life, expecting them to deal with new responsibilities and people on their own. This is especially true of the younger soldiers who matured in the military and had few responsibilities previously. Consequently, as the size of the military shrinks, the link between

the military and the civilian community grows more distant, which exacerbates the problems more. Research indicates that 27% of service members, and while 44% of those post 9/11, claimed that re-entry to civilian life was difficult, feel that civilians do not understand the problems they face (Morin, 2011a) or find it hard to relate to civilians (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). Subsequently they seclude themselves from others in attempt to deal with their adjustment difficulties alone, in self-imposed solitary isolation (Solomon et al., 1992). After their service is over, or while they are on leave, military men might experience a sense of isolation and boredom immediately following. Civilian jobs might feel uninteresting to them and lacking in intense social interaction, which may influence veterans toward jobs such as civil protection or other dangerous, socially intense work. They may tend to develop biased memories in which they recall more positive and fewer negative aspects of their time in military, seek redeployment if still in the military or hang around settings where there are likely to be other men who also belong to such high intensity groupings (e.g., Veterans Administration hospital lobbies).

In conclusion, the socialization that occurs in the military to deprogram recruits and creates military men that will fight and kill for their country, unit, and superiors highly conflicts with civilian life. Then, little or no training is provided to help them transition back into their civilian roles (e.g., child, sibling, parent, and employee). The primary purpose of the present study was to (1) present and describe a new theoretical social psychological construct, SIS, which attempts to explain the effects of military socialization, and (2) assess SIS through a new self-reported questionnaire.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

A survey sample of 965 active and veteran United States military personnel participated in an anonymous online survey.

3.2. Procedure

3.2.1. Scale construction

SIS is a non-standardized instrument created to assess effects military culture has on the socialization of both active soldiers and veterans. A team of clinicians and researchers authored 150 preliminary items believed to have potential for identifying and outlining military social behaviors. Questions were based on theoretical reflection, interviews with military members and their families, previous research, clinical experience and literature reviews. The criterion for item retention in the preliminary measure was based on strict alignment with the theoretical assumptions, open debate and then consensus agreement; 100 items were retained.

3.2.2. Data collection

SIS asks participants to specify how much they agree with a statement by answering on a 5-point Likert scale; *disagree strongly* (1) to *agree strongly* (5). The snowball method for recruiting participants was utilized. A recruitment letter was distributed to friends, family, acquaintances, and social networking groups who were involved with military personnel.

3.3. Concurrent assessments

3.3.1. Group environment questionnaire (GEQ; adapted; Ahronson & Cameron, 2007)

This 18-item scale assesses group cohesion, social aspects of ones perceptions of and attraction to the group was adapted to measure military group cohesion (original, $\alpha = .72$; present sample,

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