THIRD-LOCATION DECOMPRESSION FOR CANADIAN SOLDIERS
ENDING A TOUR OF DUTY: A FOCUS GROUP

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2006

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Counselling Psychology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2012

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Abstract

This study investigated the Canadian Third-Location Decompression (TLD) Program, a program in which soldiers participate immediately after their Tours of Duty in operational deployments prior to their transition home to Canada. To investigate this matter, a research focus group was run for three hours, and thematic analysis of the data gathered was completed. The orientation questions for the focus group were: “What is the experience of third-location decompression?” and “What factors in TLD would have aided in a more successful re-entry experience back home to Canada?” Two primary themes were supported by a number of subthemes which indicated 1) The apparent value of TLD is questioned upon arrival, but changes over time with enhancement of personal awareness and TLD being perceived as a buffer, and 2) Reservists perceive a disparity between their members and Regular Force counterparts which threatens their personal identity and leads to a perception of abandonment. Contributing to this, Reservists also perceive a greater challenge to re-entry and reintegration with civilian lifestyle after TLD compared to Regular Force members. These themes are discussed in relation to the current literature, and suggestions for further investigation are made as well.
This research was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The certificate Number of the Ethics Certificate obtained was H11-00988.
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Acknowledgements

While a number of sleepless nights and countless hours in front of a computer screen may have contributed to the completion of my thesis, none of it could have been done without my personal supports: my family on all sides, and also some very significant others in my life! Special thanks to my advisor Dr. Marv Westwood who kept me motivated within the confines of academia and beyond, and to Dr. David Kuhl who was never afraid to challenge me. I must also acknowledge the population that I serve, both in uniform and out, courageous members of the Canadian Forces. And to the participants in my study, who insisted that under all circumstances, I keep up my GAFF.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and History

With the overt involvement of Canadian Forces (CF) personnel in Afghanistan since 2001, the gradual development of a normalization and re-integration program was recognized by the CF as an area that required attention. The focus on Canada’s decompression program for soldiers who are ending their Tours of Duty overseas represents an area of literature that has not yet been adequately explored. By conducting a review of background information, defining decompression and other important issues, and outlining the research problem and the research question, a more thorough illustration of concerns pertaining to the CF TLD program can be developed.

Starting as a test-program with a limited number of CF personnel in a Guam resort in 2001, a small number of soldiers of the 3 PPCLI (Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry) battle group attended a 5 day layover as part of their deployment termination as a means to participate in a recovery, reintegration, and reconstitution plan. As outlined by Brigadier General Lessard, in the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman’s (2004) report, such a plan would “allow our soldiers the opportunity to decompress from the high tempo of operations, and gradually return to a professional and domestic state of normalcy” (p. 18). Following recommendations and proposals from other allies, Canada has taken steps to formalize its current TLD program and incorporate it as a mandatory measure for all troops returning from Afghanistan.

Since 2004, this formal decompression program has operated in Cyprus as part of a rest, relaxation and psycho-social skills-building component which aids in concluding an operational deployment in the CF. Providing effective psychological care for soldiers after they finish a
Tour of Duty overseas is a goal that is maintained as a military member leaves a Nation in conflict. This process of transition from the military environment back into a Canadian life-style is referred to in the military as decompression. The five-day overseas program that is the primary focus of this study is known as Third-Location Decompression (TLD). Programs in Counselling Psychology and other disciplines need to be informed of the first-entry experiences of military personnel as they move through the decompression area immediately following a Tour of Duty, and prior to their return to Canada. Obtaining this knowledge will create a bridge between overseas counselling services sponsored by the military and existing programs here in Canada that are not as well acquainted with military themed areas of stress and trauma. It is, therefore, the goal of this study to use a research focus group to deepen the understanding of the experience of the decompression program and understand and report the factors that could have aided in a more successful reintegration back home.

1.2 Research Problem

As a member of the Canadian Forces ends his or her tour-of-duty in a theatre of operations such as Afghanistan, every member must participate in the mandatory TLD which lasts approximately five days prior to the return home to Canada. Since 2004, a post-mission layover in Paphos, Cyprus concludes the average tour-of-duty of six to eight months; each Soldier spends this brief period at a resort centre designed for rest, relaxation, and social support. Here, an opportunity to unwind on white-sand beaches, participate in sports and leisure activities, and take their first sips of an alcoholic beverage in many months is presented to each member. More recently, another TLD area has been setup in Germany with similar amenities and resources. Additionally, and perhaps of greatest salience, are a series of mandatory lectures and psychological debriefings, some of which occur in an attempt to address the impacts of traumatic
stress, such as that encountered on the battlefield, and the resulting psychological issues which may have developed due to the experiences of war. For some soldiers, experiences may have been limited to the confines of a relatively secure base with regular access to amenities. For others, the front-line demands of battle, improvised explosive devices, and rocket propelled grenades may be more familiar, and of particular impact.

While some limited information exists in describing TLD, it is primarily published within a governmental or military organization, thereby potentially affecting trustworthiness and reliability due to internal biases. Even in the structure of some government documents, benefits and positive effects are outlined as a result of TLD, while it appears that little information exists that outlines possible challenges or limitations. Some background review of TLD has been conducted, but by employing a research focus-group to highlight this area for attention, a more in-depth and potentially less biased representation can occur.

1.3 Research Questions

A key component in understanding the experience of the TLD program, its purpose, its content, and processes at work, is the investigation of the experiences of members who attend. Soldiers concluding their operational deployments are mandated as part of their Tours of Duty to participate in the TLD program based in Cyprus or Germany. To better understand the experiences and processes at work here, and articulate the perceived efforts of the TLD program, the following questions must be asked of a focus-group consisting of a sample of Canadian Forces members:

1) What is the experience of third-location decompression?

2) What factors in TLD would have aided in a more successful re-entry experience back home to Canada?
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.1 Defining Decompression

According to a report by the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman, members of the Canadian Forces that exit from the theatre of operations must participate in the decompression program that is currently operating in Cyprus, known as a “third location” which provides a transitional setting prior to the return to Canada (2004). Hacker-Hughes et al. (2008) describes that a location that is neither the theatre of operations nor the home environment is selected as a transitional area for soldiers to participate in activities relating to decompression.

Here, rest and relaxation occur alongside a number of mandatory reintegration lectures which take place in four phases. The National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman report describes the first instance of a third-location decompression in 2001; defined by 3PPCLI BG ‘the purpose [of decompression] is to provide a safe environment, outside of the combat theatre for the Brigade Group to collectively decompress, rebuild interpersonal skills, and examine coping mechanisms necessary for their return to Canada” (2004). Other terms commonly used to describe decompression exist in the form of normalization, reconstitution, demobilization, transition and re-entry. For the purposes of this study, decompression or TLD will be referring specifically to the five-day process that occurs for Canadian soldiers following their operational deployments.

Decompression as it pertains to the military takes on a variety of descriptions. Hacker-Hughes et al. (2008) describe the importance of military decompression programs as a process that is designed to allow service personnel returning from an operational deployment a chance to transition home in a graduated way, “reducing the potential for maladaptive psychological adjustment” (p. 534).
As described in the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman (2004), “decompression” is designed to assist in the reintegration of CF members in their return to Canada:

The objectives of decompression initiative and stress mitigation programs are to minimize family reintegration stress and ensure early identification of any potential health problems by providing service members the opportunity to reflect on and recognize what had been accomplished during their tour, to gain a sense of closure and to facilitate a smoother reintegration to Canadian society. (para. 3)

Additionally, as described in the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman’s report, there are four phases as part of the redeployment/re-entry process (2004):

- In phase one, preparation for a return to Canada, known as re-deployment, is made for the soldier and his/her family as per the requirements of administration, logistical support, transport and kit turn-in. A redeployment checklist confirms that all affairs are in order prior to disembarkation. Additionally, a component of this phase requires each Canadian Forces member to participate in a number of in-theatre briefings, including individual interviews with a mental health representative with the aim of addressing the issues of post-deployment stress, family reintegration, workplace reintegration, and other identified concerns.

- Phase two is described by DND as an opportunity to “make a clean break from the mission and deployment area, and leave for home rested and in good spirits” usually after a period of structured activities for five days (para. 4). This phase represents the particular area of interest that this paper will address by means of a case study. The process most recognized as decompression occurs here in the second phase, and should
also note the integration of psychological resources available to soldiers, and a series of mandatory briefings that attempt to support the reintegration process for the soldiers about to return home.

- The third phase of re-entry is described as re-integration to Units and Garrisons in Canada. Particularly relevant to regular force personnel, troops are returned to their original Unit of deployment to finalize administrative details and prepare for block-leave. Any other medical resources required will be addressed at this point.

- The fourth and final phase of redeployment includes a post-mission follow-up which concludes operational deployment, and finalizes medical concerns which includes an Enhanced Post-Deployment Screening Interview between 90 and 180 days post-arrival. As part of ongoing care and post-deployment re-integration, access to Operational Stress Injury (OSI) resources is available to those who wish to make use of services. As per the description provided by the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman (2004) the Canadian Forces “will assume a pro-active role in promoting a culture of support, understanding and caring towards injured personnel” (para. 6).

As depicted in the four phases of redeployment, an exit strategy maintaining the best interests of the Soldier appears to be an objective and priority of the DND. Still, while decompression offers soldiers an opportunity to relax and gain access to various psychological resources, if need-be, the program does not appear to exist without a question pertaining to overall value. Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and a number of other nations make use of some form of decompression program under a variety of names, all with the good intentions to Support the Troops as the saying goes. And while these programs exist with the best interests to support the Soldier kept in mind, defining exactly what goes on or what the
experience of these TLD programs is like, does not appear in great detail in much of the literature.

As Hacker-Hughes et al. (2008) points out, although widely used and considered mandatory and essential by some, there remains no standard explanation of what decompression is, be the definition between or within nations, and none of the examples appear to provide data of overall effectiveness or hard statistical benefits. Hacker-Hughes et al. (2008) also mentions that due to the lack of any substantial bank of positive evidence to support the effectiveness of decompression, focus should be on keeping the decompression period short so as to return the troops to their homes and families as soon as possible. Hacker-Hughes et al. continues to describe that while the decompression programs available may do well for the sake of management and relaxation, a lack of structure may “convey no benefit, and at worst, affect morale and satisfaction” (2008, p. 538). As Rossignol (2007) points out in a report on third-location decompression for military personnel, the efforts of the current decompression programs do not necessarily prevent psychological difficulties and serve only to provide a gradual transition from a stressful situation using debriefings and information sessions to help personnel recognize the need to seek treatment should symptoms arise. Whether or not the decompression program truly benefits soldiers is a concern that is yet to be determined.

2.2 Psychological Needs of the Soldier

During correspondence with the leading social worker for the decompression area in Cyprus, Canadian Forces Major Suzanne Bailey (personal communication, November 30, 2010) described the use of psychological debriefings, lectures and presentations that are designed to complement pre-deployment seminars regarding the presence of psychological stressors. While this allows the soldier to be briefed on the possibility of stress reactions during deployment,
Rossignol (2007) points out that including the ways to avoid or prevent these reactions is limited. Considered in some ways as an Army doctrine, Grossman (1996) in his book, *On Killing*, describes the military attempts to incorporate strategies to encourage mental toughness and enhance one’s ability to manage fear to avoid the emotional complications of combat and killing. At a time of extreme stress for example, a soldier on an operational deployment may incorporate the use of psychological debriefings as a means to assist with challenging situations. With this, the possibility of becoming emotionally detached is decreased.

While some strategies may be described as ways to reduce emotional reactions, Cossar (2010) reports the implementation of these debriefings as an attempt to encourage expression of emotional tension to potentially horrific events so as to reduce a stress-response. While under this severe stress of the combat environment, Fowler (2010) describes that soldiers will typically move into an altered state of consciousness that allows them to operate from instinct without emotion, similar to a drug-induced trance. It is a common occurrence for many soldiers however, that maintaining effectiveness in the theatre of war requires some level of emotional detachment. As Brasham (2008) points out, these skills of detachment that help one survive in a combat zone do not necessarily serve well upon return home. Here, the disconnection from emotions for many soldiers serves as a means of survival. In combat, when “senses are submerged under a barrage of threats, noises and confusion, training and discipline take over to allow the soldier to continue fighting, and under the right circumstances, even carry out extraordinary actions” (Fowler, 2010, p. 43).

