



# e-quilibrium

- *“electronic briefs on behavior and health”*

Volume 6, Number 5  
May 2010

## Strong

“There’s strong, and then there’s Army Strong.” “Army Strong” has been the recruiting slogan for the US Army since 2006.

There isn’t anything “touchy-feely” about the slogan, “Army Strong,” but in recent months some critics have suggested that the Army is becoming too “touchy-feely.” The reason for the criticism is that the US Army has launched a Comprehensive Soldier Fitness initiative, which includes a Master Resilience Training (MRT) program. In brief, the goal of the MRT program is to train military personnel to better cope with adversity, with the hope that fewer will develop mental health problems after deployment, including post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Perhaps ironically, the Master Resilience Training program is based on techniques used initially with young children in the Penn Resiliency Program. This University of Pennsylvania program emphasizes cognitive, behavioral, and social skills for managing life experiences, and has subsequently been used with older children and young adults. One of the core components is learning to dispute catastrophic thinking. Over 20 studies of the Penn Resiliency program have demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing the incidence of depression and anxiety in children, adolescents, and college students, along with increasing optimism and overall well-being. The Army selected this program because of the extensive evidence demonstrating its effectiveness. The MRT program will be carefully evaluated to determine its impact on the

incidence of PTSD, suicide, and other illnesses, as well as job performance in Army personnel.

While asserting that mental and physical fitness go hand in hand, General George Casey, the Army's chief of staff, recently made reference to Phil Mickelson's latest victory at the Master's golf tournament. Casey argued that Mickelson's victory was more a product of mental strength than physical strength, given the adversity Mickelson has experienced over the past year with family illnesses. Not surprisingly, Casey is an outspoken advocate of the Army's new program.

The 2009 announcement of the \$120 million Comprehensive Soldier Fitness initiative (which emphasizes physical, emotional, social, familial, and spiritual well-being), along with its Master Resilience Training component, caught my attention because of the names of the psychologists involved in its development... including Martin Seligman, Karen Reivich, Chris Peterson, Barbara Fredrickson, and John Cacioppo. These are among the psychologists whose work I most respect.

Certainly not all readers of this column have or will experience traumatic events as severe as those experienced by some combat soldiers, but all people experience some type of adversity in life. The skills of psychological resilience are rarely taught in an intentional manner, yet are indispensable when it comes to coping with adversity. These skills include managing negative emotions effectively, developing cognitive flexibility, disputing negative thoughts, and communicating in a constructive manner.

Psychological fitness. Leadership. Resilience. Are these touchy feely?" I think not. "Strong?" Absolutely!

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