While training and experience allow some detachment that keeps the soldier alive and effective in the theatre of war, a return to a state of emotional congruence after removal from the combat environment is not something that the soldier can easily un-learn or forget, even with
The use of these psychological tactics such as Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD), are employed at all stages of training and deployment, including decompression. Naparstek (2004) points out that while the soldier-friendly name can attract personnel to such debriefings, CISD offers only short-term assistance, allowing the individual to get organized, regain composure, and marshal internal resources needed to function in the immediacy of the traumatic event.

Because it is called *debriefing* – a happily masculine and military-sounding name, rather than *brief, supportive, reality-based, on-site therapy*, which is what it is, CISD is immediately palatable to its fairly macho recipients in the rescue industry [for instance], most of whom would have nothing to do with anything called by the sissified name of *therapy* or even *help*, for that matter (Naparstek, 2004, p. 321).

It is this palatability, or lack thereof, for the idea of therapy which seems to dissuade most soldiers from seeking it when needed. Additionally, Naparstek further describes an in-depth investigation of 15 controlled and randomized studies measuring the efficacy of the CISD protocol, in prevention of issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) “absolutely no improvement in subsequent PTSD symptoms” occurred and therefore the use of this intervention cannot be justified for the sake of PTSD prevention (2004, p. 321). While Short-DeGraff and Engelmann (1992) point out that some psychological traumas will only surface when the individual is emotionally prepared to confront them, sometimes decades after the precipitating events, Everstine & Everstine (2001) suggest that debriefings such as CISD are ineffective in reducing the psychological repercussions of trauma because the debriefing “requires a higher level of intellectual functioning than is possible for severely traumatized people at [that] stage” (p. 183).
Prior to TLD in the theatre of operations, providing counselling in the field appears to be a difficult option due to multiple factors. Keller et al., (2005) indicate problems with the delivery of mental health support due to logistical constraints, difficult terrain, wide dispersal of personnel, combat contingencies, and a limited number of health practitioners. In this way, the external mental health resources may never reach the traumatized soldier, and in the case with CISD, may still be ineffective. Leaving the soldier with this stress to the end of his/her Tour means dealing with it during TLD or back home in Canada.

In the United States, Doyle and Peterson (2005) conducted a review of the transition and re-entry process for US Army soldiers concluding combat tours from areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan. As part of their reintegration training, soldiers were required to participate in a number of classes and lectures prior to returning home, a process referred to as ‘demobilization.’ Here, demobilization occurred in an effort to combat the common themes identified among those studied such as a sense of isolation from peers, estrangement from family and friends, and a loss of common purpose, all of which contribute to the accumulation of stress. Additionally, in a comparative cohort study reviewing data from nearly 10 thousand soldiers, Fear et al. (2010), examined the consequences of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the mental health of UK armed forces from 2003 to 2009. By use of a questionnaire, it was determined that the greatest trends in consequence were the prevalence of alcohol misuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, and reports of other common mental disorders. In each deployment area outlined, the use of debriefings by that nation’s military forces are used as part of the strategy to mitigate stress responses.

Regardless of the nation which participates in the debriefing format, research by Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli, and Vlahov (2007) and others indicates that whether in the field or
during a specific decompression period, the blanket-application of psychological debriefings may actually impede natural recovery and inhibit those who are resilient against the pathologies that may extend from operational stress. While a lack of empirical evidence exists to support effectiveness, similar debriefings and lectures are mandated for every soldier entering the Canadian TLD area, a place with easy access to rest & relaxation, and also to alcohol. Supporting the need for a research focus-group on the topic of TLD, further understanding of the experience soldiers generally have, including the variety of factors that make up the context of the debriefings, is required to further this area of the literature. Additionally, developing a better understanding of what resources are available within TLD to prepare for this re-entry experience can inform current programs and aid in soldiers’ transition.

2.3 Re-entry

Once soldiers have completed their stint in the TLD program, they are faced with the welcome challenge of making their way home to Canada. The journey home may be filled with excitement and trepidation as CF members must now face the reality of having been away from the comforts of home and immersed in a culture of training and deployment, that for some, has lasted upwards of 18 months. After many hours of flights, and tying off administrative loose ends, soldiers re-enter the familiar arena of a Canadian lifestyle with access to friends and family, and the comforts they had once known many months ago. This transition to Canadian soil does not go without its hardships however. Westwood, Lawrence and Paul, (1986) describe that due to the abrupt transition, a soldier’s re-entry often involves a period of social and occupational duress which requires “some degree of mental and emotional adjustment prior to optimal functioning in the ‘new’ environment” (p. 223).
Dealing with the tribulations of the Afghanistan conflict for instance, puts soldiers of all
varieties in harm’s way. Whether operating outside the wire beleaguered by threats of
improvised explosive devices (IED’s) and gunfire, or within the confines of an armoured sea-can
operating communications equipment back at the base, soldiers face stressors of all types that
contribute to a need for a stint in TLD after their time in theatre. Stress endured over the typical
six to eight month tour of duty builds up in every soldier; for some, the resources available both
internally and externally make a difference for those who return and encounter stress-reactions or
full-blown PTSD. Reactions to combat do not always qualify as PTSD, however, symptoms
such as hostility, depression and paranoid ideation are the most common psychiatric reactions to
difficult peacekeeping missions such as those noted in literature regarding the UN contingent in
Somalia in the 1990’s (Orsillo, Roemer, Litz, Ehlich, & Friedman, 1998).

While the Department of National Defence (DND) continually indicates its support for its
soldiers and the resources available to those affected by an operational stress injury, a perceived
stigma against help-seeking behaviours for military personnel decreases the likelihood that
members will report anything at all due to potential embarrassment or fear of repercussion.
Here, the threat to one’s career makes it extremely difficult for the individual to seek the health
care needed. Determining whether or not help in the form of psychological resources is required,
the soldier must differentiate between “the normal human tendency to relive in the mind all
unpleasant experiences, and the variety of enduring patterns of severe psychological and
physiological responses to overwhelmingly traumatic conditions” (Kroll, 1993, p. 71). In this
way, what is interpreted as normal memory and recovery must be realized as traumatic memory;
the level to which this occurs (exhibited symptomology) marks the point at which symptoms
associated with PTSD and acute-stress disorders are acknowledged. Determining this point
without medical or psychological supports is impossible to the Soldier and highlights the stigma-related issues that accompany the Soldier who is challenged by the process of re-entry.

While TLD provides the soldier with a little R&R complemented by some basic psychological resources, the bulk of the transitional experience back into Canadian society must be served away from white-sand beaches and ocean spray. Relationships at home must be mended and maintained, and even reactions to a non-combat environment must be adjusted to. Atherton (2009) addresses the fact that some challenges still exist regarding the renegotiation of identities within the home for instance, which can include the formation of new relationships as family members come to terms with the changes in behaviour of the newly-arrived veteran. Here, Gabriel and Neal (2002) highlight the use of psychological resources as beneficial, but acknowledge that there is less of an issue regarding availability, and more of a concern pertaining to the stigma and bias. Gabriel and Neal (2002) note how some soldiers perceive PTSD and other stress-related reactions as weaknesses that they choose not to reveal in medical or psychiatric follow-up interviews due to this fear of stigma. While perceptions vary, Brown (2008) explains PTSD as an emotional illness that can develop as a result of severe emotional stress or perceived life-threatening events. While PTSD has only been recognized as a formal diagnosis since 1980, Brown (2008) also notes that similar comparisons of behaviours from previous wars and extremely stressful events have resulted in descriptions such as ‘soldier’s heart,’ ‘combat fatigue,’ ‘gross stress reaction,’ ‘battle fatigue,’ ‘shell shock,’ and now, ‘operational stress injury’ (OSI).

While a purely military term, an OSI does tend to leave in the minds of personnel a perception of illness or disorder. Grenier, Darte, Heber, and Richardson (2007) explain that soldiers may stigmatize those with OSI symptoms if they are labelled as having a mental illness.
It is this stigmatization which may deter members from seeking treatment, reducing effectiveness for those who seek it, potentially generating unnecessary personnel losses.

Together, this variety of factors contributes to the difficulties that are encountered most often for soldiers returning home. The process of re-entry is addressed in some ways within the TLD program, but the actual experience of the reintegration lectures and debriefings are not well understood. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of what the experience of services being offered and how they are attempting to deal with the issues presented in the literature, an in-depth analysis of the experience of the program was carried out.
Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this investigation of the TLD program focuses not only on the participants’ subjective interpretations of their experience as reflected within a social constructionist paradigm, but also on the speculation of factors that could have made for a more successful re-entry experience. Through discourse within a focus group, several themes were socially constructed and revealed to the researcher upon a review and thematic analysis of the data collected. While the goal is not to formally assess the decompression program, certain themes and assertions were identified that lend to the potential improvement of this area of research and have the potential to benefit CF members that participate in third-location decompression in future missions.

3.1 Methodology

Social Constructionism is a theory that guides the methodology of this research. Originally described by Berger and Luckmann (1967), the theory of Social Constructionism refers to the way in which we create meaning based on social interactions with others. Here, our concepts of reality and culture are shaped not only on what we witness or perceive, but also on what knowledge we create based on verbal interactions (dialogue). In this research study, the theoretical application to a focus-group method of data collection asks participants to report on an experience. Here, the individual experience is expressed in a way that conjures further dialogue with others allowing a more in-depth level of understanding.

In some experiential research, researchers such as Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, and Irvine (2009) suggest that the blending of phenomenology and focus groups can be carried out under the right theoretical lens, however, under the social constructionist views of this study, learning about the experience of TLD, as well as factors to aid in a more successful re-entry experience,
does not allow compatibility of phenomenological methodology. Typically, phenomenology seeks to explore and define qualities of phenomena that are described from the individual perspective so as not to be contaminated, manipulated, or influenced by anyone else except the one relating the experience. The use of a focus group in this study actually relies on the group dynamic to maintain and influence discussion and the creation of themes between members, hence a social construction of themes.

According to Burr (2003), it is through our understanding and study of language that we come to fully comprehend the world around us. In this way, our interactions with the world can be articulated and further through the creation of knowledge. Here, Burr states that, “nothing exists except as it exists in discourse” (2003, p.82). She adds that it is through this discourse, be it accounts, instructions, conversation, or story-telling, that one logically moves to the use of qualitative methods as a research tool. A researcher then, can most often make a logical move to the analysis of interview transcripts and written texts of other kinds, just like that seen here in this study, which aid in the creation of themes.

Gergen (1999) also takes note that while certain themes may emerge from an analysis, the way in which one reflects on discourse within text for example, is done so using language that is neither a perfectly accurate reflection or map of our subjects because the very nature of the use of language conveys and constructs meaning that must be understood and extracted by someone else (the reader). Here, the very means that are being used to convey a researcher's understanding of meaning (emerging themes), are done so using a tool that conveys either more or less meaning in its implementation. While some could see this as a limitation, the theoretical backing of this research paper actually relies on the idea that knowledge has been socially constructed through discourse, and a report on that discourse from within a research focus group
is being conducted. Gergen (1999) further emphasizes the importance of recognizing the use of metaphor while conducting analysis as a means to relate information and thereby create knowledge; here, metaphor attaches substance and reinforces the meaning-making sentiment of discourse. In analysing the transcribed text of this research project's focus group, one must maintain awareness that the use of metaphor often depicts important themes that are specific to the group being studied. In this socially constructed way, knowledge reported in the form of themes does not merely emerge from the text, but is created, interpreted, and related by the researcher to the reader.

3.2 Design

The use of a research focus group to study the topic of third-location decompression has the potential to reveal a greater breadth of understanding of members’ experiences while generating new knowledge based on the group interaction. Kitzinger (1995) outlines the use of focus groups in qualitative research design as a way to explore people’s knowledge and experience to examine how the group thinks about a topic, not just as a means to describe what it is. The use of a group dynamic is further described by two major assumptions outlined by Glitz (1998), that on their own, individuals can provide rich details about a topic, however due to dynamics as a collective, material generated will be different than other forms of data collection.

Here, Kitzinger (1995) points out that it is this group process that encourages exploration into issues of importance using group-specific vocabulary to relate to the topic thereby clarifying each member’s views more easily than in a one-to-one interview. Powell and Single (1996) describe the use of a focus group as being particularly useful in promoting group cohesion and the perception of likeness. It is this commonality in shared experience that not only contributes to the sharing of experiences but does so also through the building of trust and safety. While the
goal of the focus group design is not to provide a therapeutic benefit specifically, Yalom (1995) describes group trust and cohesiveness as a curative factor in group therapy and strongly believes that group environments use this cohesiveness as a means to individual increases in self-esteem, hope for self, and overall well-being. Here, Powell and Single (1996) also point out that cohesive focus groups often end up improving morale and can generate feelings of self worth among participants.

A focus group developed to understand the experiences of soldiers who have been through TLD can be useful in a variety of ways. While the overall group dynamic encourages participation from members and generates knowledge based on its interactions (Kitzinger, 1995), Powell and Single (1996) also note that focus groups are especially useful when existing knowledge of a subject is inadequate and elaboration of pertinent issues is necessary prior to the use of other data collection methods, and when a subject is complex and requires a variety of data collection methods due to a plethora of variables; many of which can be determined through the implementation of the group.

Additionally, Simon (1999) outlines the value of focus group facilitators using a top-down view of questioning as a technique to draw out useful information pertaining to the researcher’s end goal. Here, an incorporation of the main research questions and others can contribute to a sufficient exploration of details to draw out a thematic analysis. As Simon describes, “to be effective, focus group questions should be open-ended, focused, and move from general to more specific” (1999, p. 41). As an example of questions that will be asked within the focus group, a series of top-down inquiries are presented:

1) What is your experience of the third-location decompression program that you participated in at the end of your Tour of Duty?
2) What were some components of TLD that you appreciated or particularly enjoyed about the TLD program?

3) What are some parts of TLD that you saw as a challenge within the program?

4) What are some factors that would have contributed to a more successful re-entry experience while in TLD?

Here, the inclusion of the main research questions allows their specific exploration while being supported by other related inquiries. Encouraging discussion within the group also relies on the use of specific probing techniques that can bring about further details and elaboration.

Patton (2002) outlines the incorporation of these probes into the interview procedure which are designed to help facilitate the process, such as that which occurs within a focus group.

Patton (2002) identifies three types of probes as essential to the interview process:

1) Detail-oriented probes: as per a natural conversation, questions are asked to gain more detail due to fulfill a genuine curiosity. Examples include: “Who was with you?” and “What was it like being there?”

2) Elaboration probes: encourages the interviewee to tell us more, we indicate our desire to know more by such things as gently nodding our head as the person talks, softly voicing 'un-huh' every so often, and sometimes by just remaining silent but attentive. Example: “Yes, tell me more about that.”

3) Clarification probes: Due to times when the interviewer is unsure of what the interviewee is talking about, gentle clarification is required that does not leave the interviewee feeling at fault for the difficulty in transmitting the message. Example: “I want to make sure I understand what you mean. Would you describe it for me again?”
3.3 Participants

Participants in the research component of the focus group included only the primary researcher, UBC's Dr. M. Westwood, and myself as co-investigator, an M.A. student at the University of British Columbia who facilitated and organized the research focus group.

Personnel and military members that were interested were added to the participant list and were informed not only of the nature and interest of the study, but also told about the terms of informed-consent. To qualify as a participant, group members were to include soldiers of all varieties that had been on an operational deployment which had concluded through the third location decompression program in Cyprus, prior to re-entry to Canada. Additionally, members of the Canadian Forces (CF) had to have reported their return from TLD in the last 365 days, and were representative of group rank structure such as junior ranks, non-commissioned officers, and commissioned members.

Client ages pertained to military deployment requirements, between 18 and 57 with no previously-existing mental illness or diagnosis, or unresolved psychological concerns. A total of 7 members were recruited from the CF and were active in the focus group tool of data collection. All 7 participants were contacted after media was transcribed and thematic analysis was carried out completely to verify that the expression of these themes was fully understood and agreed upon.

3.4 Recruitment and Site Selection

While my membership within the Canadian Forces may prove valuable due to an understanding and appreciation of administration and CF affairs, an official request to access CF personnel was not required as this information is not being provided to CF representatives nor is the data required to be released to the CF. Additionally, soldiers who wished to participate were
not receiving remuneration for their participation as a military member in the CF, and were out of Military dress. Participation was therefore, entirely voluntary. With access to local area Units within 39 Brigade, and as per consent of individual members, I announced my investigation and my call for participants within the Mess of a number of local Units. Contact information and a description of the investigation was provided to all members present as well as the announcement of a Tim Horton’s Gift certificate of $20 for participation in the focus group. A poster with a description of the proposed study including risks and benefits to participation was provided to each Mess visited (Appendix B), as well as detailed contact information for the primary and co-investigator.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted during the meeting of all participants in the focus group in one session for approximately 3 hours which included one 15-minute break. The meeting occurred at the University of British Columbia in a private classroom environment. During the session, a pair of sound recorders and a video camera were setup in accordance with participants’ informed consent and used as a means to record all aspects of conversations and group interactions. The video camera was setup in part as an audio-recording and tracking device, which also aided in transcription and analysis, but the video recording itself was not be used to infer themes or present dynamics within the group such as non-verbal behaviours.

3.5.1 Process

All 7 participants arrived at the UBC location just prior to the requested timing. As each participant had served in the CF or was currently serving the Department of National Defence within 39-Brigade, some members had worked directly with others present in the group and arrived together. As group facilitator, I gathered the members into the circular seating area
provided and announced the commencement of the focus group. Before the recording devices were turned on, I reminded everyone that their participation was voluntary and read out the entire letter of Informed Consent. Each member was then asked to hand in a signed copy of the consent form if they agreed to the terms; all 7 members signed and agreed to participate. The recording devices were then turned on and I started the data collection with a group check-in exercise that requested each participant to briefly describe his own operational deployment history and rotation, and the position he filled overseas. Over the next three hours, a minimally-structured group interview took place that encouraged discussion on TLD, following the format of Simon (1999) that prescribes initially open-ended inquiries and progressively more specific over time. During this session, one 10-minute break was provided, and then a semi-structured check-out exercise was conducted at the group's conclusion and dismissal.

Using the media recordings, I transcribed all audio into text and carried through with Braun and Clarke's (2006) methods of thematic analysis for focus groups.

3.6 Data Analysis

As part of the qualitative examination, thematic coding procedures were be carried out as per methodology described in Braun and Clarke's (2006) background literature to provide accurate thematic analysis.

In the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), a step by step approach to Thematic Analysis was described in six phases that caters well to the first-time investigator and beginner researcher. Of particular note, the authors describe their format of thematic analysis as flexible and adaptable. The creation of themes then, does not rely on a specific count or prevalence regarding emergence or manifestation of ideas, points, or themes such as how many speakers spoke directly in support of a theme. For instance, Braun and Clarke state that "ideally, there will be a
number of instances of the theme across the data set, but more instances do not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial" (2006, p. 82). Adhering to the flexible nature of that described by Braun and Clark, this research project proposed a general guideline that 5 out of the 7 participants would contribute to the construction of a primary theme in order to be presented in the results. However, greatest concentration was placed on whether or not the focus group as a whole was able to achieve the research study's primary objective: to answer its research questions. In this way, prevalence of data may be sufficient, although not necessary, to satisfy the creation of a theme.

The authors outline the following process for accurate thematic analysis:

1) Familiarizing yourself with your data: Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.

2) Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

3) Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

4) Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.

5) Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6) Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

3.7 Levels of Analysis

As per observations during the focus group, interactions with participants, and themes described in interviews, Stake (1995) describes the use of three levels of analysis:

1) Categorical aggregation: Here, the researcher sequences the theme, action or event, categorizes properties, and make tallies in some intuitive aggregation. This style of analysis best describes a collection of instances within data that represent a specific categories or themes.

2) Direct interpretation: The researcher attaches meaning to a small collection of impressions, feelings, or hunches. In analyzing TLD experiences while conducting open-pass coding, the researcher may find a common theme regarding alcohol usage, for instance. Here, reported instances of drunkenness, inebriation, party-like behaviours, or bar or club attendance may be directly interpretable as alcohol use or misuse.

3) Naturalistic generalizations: From analysis of the data, generalizations can be made that other readers of the report can learn from to apply to other populations.

Both categorical aggregation and direct interpretation depend greatly on the search for patterns, and ways to attach meaning. Often, the patterns will be known in advance, drawn from research questions, serving as a template for the analysis. It can also be expected that patterns will emerge unexpectedly from the analysis. Specific to this investigation using focus groups,
themes of ‘trauma,’ ‘stress,’ and ‘re-entry’ as well as particular details relating to TLD and ‘decompression’ in general will be of greatest salience.

3.8 Credibility

Neuman (2003) describes four key factors that address the possible threats to reliability and validity within qualitative design. He outlines specific considerations as they pertain to a research study's methodology, ecological validity, natural history, and competent insider performance, if it applies to the study.

1) Data collection Methods: Because of the focus group method for data collection, determining the experience of TLD with the creation of themes, conclusions are made based not only on individual sources of data, but multiple participants within a group setting. In this way, replicability is not a criterion because field research is virtually impossible to replicate. Here, contexts, social atmospheres, and even individual researchers can change overtime. The incorporation of multiple-pass coding techniques however, enhances reliability since the connection between a theme and the data to support it is strengthened and honed. Findings were based on empirically gathered evidence which used references to the data collected or supporting literature.

2) Ecological validity: describes the degree to which the social world described by the researcher matches that described by the world of members. Carey (1995) also complements this by adding that, "information can be considered as an accurate representation of the perceptions of reality for the group members and therefore valid" (p. 420). Additionally, Neuman (2003) points out that the environment must also take into account the researchers presence; to enhance the ecological validity, the researchers must maintain awareness of whether or not the same events within the environment
would have been reported without their presence versus another researcher. In this way, the contexts and descriptions made by participants must be accurately reflected by the researcher. Here, one must consider whether or not participants were 'holding out' or modifying answers due to the researcher's presence.

3) Validations via natural history: a detailed history of how the project was conducted. Here, to enhance validity, candid disclosures of the researcher’s actions, assumptions, bracketing and procedures for others to evaluate must be provided at a time prior to declaration of findings. Here, special attention was paid to the procedure of data collection and analysis. From examination of the transcribed data, Braun and Clark's (2006) step-by-step process of thematic analysis ensured accurate creation of themes. For each, examples from the data collected were used to provide support and further encouraged the honing of the themes presented. Interpretations and theme creation were verified with the principal investigator and other research committee members, and all participants were contacted prior to the presentation of findings to verify results. During this time, participants were told about each theme within the results, and some examples from the transcribed data were provided. Here, all participants agreed with the themes presented and verified their continued involvement. Additionally, to minimize bias and personal beliefs or influence, bracketing and researcher assumptions are discussed prior to the presentation of results.

4) Competent insider performance: the ability of a non-member to interact effectively as a member or pass as one. While the possibility has been considered, a covert presence, or at least one that is unannounced would present a variety of ethical issues and concerns within a focus group and is therefore not a viable possibility. The presence and
background information for all researchers involved in this study will be provided candidly for all participants.

3.9  Positionality and Assumptions

As a Reservist in the British Columbia Regiment, it has been my experience with friends and associates returning from overseas that some transitions back into a post-tour environment have been trickier than others. Vicariously, I have witnessed this experience and have yet to have a first-hand familiarization with the tribulations and adventure of an operational deployment. Of particular fascination however, are the mixed personal accounts of each member’s time on their way home – including the mandatory decompression provided to Canadian troops at the end of each Tour. I have observed a wide spectrum of descriptors, some touting the TLD as a way to relax and start the counselling process, and others who claim it is a waste of time and invades one’s personal space and time. In most anecdotal accounts, the TLD experience appears to allow easy access to alcohol, even for members undergoing psychological debriefings. I would like to know more about the TLD process and structure based on observations and personal accounts of TLD participants so as to better inform Counselling Psychology here in Canada as a means to provide effective psychological care to those in need.

Of note, is the particular assumption that the questions that come from the research interest are informed by a perception of inadequacies with TLD; that soldiers may not be receiving what they need during their transition home nor does the decompression program being offered to soldiers by the Department of National Defence (DND) provide adequate care for its participants. This particular area of research has the potential to fill a gap in the current literature by leading to greater understanding of the decompression process and the individual needs of soldiers. Additionally, my personal definition of a Soldier could be further updated and
informed within this study as compared to my current understanding and experience of the Army; that of a predominantly young, male-dominated culture of Reservists from British Columbia. Here, exposure to a greater representation of soldiers may help to identify the specific needs that are held most valuable in the decompression process; this potential increase in information may improve the quality of life for those starting their transition home to Canada. Being mindful of the factors and bias that could influence this research, conducting a research focus group as an exploration into the area of TLD will be dealt with empirically via a qualitative process rather than based on potential assumptions and misconceptions.

Another viewpoint that must be considered moves beyond my own personal interests and that of the interests of the population I attempt to serve. Here, access to the Canadian military attempts to help a specific population that is governed under a body of legislation, rules, rank-structure and bureaucracy. Access to this population then, is through a gate of ideals that pertain specifically to the beliefs upheld by the Department of National Defence. Due to the challenges inherent to working with this specific population, it must be perceived and genuinely maintained that the best interests of the TLD program operated by the Canadian Forces are not criticized; instead it has the potential to be informed and educated as to potential learning outcomes, decreasing the perception of judgement from the researcher, and maintaining the possibility for further research in league with DND. This has become a particular consideration due to the potential publications that may come from this article. While member participation in this study is not an issue within DND, the results attained may be perceived as judgement on the DND initiative, Third-Location Decompression. Maintaining this awareness, it is from the formulation of the explorative research questions that a level of trustworthiness of the authors can be assumed prior to conducting the qualitative inquiry.
Due to the nature of this study, a particularly challenging set of ethical considerations apply. Within the context of any group where stories and opinions will be shared, the potential to contribute information that over-discloses personal experience is of particular concern. It is crucial to a safe group process and to the exploration of data, that the group is run according to guidelines established at the start of the meeting, and described in detail as part of informed consent. Here, the level of experience and expertise of the focus group facilitator demands attention to ensure that participants feel validated in their expression of experience as well as safe and comfortable after they leave the focus group environment. To further address this concern, each participant was be informed of the risks and benefits to participation and was offered information during the meeting on how to access psychological resources after the group was concluded. Additionally, participants were informed that the presentation of findings would include direct quotations from the transcribed audio recording of the focus group. In order to maintain confidentiality, participants were told that a pseudonym would be selected for them prior to the presentation of results.

An additional consideration to be aware of is the co-investigator’s potential influence on personnel as a member of the Canadian Forces. While the role of the co-investigator will be in the form of a UBC student primarily, the possibility of influence due to differences in rank, trade, or unit should also be taken into account. Here, as part of disclosure in the informed consent, participants must be informed that the co-investigator is a serving member of the CF. Participants will also be informed that personal information and data is not being revealed to DND and that the co-investigator’s affiliation has merely provided incentive to conduct this research.
Chapter 4: Results

Results for this research study come from interpretation of the 3 hour focus group which was audio-recorded and transcribed into approximately 100 double-spaced pages of 12-point font. In total, 2 primary themes were constructed each with subthemes as support.

4.1 Apparent Value of TLD Questioned Upon Arrival; Changed Over Time With Enhancement of Personal Awareness; TLD Seen as a Buffer.

Theme description: Reporting the experience of their TLD, participants questioned the particular value of it upon arrival; however, having completed a full TLD rotation, changes to their perception of the value of TLD had occurred primarily due to the enhancement of personal awareness. Specific examples such as access to resources, relaxation, and peer-interactions made the greatest changes to perception of value of TLD and enhancement of awareness.

All participants agreed that their expectations of the TLD program were lower than that experienced upon completion of the program at Cyprus. Participants described that their outlook had changed due to interactions with peers in the unthreatening non-combat area outside of Theatre, due to the enhancement of personal awareness from support and resources available, such as psychological debriefings, the presence of peer support and interaction, and due to access to amenities allowing for rest and relaxation. Here, each soldier described ways in which their impression of TLD changed either during their time at the TLD area or upon reflection since returning home.

Thomas described how he had arrived at Cyprus under the impression that it was only a disruption to his Tour of Duty. By the end of his stay his outlook had changed:
'If I could just fucking stay here a little bit longer,' I guess what I was trying to say was that there’s a change in the time I was waiting in KAF waiting to go to Cyprus to the time that I was at the end of Cyprus, and the change was that at first I was like, 'I don't want to go to Cyprus, what do I care about Cyprus,' but then at the end of Cyprus it was like, 'I want to stay here and not go anywhere else!'

Steve agreed with this, mentioning, "I thought it was stupid at first as it was just delaying me going home; I appreciated it when I got there though." Similarly, Patrick also contributed his experience, expressing that, "I didn't really care for it at first and I didn’t really understand it, then when I got in there it was, 'Okay, this is nice. I guess this could be a bit longer.'

While the group acknowledged that their perception of the TLD's value changed over time, participants also acknowledged the challenges presented in attending a decompression period that added even more time to an already significant Tour of Duty time commitment. For instance, Alex questioned his time at Cyprus due to the concerns he had of what was waiting for him at home in Canada:

'It’s like the first two days for some of us, going nuts in my mind, like, 'what the hell am I doing here? I wanna get home and solve my problems.' Back to that kind of stuff, but then I realized after two days here, 'since I am here, and I can't get out of it then might as well do something about it!'

Josh also reported that when he first arrived to the Cyprus TLD he "didn’t want to be there because it was three or four days away from home and the idea of hanging around with a bunch of drunk, horny 20-year olds with neck tattoos did not appeal to me." Josh spoke of adjusting his outlook for being there and making the best of the situation. He continued, "...eventually you make your peace with it, there’s time for that and there’s time for getting
liquored in the pool, let's face it!" Agreeing with this, Ben also noted that "things were going in the right direction" by the end of his time at TLD.

Participants expressed a range of reasoning for their change to the perception of value of TLD, however, each expressed directly their rationale for the change in personal awareness contributing to the perceived worth of the Program. Participants agreed that upon completion of TLD, they were glad they had gone through it, and this personal awareness had been maintained into their re-entry back to Canada.

### 4.1.1 TLD Enhances Personal Awareness

**Subtheme description:** TLD provided a level of personal awareness as to what to expect when reintegrating back at home in Canada. As a result of lectures and debriefings during TLD, the participants learned of things they could see in themselves when they returned home; participants indicated that while personal awareness aided in re-entry, the provision of skills or tools to handle those challenging situations were recognized as potential aids for a more successful re-entry.

As participants described their experiences of TLD, the discussion moved onto a focus of psychological debriefings and lectures that were a mandatory component of the Cyprus Program. Participants reported that these lectures provided members with information on what they could expect as a result of going through a Tour of Duty. In particular, it was noted that members were encouraged to look out for potential issues with aggressive behaviour, risk-seeking habits, relationship challenges and family reintegration, and concerns around emotional inexpression. While a high level of awareness around these topics was developed in each participant, the tools or skills to deal with these challenges was reported as a particular challenge of the decompression and re-entry experience.
Patrick first commented on the development of awareness as a result of the TLD briefings as things to consider when he returned home, "Yes, awareness, especially dealing with relationships, family, it’s like OK, maybe I’m being too impatient or maybe I'm being too hostile or aggressive - just being aware of that."

Mike agreed with this comment, but noted that the awareness did not assist him greatly until he went home. Additionally, the question as to what to do if one becomes aware of a difference in behaviours came up. Mike stated:

You don’t realize this stuff until you’ve actually been home for a little while so it’s good to be able to recognize that before then, but once you’ve actually seen it, that’s when you actually need to know, ‘how do I deal with this?’.

Thomas described that developing awareness was "good to know about beforehand so that you can recognize it later and not be too concerned about it if you don't think it was a concern." While awareness appeared to participants as a first step in recognizing new behaviours, the next stage as to how to handle the situations was said to have been given little emphasis. Thomas described: "the other thing they told me was that if later on these things start to continue or if they get worse or whatever that’s when maybe you want to think about it."

Identifying with this, Steve related that the idea of developing awareness of behaviours from attending lectures: "it almost felt like they were afraid to say that in one or put a curse on you by saying this is what you will be like... ." Stating explicitly what he would have preferred, Steve outlined that he "would’ve liked if they laid out some skills" and that "awareness was a start but a provision of skills would have been better perhaps."
While the development of awareness aided most participants in identifying features of change in themselves, learning how to deal with these situations or knowing when they could appear was not well understood. Thomas remarked that upon coming home to Vancouver, "it was like a door shut or something; that was the moment that everything changed. I don't know if you guys noticed the same thing. But it was then I started recognizing things... it was funny."

Similarly, Ben pointed out that he had a similar experience upon his arrival home at reintegrating with his family, but was more aptly prepared to recognize changes in himself rather than the possible changes in others as a result of his absence:

My wife pointed it out to me but then I realized, it’s not about something that I learned in lectures - the consideration of how they are coping when we’re away. Does that make sense? So, I think I would be better prepared to recognize something in myself rather than recognizing how they’d cope and how they’ve changed as well.

Alex also contributed to this thought and gave the example of how others were responding to his new behaviours yet hadn't been given the right skills to assist with the situation:

It was like, 'I've got this problem, but nah, this is a piece of cake, it's just normal stuff.' But then you realize like, 'I am hurting the ones around me,' it's like when your girlfriend cries and you’re just like, 'what do I do?', and you're just panicking and just say, 'stop!' I didn’t know what to do, and that took me about a year to fix the relationship.

Josh suggested that reintegration was more of an individual responsibility, but highlighted that a provision of skills was absent from his experience of TLD: "people should just know and be aware of the signs and be given someone to call because everyone is going to experience it differently." While TLD brought to light the concerns that could be faced by some
of its attendees via the enhancement of personal awareness, it was perceived in this focus group that a change in behaviours once home would have been supported by a skillset to apply to those situations; this presented a challenge that each member appeared to work out on an individual basis.

4.1.2 TLD is a Buffer Before Re-entry

Theme description: Participants reported that TLD provides a necessary break between the war-torn environment of operational theatres such as Afghanistan prior to the re-entry back home to Canada. In this way, participants attached value to TLD upon completion.

During the time spent in the Cyprus TLD, participants reported separation and disengagement from the role, regulations, and most responsibilities that each was engaged in while in Theatre. As the TLD program is mandatory for all service personnel who are ending an operational deployment over 30 days, a four day period on the Island is a conclusion to each soldier's Tour that encourages a degree of separation from Afghanistan's war-torn regions and acts as a buffer prior to traveling home rather than the abrupt return. Re-entry and reintegration still appeared to be a significant challenge for each participant, as described in other themes, but the experience of the TLD as a buffer period was reported to lessen the impact of transition to an environment juxtaposed to one's Tour of Duty.

Thomas supported the idea of TLD as a buffer period directly, as he described that TLD provided "buffer time from being totally focused on your job overseas." Adding to this, he stated that, "you've been waiting for so long; for seven months, and Cyprus really does force you to take your head out of the game and just relax." Focusing on the buffer period as an analogy to working a job back in Canada, Thomas also noted that TLD acted as a way to transition from work to home life:
It's just like what you need at the end of the day when you’re working in Canada. Whatever job you have, you need to decompress before you can kinda deal with, then you transition from work to your home life or whatever, and this gives you that buffer time.

Further emphasizing this, Thomas continued: "It's like the only, truly, real forced-rest. You know how they always talk about forced rest, like we’re gonna have it... ...I appreciated the freedom after not being free for so fucking long."

Mike described an aspect of TLD relating to the use of language as part of the transitional buffer period, specifically that, "everyone speaks in English. That was really convenient where as if you were somewhere else you might not have that. It’s a little thing but it’s again just a transition into normalcy." Commenting on that transition into normalcy, Ben outlined the first access to alcohol as a component of TLD that further emphasizes the perception of TLD as a buffer period. Ben reported that, "they’re using Cyprus as a buffer zone, sort of like when the Russians did that in the Second World War in Poland. They are preventing you from doing it back in Canada perhaps." Adding to this, Ben described the absence of alcohol in Theatre as a significant change in many members' lives. TLD however, provides the soldier with his/her first sips of alcohol in this buffer period in the form of a controlled environment:

When you get back home you do not have free and easy access to alcohol, you know, and you need maybe some period of time surrounded by your peers where, like they say, you get that shit out of your system, you know, where you have a few drinks instead of when you get home, so that’s part of the transition.

Agreeing with this, Josh commented on his perception of the Military's attitude towards alcohol consumption, indicating that "it’s like they're trying to get it out of your system."
Using TLD as a buffer zone prior to re-entry to Canada connects considerably with participants of the focus group. Additionally, the consumption of alcohol as a means to celebrate one's accomplishment and conclusion to a Tour of Duty was identified as a component that complements the transitional buffer period of TLD. The perception of TLD as a safe environment to relax and consume alcohol is further emphasized by Ben, as a "place where people are going to drink after tour. I don't know there’s a better place to do it and surrounded by people who are going to support you and with that an intact support structure!" Mike also agreed with Ben's comment, mentioning that, "I think it’s good to have the access, and to let the guys get it out of their system, and they are set up there with all the harm reduction and mitigation facilities."

Participants from the focus group provided evidence supporting the creation of the theme that TLD is seen as a buffer period prior to re-entry to Canada. Access to alcohol was recognized as a supporting element to the theme of TLD as a buffer period.

4.2 Reservists Perceive a Disparity Between Their Members and Regular Force Counterparts.

Theme description: Reservists see themselves at a disadvantage as compared to their Regular Force counterparts who appear to have greater access to resources both in TLD and during re-entry to Canada. This results in a variety of repercussions such as the perception of loss, isolation, segregation, and abandonment regarding follow-up and aftercare. Here, participants reported on their experience which incorporated factors that would have aided their re-entry.

Perhaps one of the most significant themes that came forward as a result of the focus group was that of the perception of great disparity between Reservists and Regular force
members, as recognized by the assembly of a focus group made of entirely of Primary Reservists. Questions and comments, discussion and inquiry were all highly charged as each member had examples and commentary regarding this significant theme. All participants commented on the perception of disparity which was supported using a variety of smaller subthemes.

Participants in the focus group started creating a theme of disparity by considering the research question which asked to relate experiences or factors that aided in re-entry. When this was explored further, a number of points were discussed. For example, according to participants, civilian post-Tour occupational reintegration is considered a challenge that applies exclusively to the Reservist segment of the Military, unless Regular Force members chose to quit their Military contract immediately after Tour. Perceptions reported in the focus group indicate that TLD and re-entry supports are designed primarily for Regular Forces members with little considerations of Reservist needs. Here, access to follow-up resources and reintegration skills was outlined as a missing component to re-entry.

Here, Steve first presented his perception of disparity, offering the perspective that financial planning resources and resulting concerns differed for the Regular force compared to Reservists. Steve described: "if you’re in the regular force, all the regular force members have a financial adviser. All this should be squared away! They all have RSP's and they're all financially savvy!"

Conversation grew from this idea that there was a difference in accessibility of resources as Mike also noted that: "The other thing is when you get out of the Reg Force they make sure that you're squared away for all that and they don’t do that for reservists." Ben also added:
"Yeah, but if you’re in the Reg Force and you come back from Tour, you’re still at work, you're good and your finances haven’t changed!" Josh described his perception of the Regular Force:

When they transition out, they have people like at the MFRC or wherever they are, who take their military courses and their military skills and they can civilian-ize your skills into resumes for your employer’s or your potential employers. I don’t think we have that option and we should have it especially when reservists are coming off of Tour.

Discussion regarding this disparity of occupational reintegration grew; often describing that TLD provided adequate preparation for Regular Force members, but left something lacking for the Reservists. Addressing the issue of occupational transition, Steve stated: "I think they definitely should have recognized several rotos ago the reserve problem, because I think TLD the Cyprus portion was probably bang on for the regular force folk."

As different statements were adding to the discussion around the issue of disparity, the issue of abandonment was indicated by a number of participants. Specific to the needs of Reservists however, were accounts that reintegration for reservists outside of operational deployment required more transitional time and preparation compared to Regular Force counterparts due to jobs or occupations that were carried on with as Civilians post-Tour. Here, it was identified that as Regular Force members return to Canada, their jobs as "Soldiers” continue, while Reserve Force Soldiers must take off the uniform and are challenged by the reintegration from a war-torn environment often involving combat, to that of civilian jobs and professions.

Josh noted his observations of the TLD experience describing that when Regular Force members return to Canada, they are given a Leave period that is strictly adhered to and supported. Yet as a Reservist, Josh described: "I had to start work the week after I got back and I know guys that got back after 48 hours and then they were at their Civi-job!" Ben recalled his experience as well,
highlighting the issue of civilian job security for Reservists: "My company had to lay off most of their staff about a month before I came home, and I hadn't really any time to talk to anyone in charge to see what was left there, so there were some worries."

Comparing the experience of quitting one's occupation within the Regular Force, Mike also outlined how "it takes months to get out of the Reg Force because they have this whole system they go through" referring to medical and psychological assessments, financial planning, career transition, "but we don’t get the whole transition." Steve reflected his experience further stating that: "as reservists we're a bit unfortunate in the fact that we come back and being back you're just completely cut off. ... in some ways I envy the regular force counterparts."

This feeling of being cut off or abandoned was mirrored by Ben's account of post-TLD reintegration when he described that for Reservists, "a lot of us, we get back, we have our leave, and if you’re not injured or have an identified OSI or something you get kicked out the door!"

4.2.1 Reservists Perception of Disparity Threatens Personal Identity; Leads to Perception of Abandonment

The perception of disparity for participants in the focus group was also related to questioning one's identity and character compared to Regular Force members. Here, the definition of one’s job as a "Soldier" became a point of discussion due to the part-time nature of one's role as a Reservist versus a full-time role of a Regular Force soldier. In this way, the group reported that TLD appeared to cater more-so the needs of Regular Force members, thereby perpetuating the perception of disparity.

The following discussion between four participants outlines some of the concerns and challenges that are faced when defining components of character and issues of disparity:
Steve: There definitely should have been a reservist element as we got back as I know for you guys who had vocations to go back to, 'cause you go from, you know, when you’re in Edmonton for X number of months and you're overseas and you have purpose and you have a job and when you do visit family and you’re like, 'oh, you're a soldier' and when you come back and suddenly you’re just this aimless unemployed bum and you’re like, 'shit, I've got to formulate a plan!'

Thomas: 'I was in Afghanistan a week ago but now I'm just an unemployed bum; that I went from having a career and a profession...'

Ben: From a hero to zero in two weeks!

Thomas: Literally! And those Reg-Force guys are like, 'I'm just on leave but I'm still a soldier.'

Facilitator: From a hero to zero in two weeks.

Highlighting the threat to identity as perceived by participants in the focus group demonstrates an additional area relating to comparison and disparity. Here, the very definition of 'Soldier' is threatened for Reservists due to the transition out of a full-time contract that concludes one's operational deployment. Here, TLD is seen as way to mark the conclusion of one's Tour, and in the case of Reservists, it may be considered the last time they can still define themselves as soldiers as compared to their Regular Force counterparts. In one instance, the issue of identity was of tremendous concern to Patrick who was unable to complete a full Tour of Duty due to injury. In order to fulfill his contract, he was ordered to carry out his service as a clerk back in Canada, something which came as a great challenge to Patrick's identity and image of self:
I had a bunch of shit I wanted to do with my life and get sorted out after surgery, and one was the focus on recuperating and getting my health back and getting in shape. And they stuck me in the O.R. to work for three months so my GAFF just went through the floor. I had nobody in there to identify with, with anything, it really pissed me off!

Upon returning to Canada and starting the re-entry process, the issue of disparity is further perpetuated due to the lack of experience that others have with deployed Reservists. Leading to the perception that one's contribution is insignificant and is then therefore abandoned, adds to the perception of disparity or lack of worth relative to full-timers. Coming home from TLD, Thomas described returning to his Reserve home Unit: "It’s like I’m the one guy who was on the tour and no one knows how to deal with me." Adding to this, he described an idea presented to him to be supported by a Regular Force unit and its members to provide additional reintegration time while on TLD, yet upon re-entry, the idea fell through:

They shit-canned the idea because they said there is no funding for reservists to come back to work on a class C after they’ve been paid out their leave from their deployment, it’s like, “no!” basically. Okay. And then, so, I go home and I got off the plane in Vancouver and I never heard a fucking word from any of those guys again! There wasn’t a single phone call; I didn’t exist anymore as far as they were concerned.

Steve also related to the feeling of being abandoned: "It did feel like unfinished business as you come back in staggered chalks while half year’s squadron is still back in Afghanistan." Reflecting on his deployment experience, Steve recalled that due to his presence as the only Reservist deployed from his Unit, he was attached to a Regular Force squadron where he didn't
quite fit in: "I wished I had been with the guys actually; that was a whole theme of my whole god-damn experience there was just that I was alone!"

Here, the perception of isolation or abandonment is identified as one of the ways that Reservist in this focus group compare their experience to those of Regular Force members. One recommendation to combat this disparity and aid in re-entry was provided by Josh, to keep members together as long as possible:

The idea of going through as a formed unit, like the guys, especially as reservists, the guys who you suffered with during work-up training and Tour; to go back and have that closure, so I'm here with my friends. We started this and now are finishing it!

4.2.2 Reservists Perceive a Greater Challenge to Re-entry and Reintegration With Civilian Lifestyle After TLD Compared to Regular Force Members

Theme description: Reservists perceive a greater challenge to the post-Tour environment, specifically with re-entry and reintegration as compared to Regular Force counterparts. Recommendations for a TLD-Reserve element for considerations specific to the needs of Reservists additional to that of their Regular Force.

Another area of perceived disparity involves the level of follow-up and after-care for Reservists once they have returned home after TLD. To answer what factors would have aided re-entry, most participants were best able to give examples of what factors mitigated positive or successful re-entry post-TLD, and could therefore recommend re-entry aids. A particular area of conversation regarded the lack of follow-up for, or consideration of Reservists after TLD. Here, all participants provided examples that add to the factors that would have aided re-entry,
specifically with a focus on follow-up, after-care, and reintegration from a Reservists perspective.

Mike started off by stating: "we definitely need a more comprehensive reservist re-entry." Alex added to this point by remarking that for those Reservists who come home to Canada without a civilian job waiting for them, "it would be nice that for guys that are unemployed to a follow-up within the unit." However, no particular system is currently in place to provide consistent employment for Reservists at the Unit level as an example of follow-up care.

Commenting on this, Ben added that he was not expecting employment from his Unit, however he would have appreciated some services or resources provided at the Unit-level upon re-entry to aid in the job-search: "...if you could be put in touch with something... ... if there was civilian job placement assistance things like that, even if it doesn’t really help yourself, at least it’s a support to reduce some of the anxiety." Josh also added: "How you gonna find these guys employment, right? So, they do what they can but I don’t think they’re given tools to help out reservists in that sort of transition." Josh reflected on his own experience and said: "for me and your seven months in Afghanistan you’re too busy thinking about what you’re doing to worry about what about a job when I get home?"

Getting home after a lengthy Tour of Duty with concerns of employment presents a considerable personal challenge. Additionally, while the operational deployments overseas are the same length as the Regular Force, the work-up training that begins about 8 months prior to deployment typically separates Reservists from their families far longer than Regular Force members who have the opportunity to live on-base with their families allowing regular access until deployed:
As a reservist you go off to the training, you're away from families a lot longer than the Reg Force guys because we’re away! I mean, they go to their job for training every day, for their pre-deployment training, and then they go home! And many of us did not have the opportunity to do that, and my... That was pretty bad for me!

Here, Ben's account deals with a perception of disparity that results from a longer period of separation from family compared to Regular Force members. In this way, TLD attempts to accommodate some individuals who have not only completed a Tour of Duty overseas, but also an additional 8 months of separation from a family environment even prior to deployment.

Steve also described his experience of being away from family and observing a disparity compared to regular force members. "Well, as soon as the bus rolls in they go off with their families, and you and a bunch of lame reservists are just back to building 222 to eat pizza and get drunk. It’s very anticlimactic."

Being separated from family for long periods of time adds to the challenges that TLD may attempt to accommodate for Reservists. The issue of follow-up and aftercare post-TLD however, was an area that participants expressed their concerns about as well. Thomas suggested that instead of returning to his Reserve Unit upon completion of TLD, that he would have benefited from some level of forced rest under the care of his mounting base: "At the time I didn’t wanna go back to Edmonton, but now I can see how much value it would’ve been. Something to give you closure and there’s some follow-up."

Ben noted that for Reservists there is a form of follow-up in place although it appears to be partial at best: "There is follow-up; it’s limited. It's three months later when you have to fill out the questionnaire - when you have to go to the social worker in the MIR." Steve reflected on this and noted, "But you kinda get through it like in any military thing. You just get through it."
Ben also noted that ideally, "education for the reservists on resources for transitioning, like Mike said, transitioning almost out of the Reg Force or transitioning out of class-C almost entirely to civilian world, that’s all."

Steve suggested that after TLD some follow-up is necessary due to those issues he became aware of after reintegration: "it would’ve been helpful to have that either in the midst of your leave and maybe even off at your home unit. Something to be like what we are doing here, something to hash out the mother-load."

Josh also added that follow-up after TLD would be ideal: "if they could somehow recreate that in a very nonthreatening environment as a follow-up later on when you’re actually aware of what you need!" Alex echoed this sentiment, but added that part of follow-up would benefit from some level of re-connection with those that we served with: "it would be nice if there was another program that you could have to talk about it with the guys that you were on tour with. Other than that there’s no other communication with them."

Patrick also described his need for follow-up in connection to what was not provided by the home unit: I realize that the onus is on me to square my own shit away but if I had some options laid out in front of me that I didn’t have to seek out on my own that might have helped." Echoing this, Thomas stated that with the Reserves, "they’re neither equipped nor... they don’t understand. They’re not the Reg Force! I just feel like the home unit often just totally drops the hat."
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature regarding the experience of Canadian Soldiers moving through TLD. While some data exists on the British and American TLD Programs, the experience as reported from the Canadian Soldiers' perspective is an area near-void of information. To fill this gap, I asked participants in my focus group: What is the experience of Canada's Third-Location Decompression Program? And to offer considerations for future TLD programs, I asked: What factors in TLD would have aided in a more successful re-entry experience back home to Canada?

Here, the themes discussed have provided answers to the research questions that have also allowed further insight to the needs of the TLD Program and others like it in future. There are two primary themes, both of which are supported by multiple subthemes. The identified themes are: 1) The apparent value and worth of TLD is questioned upon arrival; changes over time with enhancement of personal awareness; TLD is a buffer before re-entry, 2) Reservists perceive a disparity between their members and Regular Force counterparts; creates challenges for re-entry and reintegration perceived to be worse than regular force members; perceived disparity threatens Reservist identity leading to feelings of segregation or abandonment.

5.1 The Value of TLD

In the work of Jones, Burdett, Wessely, and Greenberg (2011), surveys of over 11000 British troops addressed troops' perceptions of TLD. The surveys were based on perceived stigmas and unpleasant deployment events, concerns about settling down to normal life, adjusting to relationships and settling into peacetime duties, and also addressed whether TLD might assist in dealing with unpleasant events. Of the findings, 70% felt going home would be easier as a result of TLD, and 80% of respondents reported being "ambivalent or not wanting to
go through TLD before decompression; however, on completion, 91% reported finding it useful” (p. 102). The research presented here directly parallels the theme that is present in my study, that TLD’s apparent value and worth is questioned upon arrival but changes over time.

In the research of Fertout, Jones and Greenberg (2012), the perceived usefulness of TLD was considered regarding the comparison of those who attended within Formed Units (FU’s) versus Individual Augmentees (IA’s). In their study, the authors referred to all soldiers who participated in a British TLD as FU’s. Anyone attached as a civilian contractor, staff, or advisors hired to work with the soldiers on camps in theatres of operations such as Afghanistan, were referred to as IA’s. Their study investigated perceptions of TLD from the perspective of the IA’s and found that "three-quarters of IAs who did not want to participate prior to their arrival in Cyprus still found TLD useful upon completion” (p. 4). This supports the finding in my own study that created the theme which questioned the apparent value and worth of TLD prior to arrival, yet claimed value and usefulness upon TLD’s conclusion. Here, IA’s can be easily compared to the rolls of Canadian reservists, often feeling parachuted-in to near-foreign groups and situations that are difficult to integrate.

5.1.1 Personal Awareness

As described earlier, a high level of awareness was reported by the focus group participants to have been gained as a result of the TLD experience, allowing the identification of various re-entry concerns such as aggressive behaviours, risk-seeking habits, relationship difficulties and family reintegration challenges, and concerns around emotional inexpression. While awareness was identified as having been crucial to recognizing some of these challenges, the skills to manage them, and the resources to support the Soldier appear to have limitations as well as a perceived barrier to access. In a Canadian Forces report on mental health problems in
the CF, Zamorski (2011) highlighted that issues concerning access to care which may not only be complemented by personal stigmas, but mental health professionals that cater to CF personnel may also fail to consider the additional consequences of the stigma itself "such as discrimination, erosion of social support, and the imposition of an additional burden on those already struggling with mental illness” (p. 4). Here, while some soldiers may have developed an awareness as a result of TLD allowing recognition of new or altered behaviours during re-entry, the stigma of seeking care upon reintegration may be considered a significant barrier to care for more reasons than the stigma itself.

On top of the mandatory Program and time available on TLD, soldiers are offered family reintegration briefings at local Mainland Family Resource Centres (MFRC), however, these are offered to members of the Military that identify themselves as seeking assistance. Additionally, services such as the Member Assistance Program (MAP) offer confidential support over the phone for those interested. While a wide variety of post-deployment resources are offered here including counselling services, the choice to participate is entirely voluntary. Again, personal awareness may only provide the building blocks to individual care, as soldiers may encounter real or perceived barriers when considering access to post-TLD care.

Otis, Dunn and Wang (2009), provided a report on follow-up care in the CF and other Nation's Forces. While Canada appears to be in league with other developed Nations in its ability to provide care and follow-up for its members, be them Regular Force or Reserve, the apparent barrier to care may have more to do with personal stigma against various types of care rather than a lack of awareness. As described by participants, TLD provided personal awareness but not necessarily the skill-set to handle those issues identified after TLD. Here, the Soldier's mandatory participation in TLD briefings and lectures may have provided a better alternative to
building a skill-set of resources to handle one's challenging reintegration scenarios, rather than placing the onus on the soldier who then must engage in follow-up care under his or her own volition upon re-entry. Additionally, contributing to the perception of stigma or otherwise, pursuing care outside of the TLD environment may be more challenging to the Soldier both due to internal biases or stigma, and external barriers such as physical accessibility.

While TLD did not appear to provide Troops directly with the necessary skills to handle some of their challenges upon returning home, the benefit of personal awareness to recognize those challenges did provide a basic tool that aids soldiers as they attempt to reintegrate back into family, occupational, and Canadian lifestyles.

5.1.2 TLD: The Buffer Zone

In the research of Jones, Burdett, Wessely, and Greenberg (2011), TLD was also described as a buffer period in that it was intended to "allow a pause during which deployed personnel could experience a step down from the tempo of operations and collect their thoughts prior to disembarking at their home unit (p. 105). This parallels the theme of my own study that reports TLD as a valuable buffer period prior to re-entry to Canada. Interestingly, the research also describes how British Forces use the TLD buffer as a safe means of offering "a controlled reintroduction to alcohol during an evening social function in order to mitigate the potential for post-deployment alcohol misuse" (p. 102). While the Canadian TLD offers access to alcohol, no reports of limits or a 'controlled reintroduction' were reported by any of this study's focus group participants. In fact, accounts of alcohol consumption reveal excessive use and low accountability. As Steve reported in the focus group interview, "there is no shortage of access to alcohol and there was no accountability of your drinking." The question is then raised as to the influence of fully-accessible alcohol with no limits mixed in a setting that is attempting to deliver
psychological debriefings and psychoeducational lectures. While participants in the focus group reported that roll-call is called each morning prior to lectures and everyone must be present, the resort-style atmosphere of the Cyprus TLD Program may be more conducive to vacation-related activities rather than Military reintegration. The argument as offered by participants however, is that one can "get it out of your system before you go home to Canada." Here, rest, relaxation, and the alcohol-inclusive idea of TLD as a buffer could be considered just as vital in the re-entry process as the mandatory psychological debriefings being conducted each morning. In this way, the buffer zone concept contributes to the perceived value of TLD for Troops moving through it and reflecting upon it.

5.2 Perceived Disparity

Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of this study was the convening of an all-Reservist focus group. While this was not the intention at the start of the research study, the themes identified pertained not only to a Soldier's perspective reporting on experiences, but also the viewpoints specifically of Reservists. Here, it was identified that a number of comparisons were being made to Regular Force members resulting in the perception of disparity in issues such as re-entry and reintegration, follow-up care and abandonment, and loss of identity.

Findings in the literature support this concept of perceived disparity in a number of ways. In the work of Moskos (2005), the author claims that reservists often perceive differences regarding pay and benefits, opportunities for promotion, quality of military equipment, and face the issue of poor support by employers as they return home from an operational deployment. Moskos states in his research that "The recurring theme was that reservists were treated as second-class members of the Army" (2005, p. 665).
Additionally, support to the theme of perceived disparity comes from the research of Harvey, Hatch, Jones, Hull, and Greenberg et al. (2011), who outline explicitly that compared to their Regular Force counterparts, Reservists "were more likely to feel unsupported by the military and to have difficulties with social functioning in the post-deployment period" (p. 666). According to their data, Harvey et al. (2011) reported three key findings that are congruent with the supporting sub-themes that were created within this study's focus group data:

First, over two thirds of Reservists who have deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan (since 2003) report adverse post-deployment experiences in terms of their civilian employment, perceived support from the military, or their levels of civilian social support and participation. Second, Reservists were more likely to report adverse experiences compared with Regular personnel. Last, difficulties with post-deployment social functioning were associated with a significantly increased risk of a range of mental health outcomes. In particular, a perceived lack of support from the military was associated with increased rates of probable PTSD and alcohol misuse. (p. 670)

Referencing the findings of my own study on the experience of TLD described by focus group participants, results outlined in the sub-themes of perceived disparity are supported.

5.2.1 Challenging Reintegration

In Burdett, Jones, Fear, Wessely, and Greenburg's (2011) report of the British TLD, over 6700 comments were collected from personnel moving through the TLD Program in 2008. Here, the experience of the British TLD was reported as the "subjective impression of the process" (p. 620). Various factors were taken into account and recorded for each member asked to fill out the questionnaire, such as combat experience, stigmatizing beliefs about mental health, PTSD, and the subjective utility of elements within the British TLD Program. Until now, a study on the
Canadian perspective of TLD has not yet been carried out using the focus group method as in my own study, however, parallels to the British equivalent to the *Experience of TLD* were identified. In comparison, British troops were asked to complete a questionnaire and comments were recorded that informed Burdett et al.'s (2011) study. Additionally, negative appraisals of the British TLD were identified so as to provide recommendations of that which could be improved. Here, some of these factors included components that would *have aided in a more successful re-entry experience*.

One of the primary findings of the study indicated that psychological debriefings should be tailored to specific needs of those receiving them, rather than a one-theme-fits-all approach. Here, debriefings for individual groups were recommended such as unmarried troops, non-combat involved members, and individual augmentees. Here, one of the conclusions from this study was that decompressing troops "should be given as much choice as possible in various aspects of the TLD process to ensure that it is a step change in decoupling from the rigidity of operations" (p. 624). Additionally, the authors reported that of greatest perceived challenges were those having been deployed as individuals rather than with a formed unit. Here, the role of reservists and individual augmentees was addressed which found that those deployed outside of a cohesive group had greater dislike of the TLD process and had greater challenges in re-entry.

While the questionnaire in Burdett et al.'s (2011) study did not report specifically the *perception of disparity*, some of the elements such as differences for individual soldiers attached to formed units, draws a close parallel to discussion within my study's focus group data.

In Johnston and Dipp's (2009) study comparing Marines and Sailors returning from combat, it was described that each group had access to a separate decompression program. The authors reported in their study that returning by sea provided the opportunity for greater
education on, and decompression of combat stress as the service members transitioned back to garrison when compared to those who returned quickly by air. The much longer return to home soil via ship allowed time for members for an even longer buffer and decompression period among peers. The authors reported that the confined environment of a ship allowed men and women to vent and normalize experiences among their peers, which included reflection on lectures and debriefings on combat stress, and reintegration back home. While participants in my focus group reported that they did not feel as though a longer TLD would have been of particular use, the data in Johnson and Dipp's (2009) study does suggest that a longer phase of reintegration could be of benefit. The alternative here would also be to suggest a longer reintegration phase or course that runs back in Canada with the same members as those who participated in TLD.

Looking at Fertout, Jones and Greenberg's (2012) study of IA's, another area of recommendation that coincides with that found in this study, is that both FU and IA groups ended up finding TLD briefings equally useful, yet within the 'Coming home' brief, which advises members about successful adjustment, a separately adapted or more focused version for the IA's who return to civilian occupations was advised and recommended for implementation. Here, a comparison to Reservists parallels the recommendations of participants in my own study that suggest a more focused 'TLD-Reserve' component to improve reintegration back into a civilian atmosphere post TLD; something that is not as relevant to Regular Force members or the FU's within Fertout, Jones and Greenberg's study.

5.2.2 From Here to Zero: The Loss of Identity

Teamwork and cohesiveness are the building block of many military goals and objectives. Well known slogans even in pop-culture such as "Leave no one behind" and "One
Goal. One Team." or "Never Alone" come to mind as descriptors of everyone working together as a finely oiled machine towards common objectives. The Military culture emphasizes a team environment, yet upon arrival home some members maintain perceptions of a disparity between the Regular Force personnel and Reservists, and even feelings of abandonment, and loss of identity.

Doyle and Peterson (2005) describe the challenges specific to part-time soldiers in returning home and starting the re-entry process to civilian life after operational deployment. The authors show in their study that "the largest issue facing reintegration of Reservists and Guardsmen is imminent demobilization" due to the loss of civilian jobs, a sense of isolation from peers, and estrangement from family and friends (p. 367).

As this issue pertains specifically to part-time Soldiers, the threat of loss of identity, even as described in the 'part-time' nature of the job is significant compared to Regular Forces. The authors also show in their research however, that soldiers tend to report less challenge with re-entry if the home Unit has a localized base with easy access to those who were previously served with. This outlines the importance of peer support and interaction post-tour which may aid in other demobilization obstacles.

Furthering this stance, Hinojosa and Hinojosa (2011) also points out that peer interactions (with other Soldiers) helps to enhance and solidify one's affiliation to that group; thereby supporting the role and belief as a 'Soldier.' Here, maintaining one's identity as a Soldier then suggests a way in which Reserve re-entry provides a component that aids in re-entry. The authors outline here the importance of maintaining friendships and connection to those served with in Theatre also as a way to improve reintegration and successful re-entry to a civilian/non-combat environment. Parallel to findings from my own study on TLD, Hinojosa and Hinojosa (2011)
outline the challenges to maintaining these connections during re-entry as areas to be further explored.

Members of Guard and Reserve units typically see their units scattered throughout civilian society. Retaining connections with military friends outside the monthly unit assembly requires additional time and effort. With families and civilian jobs that demand attention, finding the time can be difficult. Differences in the role of military friendships of Guard and Reserve versus Active Duty personnel in reintegration and the barriers in maintaining those friendships remain areas open for investigation. (p. 1154)

The importance of reintegration into the civilian work force is supported empirically in other studies. In addressing re-entry risk-factors specifically for American National Guards, Riviere, Kendall-Robbins, McGurk, Castro and Hoge (2011) acknowledge the service that part-time soldiers commit to the military while retaining commitments to civilian jobs and other activities. While attempting to operate in two worlds provides a unique and often rewarding challenge to an individual, the results of Riviere et al.'s 2011 study including over 1400 part-time soldiers who had returned from deployments reported significantly higher rates of depression and PTSD in National Guard soldiers compared to their Regular Force counterparts in 3 and 12-month follow-up surveys post-deployment. From this it was suggested that some of the results may have been due to integration back into the civilian work force at the end of their Tour. The struggle that is present for Reservists who identify parts of themselves in both worlds becomes a greater challenge when the Soldier can no longer operate effectively in both at the same time; thereby feeling as though one takes away from the other. Riviere et al. (2011) point out that worry and anxiety about finances and civilian jobs is likely to have been a major contributor to the rates of depression and reports of PTSD, conditions that for many are originally traced back
to a Service related challenge. Here, the importance of resources made available upon return and the issue of reintegration is further emphasized. Riviere et al. (2011) describe that for part-time soldiers:

Feeling unsupported in the work environment, in which they likely spend a large part of their day, may contribute to less adaptive coping with post-deployment stress and higher rates of mental health problems. Another way of looking at this finding is that National Guard soldiers with mental health problems might have perceived the level of support from employers less favourably. (p. 140)

As with many of these examples, the dual role of Soldier and Civilian can be challenging due to the multi-faceted nature of demands that are placed on the one individual. The perception of disparity is further supported by the perceived threat to identity, one which is not necessarily questioned by members that are full-time. In this way, the Reservist may end up questioning his or her role, identity, and be further challenged upon re-entry.

5.3 Implications for Practice and Further Research

While this study was not intended to place judgement on the Canadian Forces or the Department of National Defence, certain implications were determined as a result of seeking to learn about the experience of Soldiers moving through TLD, as well as those factors they considered that would have aided in more successful re-entry. When considering the experiences of Soldiers as they come from TLD, some individuals may seek out mental health professionals to aid in their re-entry experience and reintegration. From the data gathered here, we can now consider factors or concerns in a variety of areas such as family connections and relationships, occupational concerns and finances, alcohol consumption, and threats to identity as a result of re-entry into the post-Tour environment. Additionally, the group dynamic appears to offer a
significant benefit to not only data-collection, but offers another consideration for post-TLD care.

Considering the challenges that military personnel face as they end their Tours of Duty, a look to what other countries offer such as the comparison data presented on U.S. and British re-entry concerns, it appears that access to services and support are comparable to what Canada has to offer, and these Nations also face the barriers of stigma and misconception. What does not appear to be available in Canada or other Nations however, is easily accessed military-sponsored couples counselling or family counselling. Some programs do exist to reduce the strain on families such as the Military Family Resource Centres which are attached to most Units, however these provide a variety of services to family of military personnel, but not the actual members themselves as support services are the responsibility of DND (Military Family Resource Centre, 2012). Additionally, most of the MFRC services appear to be for families that face the challenges of having their loved-one on operational deployments, not close to home. Options such as employment searches, child-minding, support groups for partners, and reference information are all available for the partners and families of deployed Soldiers, but this does not address that gap that may still exist when the Soldier returns home. Adding to the challenges faced by Reservists in particular, once the Reservist returns home and moves back into a part-time status, the access that his or her family or partner once had to the MFRC diminishes, no longer providing the list of advertised services - except to Regular Force members (Military Family Resource Centre, 2012). This overt disparity is a concern and therefore requires further investigation as such a vulnerability in the current system does not appear to have been adequately addressed.
Another area of consideration from this study recognizes that poor reintegration may result in the development of stress-related disorders or attempts to mask symptoms with substances such as drugs and alcohol. Of note, the data presented appears to show a difference in attitudes between Canada and other Nations regarding the absence of any apparent limitation to alcohol use while on TLD. The off-shoot of this relates to concerns of Soldiers' attitudes towards alcohol consumption upon re-entry and reintegration as well. As outlined in the previously presented comparative data, British versions of TLD place limits on their alcohol use while on TLD providing a controlled reintroduction. Comparatively, there appear to be no limits to usage for Canadians moving through TLD as reported in this study's focus group, as long as Soldiers are not be seen as drunk and disorderly or missed their roll-call prior to morning lectures. While some obvious health concerns regarding excess alcohol use can be presented, an underlying issue that may be overlooked in this population is the possible masking of emotional or psychological trauma symptoms during this decompression phase. As well, the pairing of alcohol and any form of psychological debriefings, lectures, or instructional periods would likely negate the potential value of the psychoeducational resources being provided. Additionally, the attitude presented on TLD to allow an excess of alcohol may very likely carry over to the reintegration period back home in Canada. Here, further follow-up and aftercare to monitor post-Tour redeployment is an area that requires attention, beyond the current 6-month questionnaire.

The concern of follow-up and after-care requires further scrutiny regarding the perceptions of disparity and threats to the reservist Soldier identity post-Tour as well. In the current model, it appears that Reservists are given their leave and then are expected to return to the previously known lifestyle of civilian occupational or academic endeavors with a part-time
focus on the Military. While this may appear acceptable at face value, the transition phase of finding another civilian job or attending an educational institution within weeks of having been in a war-zone may be more daunting to some than previously imagined. Here, transitional skills and a greater breadth of job-assistance options must be considered. While carrying the responsibility of reintegrating to their previously known way of life, the threat to identity as one takes off the uniform now appears to be an additional element of complexity. Here, while additional resources with easy access would ideally be made available by DND, greater efforts to network like-minded, or similarly-challenged Soldiers may also be of benefit for the sake of a support structure or resource network.

As reported in the results, some members found it extremely difficult to keep in contact with those they had served alongside. One initiative that appears to be showing some promise at maintaining connections as well as providing a monitored support structure is in British Columbia at the BC Regiment with its implementation of Beckingham, Hillman, Oudomsouk, and Alexander's (2008) Shoulder-2-Shoulder (S2S) program. Here, Soldiers who have returned from Tour are paired with newer, less-experienced Soldiers who show a keen interest in the more senior Soldier's time-in and Tours of Duty. This program is likely the first in Canada of this peer-driven style where often Soldiers of similar rank can rely-on and confide in one-another if need-be. The Program is an excellent opportunity for soldiers to receive support, and is particularly useful for those who choose not to employ more formal resources. Participants in the program are also able to monitor potentially at-risk members such as those exhibiting a change in behaviour regarding absences, alcohol use, or risk-taking behaviours and proactive assistance or recommendations for care can be made. In this way, personal support comes in a
“timely, appropriate, and individual” manner in the form of peer-driven or professional methods (Beckingham, Hillman, Oudomsouk, & Alexander 2008).

Initiatives such as the S2S Program offer an option at the Reserve Unit level, but may also be of benefit if implemented nationally inclusive of Regular Force Soldiers as well. While access to follow-up in this way demonstrates some level of improvement, the incentive to participate may not always be available to the Soldier. Here, it is likely that a mandatory level of participation would be required. A component that would likely appeal to the Soldiers involved however, is that while members would likely be monitored, the format is peer-based, designed on less formal methods of support.

Another factor to consider in looking at after-care is to expand on the use of a dyad and consider the use of groups to provide support rather than the current form provided by DND's counsellors in individual therapy. Demonstrated in this study, the focus-group arena for data-collection was not considered a therapeutic setting, however, the group dynamic did allow a deeper exploration into the experiences of the Soldiers in a relatively short amount of time compared to other modalities such as individual interviews. Here, commonalities within the culture and topics of discussion often meant that everyone had something to contribute. Additionally, the presence of only men in the group likely aided the connection and trust that formed to allow some disclosure of personally relevant details. In the work of Westwood et al. (2010), group therapy was provided for traumatized military veterans. Group trust, normalization, cohesion, and safety were all components of the therapy that were brought about through the disclosure of personal experiences. While strict guidelines and reliance on effective facilitation were necessary for this to occur, the authors reported that members in the group demonstrated greater levels of camaraderie and were able to work on specific problems outside
of the therapy group such as personal relationships, occupational transitions, and academic pursuits.

With the successful construction of themes as identified by members of the focus group in my own study, the group dynamic must be considered a valuable option for conducting further research as well as a modality for therapeutic setting. A great benefit of the group atmosphere is that due to interaction and dialogue between peers, a broad understanding of participants' experiences can be explored. Additionally, due to the group dynamic, the discovery of themes will often result from a high degree of interaction and commentary from each participant, allowing greater depth to a topic and further expanding on complexities of experience contributing to profound discovery.

Considerations here apply not only to Reservists, but also to Regular Force members who discharge and can no longer access Military services. Considerations must also be given to the issues surrounding the individual who discharges yet still requires assistance. Some organization do exist in this realm such as Veterans Affairs and the Royal Canadian Legion, however further investigation into this field is required.

5.4 Limitations

Of note, group dynamics such as those present in this study's focus group have a number of benefits, and also a number of limitations which must also be addressed. In the same way that group interactions can be of use, the pitfalls of focus-group methods of data collections are noted by Carey (1995), due to issues such as participant censoring and conformity. Noting the concerns of Janis' (1972) phenomenon of Groupthink, where individuals often conform to the will of a group, Carey adds that "members often adjust their comments in response to their own needs and to their understanding of their appropriate roles in the group" (1995, p. 487). Here,
comments may be tailored to another members' understanding or that of the facilitator to provide support or encourage others to perceive like-mindedness within the group to fit in. Carey outlines how members may also choose to censor, withholding input or interaction often due to lack of trust or perceived safety with other members or the facilitator, or around concerns of data usage in future. One perceived advantage to asking a group of Soldiers about their experience of TLD within a focus group however, is that the group dynamic present during data-collection likely has some parallels to the dynamic of a Section or Patrol group within a Military environment where trust and safety are high. It is viable to consider then, that the themes and accounts of experience that have been reported are very likely then to be authentic and genuine. Carey (1995) points out:

In general, there is not one, stable, exact reality to be discovered when the focus group technique is used. Especially with more complex and ego central topics, one's goal is to explore and discover the variations in perceptions. (p. 492)

Another particularly interesting consideration concerning the make-up of the group pertains to its composition of Reservists all from within 39 Brigade, a local area in Southern British Columbia. While this focus group was made up of 7 Soldiers that met only once for data collection, each Soldier reported his involvement in a Tour of Duty that concluded with a stint in TLD. For this study, no female Soldiers responded to the recruitment posters, thereby decreasing the breadth of perspective. This however, is quite representative of the make-up of the Canadian Forces as only a small percentage of personnel are female. Within the focus group, each Soldier attended a different Tour rotation from the others, and each Soldier had some variation in position while overseas, suggesting a slew of different experiences and needs upon arrival to TLD. For example, Ben was a Field Medic, while Thomas was a battle-tank driver,
and Patrick was within a Reconnaissance crew. In this way, while the Reservists who participated were all from the same home area, they all had different Military backgrounds, qualifications, and experience allowing the group to be considered a representative sample.

Some of these differences among group participants must be acknowledged as potential limitations as well. While none of the participants reported particularly difficult or dangerous encounters while serving overseas, the consideration of Tour length of one’s operational deployments may have influences on the data. Additionally, the influence of having multiple tours overseas as opposed to participating in one’s first tour of duty may also adjust one’s perceptions during decompression. The type of trade, level of traumatic experience, or even lack of action during overseas service may change the parameters and needs for any variety of the soldiers. In contrast, focusing on a very specific population within the military loses aspects of generalizability of the study which could extend to a wide array of the Military culture.

Further limitations to consider for this study pertain to data collection. For instance, all data used in the analysis were collected at a single point; one 3-hour focus group. Within the group, participants were asked to recall their experience of TLD and report on factors that would have aided in a more successful re-entry. While all participants had been through the same TLD Program in the last few years, and all in the same area with similar lectures and format, some degree of evolution to the Program may have occurred between one participant compared to another, thereby creating a difference in what was being reported on. Overall however, as the experience and recommendations are recollections of participant reality at the time, accounts can be considered authentic and accurate reflections of that which was being asked for: one’s experience.
In the structure of the data-collection method, every effort was made to ensure confidentiality was maintained. Due to the group-nature of the data-collection method however, confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed. As this was stated explicitly prior to commencement of the group and was presented as a risk in the letter of informed consent, it is possible that members withheld certain pieces of information or altered their presentation to the group. As some discussion moved into the realm of mental health concerns, there may have been some degree of apprehension in providing first-person accounts of experience, challenge, or difficulty, and must be a consideration for future studies that consider similar topics or data-collection methods.

Being aware of all of these potential limitations however, the arrival and agreement on themes that are described in this study with such a make-up of participants via an accurate step-by-step thematic analysis further validates the creation of these themes by the group.

5.5 Conclusion

Having never been on an operational deployment myself, I have relied on hearsay and some brief accounts of what TLD had to offer. Studying a group's experience vicariously has the potential to inform further research while filling a void in current literature, as well as provide an account of TLD that informs the inexperienced Soldier and offers some understanding of what one can expect. Additionally, by encouraging dialogue about this topic, programs like this and others stand only to improve the services they offer when taking into consideration the factors that were said to have aided re-entry. In future, factors significant to Reservists to encourage support and understanding, as well as maintaining an integrated sense of identity within the Canadian Forces must also be taken into account through TLD. In this way, the Third-Location
Decompression Program can be of tremendous benefit to all those who serve; be them full-time or part-time; they are all still Soldiers in the Canadian Forces.
References


Zamorski, M. Towards a broader conceptualization of need, stigma, and barriers to mental health care in military organizations: Recent research findings from Canadian Forces. Ottawa, ON: Department of National Defence (Canada); 2011.
Appendices

Appendix A Recruitment

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education

THIRD-LOCATION DECOMPRESSION

- What is your experience of the Cyprus Third-Location Decompression (TLD) Program?

- What factors in TLD would have aided in a more successful re-entry experience back home to Canada?

Participants are required for a UBC Counselling Psychology research project studying the experiences of third-location decompression in the Canadian Forces.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marv Westwood, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, the University of British Columbia. Dr. Westwood can be contacted at: (604) XXX-XXXX.

Co-Investigator: James A. Alexander, Masters student in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, the University of British Columbia. James can be contacted at (778) XXX-XXXX, or by email at XXXXXXX@XXXX.XX.

Please contact James Alexander for more information, questions, or concerns. You participation is confidential and will not be revealed to your chain of command, nor will you name, or service be published in any public documents. This is a University of British Columbia Masters thesis project. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

**Should you wish to participate, a $20 Tim Horton’s Gift Card will be offered to you.

FYI:

MAP: Member Assistance Program
Call us for a confidential talk.
If we can't help, we know someone who can.
24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
1-800-268-7708
Appendix B  Letter of Informed Consent

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education

Consent Form

Third-Location Decompression for Canadian Soldiers Ending a Tour of Duty:  A Focus Group

Principal Investigator:  Dr. Marv Westwood, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, the University of British Columbia. Dr. Westwood can be contacted at: (604) XXX-XXXX.

Co-Investigator:  James A. Alexander, Masters student in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, the University of British Columbia. James can be contacted at (778) XXX-XXXX, or by email at XXXXXXXXXX@XXXX.XX.

Background:  This study will investigate the experience of Canadian Forces members as they participate in the Third-Location Decompression (TLD) program, which soldiers participate in immediately after their Tours of Duty in overseas deployments, just prior to their transition home to Canada.  While some data exists that describes the effects of the stressful combat environment such as Afghanistan, there appears to be little information on the experiences of soldiers regarding their time in the current TLD areas which were formally introduced in 2004 as a concluding element to soldiers’ operational deployments.  Recognizing that the program has not yet been fully studied outside of a governmental influence, understanding the decompression process of soldiers prior to their re-entry to Canada is a particular issue that demands attention here in a non-military environment.  Gathering data using focus group methodology, a review and analysis of themes gathered from the interviewed soldiers will expand current understanding and aid in the construction of knowledge that more clearly conceptualizes their experiences of TLD.  Additionally, highlighting factors that would contribute to a more successful re-entry back into Canada post-tour will complement current literature while encouraging inquiry by other nations that rely on other means for post-Tour concerns.

Purpose:  The purpose of the study is to develop a better understanding of the experience that Canadian Forces service men and women encounter as they move through the third-location decompression program prior to their re-entry to Canada.  Data on the TLD experience will be
gathered using a focus group, to fill the gap in the literature regarding this mandatory process that each soldier returning from operational deployments must undergo. Specifically, the questions that will be investigated are:

- What is your experience of the Third-Location Decompression (TLD) Program?
- What factors in TLD would have aided in a more successful re-entry experience back home to Canada?

The research will be conducted using focus-group methodology. Here, a single 3 hour focus group will be used to gather information in the context of a group dynamic that will encourage a variety of opinions, and experiences. From this, a collection of themes that highlight general similarities among the group can be gathered that provide the description of the decompression experience, thereby filling the current gap in the literature. Success of the focus group will be determined in that each member has been recorded as having made a contribution to the group conversation and description of experiences or recommendations that aid in the TLD program.

Using this information, this study will contribute to a greater depth of understanding in this area of literature, and will also contribute towards a Masters thesis, which will be a public document. At no time will individual CF members or study-participants be identified.

**Study procedures:** Agreeing to take part in this study implies that the information you present will provide a description of your experience of third-location decompression. Participating in this project in the form of a focus group will require approximately 3-hours of your time.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I will send you this consent form and provide you 24 hours to read it and formulate questions before asking for your participation in the interview process. We will arrange a time and location on UBC campus to meet for a maximum of 3 hours with up to 8 other group members. In this meeting, I will read and explain this consent form to you and answer all questions you have about it. We will then spend up to 2.5 hours completing the focus group session. This session will be audio and video recorded, and I will ask specific questions about your experiences of third-location decompression, including factors that may have contributed to a more successful reentry.

Should you be interested, I will contact you to provide a follow-up opportunity over telephone and email. Here, a copy of the full transcription of our TLD interview and an analysis of the thematic overview observed will be provided if requested. I will also ensure that you can receive these documents confidentially. You will be provided 24 hours to read over the material and come up with any questions, comments or concerns.

My goal is to learn about, observe and listen objectively to information that describes accurately the experience of third-location decompression. Using your experience and those
gathered from the group, a more comprehensive understanding of the TLD experience of the program will formulate an informed description of factors that also aid in reentry.

**Potential Risks:** There is the possibility of:

a) Some level of anxiety at describing personal stories and emotions.

b) Some negative emotions while revisiting potentially painful experiences or memories

c) Unexpected negative emotions from sharing something that you have rarely or never discussed.

d) Discomfort due to new insights or understandings about past events while engaged in discussion.

e) Seeing significant events or people in their lives in a negative way after re-experiencing the event and related emotions.

f) Anxiety during the research focus group due to sharing these experiences among other participants.

g) Due to the group format of the design, confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed. Every participant however, will be asked to keep the information discussed confidential, and adhere to the CENTRE guidelines of the group.

To minimize these risks, I will ensure that you have complete control and discretion over what material you share. Your comfort and safety as a participant is my primary concern. If at any point you start to feel uncomfortable, you may tell me so, or just say “pass”, and I will understand that you want to pause or stop the interview. I will also pay attention to levels of intimacy, and any discomfort I notice in you and will check on your willingness to proceed at such times. Should any intense emotions arise during the interview, I commit to debrief these with you, or should you want to continue to explore issues that arose from your participation, I will provide you with a handout at the beginning of the study that includes information about counselling services available to you through the Department of National Defence or outside of a Military context if you desire.

Your confidentiality will be protected with the utmost care. Only the principal investigator and co-investigator will have access to audio-recorded interviews and transcripts and this data will be password protected and kept in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator’s office in the Neville Scarfe Education building on the UBC campus. You will choose a pseudonym to be used to identify the transcripts and to be used in the written report of findings and at no time will any identifying information will included in the written report.
To maintain safety and uphold confidentiality to the best of the group’s ability, all participants will agree to adhere to our focus group guidelines while engaged with other members:

CENTRE Guidelines:

C – Confidentiality: what is said in the group does not leave the group except for the principal and co-investigator’s own research. While you may discuss your own participation in this focus group, names of other members, personal information, stories, and descriptions of events will not be discussed outside of the group.

E – Equal Air time: each member will be encouraged to contribute equally within the group.

N – Non-judgmental listening: each person speaks their truth about their experience; no one else passes judgment.

T – Timeliness: start and end on time.

R – Right to pass: some members may wish to forgo their contributions for a time, although I will always give multiple opportunities to members who have not yet spoken much of their experience into the group.

E – Engaged: while we are here, we will contribute as best we can.

Your participation in this group offers potential benefits as well.

**Potential Benefits:** Potential benefits include:

a) A greater understanding of how you have experienced TLD.

b) Gaining a sense of acceptance and understanding among your peers.

c) A new perspective of significant events that you discuss.

d) Increased comfort expressing previously proscribed or forbidden experiences or opinions.

e) Therapeutic benefit from having been listened to and attended to without judgment in the context of a group.

f) Gaining a sense of knowing yourself better.

**Confidentiality:** Your participation in the research interview will be recorded and retained by me, and participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The results of this study will become a public document in the form of a Masters-level thesis. You are welcome to view your own digital audio-file or interview transcript and may request this of the co-investigator who will give you access to only your own data.
Contact for Information about the study: If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact James Alexander in Vancouver, BC at 778-840-4401 or by email at jamesalexander@live.ca.

Consent: Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time until the study is completed. As a token of thanks, you will also be provided with a $20 Gift Card for Tim Horton’s Restaurant if you agree to participate.

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services (604.XXX.XXXX) or if long distance (XXXXXXX@XXX.XXX.XX).

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this project.

Your signature below also indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records

_________________________________________________________  ______________
Participant Signature                      Date

_________________________________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant

It is important that you provide accessible and accurate contact information for the sake of follow-up and interview analysis. Please provide the best methods of contact below:

(_____)_____________________________________________  ______
Telephone

_________________________________________________________
E-Mail &/or Mailing Address

☐ Check if you would like a copy of a report on the findings, ensure you have provided me an e-mail or mailing address.