

WARRIORS IN THE ACADEMY: VETERANS TRANSITION FROM THE
MILITARY TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

WARRIORS IN THE ACADEMY: VETERANS TRANSITION FROM THE MILITARY TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are enrolling in higher education at a rapidly increasing pace. Though there is a growing body of research about this newest generation of student-veterans, what is lacking is an exploration of veteran's social and institutional biography and the qualities of higher education institutions that most impact their transition experience. To address these questions, I conducted a qualitative study about the experiences of military veterans as they transitioned to higher education, observing a student-veteran organization and conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 22 veterans attending a large public university. The research revealed two aspects of their biography that posed challenges when they first arrived on the college campus—social class and military service.

Many veterans suffer the “hidden injuries” of coming from a working-class background—an aspect of their transition that has been under-examined. While the

military is credited with being an unusually class-leveling institution, time during service does nothing to diminish many of the class effects that make higher education challenging for those who were from poor or working-class homes, therefore social class reemerges as an influential factor in the transition. The military has transformed them in some ways that are particularly misaligned with the university, contributing to what many of them experience as culture shock. Adjustment to life post-“total institution” with the nebulous identity of “veteran” compounded the difficulty of reintegration. My research suggests that veterans in transition seem to experience the university as primarily what it is *not*.

As campuses develop and evaluate initiatives to meet the needs of student-veterans, some best practices have emerged. Two of the recommendations most often mentioned are mentorship programs and university-supported student-veteran organizations; what veterans gain through those organizations and interactions is a sense of belonging. This research offers an important contribution for those committed to assisting student-veterans and offers five concrete suggestions: identify the veterans on campus; facilitate programs that enhance sense of belonging; sensitize faculty; centralize resources; and maintain ongoing dialogue with the student-veteran population.

INTRODUCTION

Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are enrolling in higher education at a rapidly increasing pace, in part due to the expanded educational benefits under the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008. Though there is a growing body of research about the newest generation of veterans in higher education, it is often from an educational, medical, psychological, or demographic perspective. What is lacking in the research is an exploration of veteran's social and institutional biography and the qualities of higher education institutions that most impact their transition experience, in the context of this particular historical moment. Thus, this body of work will benefit from a sociological analysis which "enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (Mills 2000:5) and keeps in view that "the social world is accumulated history" (Bourdieu 1986), both the history that has shaped the minds and bodies of soldiers,¹ and also the much broader constructs of national and global politics, economies, and discourses.

The experience of veterans as they transition into higher education is universal, as one instance of "the collision of biography with institutions" (Smith 2008:290) which individuals experience throughout life. Studying transition is studying identity; the initial challenge for the individual is that they do not know who they are in the new place, how

¹ Throughout, the term "soldier" will be used to refer to a service member from any branch of the Armed Forces, not only those who served in the Army.

to be, how they want to be perceived, how they will be perceived. Since identity is performative, the immediate task is to determine how to perform, signal, or play the game so that we will be perceived as we wish to be. Ann Swidler describes transitions as “unsettled times” for people because they do not yet have the cultural “tool kit” with which to develop “strategies of action” appropriate in the new setting (1986). Because people are held accountable for their performance upon entering a situation, without a sort of “grace period,” these times of first contact take on heightened meaning and self-consciousness. Transition is initially experienced as loss—the loss of a place where the individual was recognized, knew how to perform, and the standards to which they would be held accountable. It is a liminal state, a threshold that “results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman 1995:27).

Dual processes occur at this junction: veterans are “creating a narrative” (Giddens 1991) and they are “becoming an ex” (Ebaugh 1988). Anthony Giddens theorizes that each individual has a project of constructing “a coherent sense of self-identity” (1991:51), which is not merely a biography of one’s actions, it is a project that must be “routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (1991:52). The key words are “created” and “reflexive.” Giddens describes the individual-level processing of life experiences and incorporation into self-identity:

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual ‘supplies’ about herself. A person’s identity is not to be found in behavior, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going* . . . Feelings of self-identity are both robust and fragile. Fragile, because the biography the individual reflexively holds in mind is only one ‘story’ among many other potential stories

that could be told about her development as a self; robust, because a sense of self-identity is often securely enough held to weather major tensions or transitions in the social environments within which the person moves. (1991:54, 55 italics in original)

As Erving Goffman explains when describing face work, “what the person protects and defends and invests his feelings in is an idea about himself, and ideas are vulnerable not to facts and things but to communications” (1982:43). Thus, a veteran can assess their military service and then choose the narrative, and that narrative and meaning-making influences or tempers outcomes in terms of mental and physical health (Aldwin, Levenson, and Spiro 1994; Muldoon and Lowe 2012; Settersten and Patterson 2006).

Veterans face additional complexity. “Veteran” is an identity without a proscribed role or performance; it is more accurately a title signifying a previous identity, an earned status based on the past. Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, after interviewing a wide range of people who had left a role that was central to their self-identity, developed a theory of role exit. She shed light on the fact that individuals do not just become socialized into a new role, they must contend with the lingering effects of that former “hangover” identity, both internally and in terms of others’ expectations of them based on their “ex” identity:

Being an ex is unique sociologically in that the expectations, norms, and identity of an ex-role relate not to what one is currently doing but rather to social expectations associated with the previous role . . . these individuals once occupied societally defined positions which they no longer occupy. (Ebaugh 1988:3)

Student is an identity that is problematic for veterans to wholly embrace because it is a less than “total” identity. Students get to choose their degree of institutionalization; the 18-year-old who lives on campus will find the status of student to be at the forefront in their lives, while the 28-year-old commuter student who takes one or two classes may

find the student role less salient, meaning it has less influence on their self-definition, relationships, and behavior (Callero 1985). Many student-veterans have competing roles and responsibilities such as spouses, children, and jobs. They, along with the majority of students since 2005, are no longer what is considered a “traditional” student (Cavote and Kopera-Frye 2007:478). The hyphenated label of student-veteran is, at least initially, a combination of what they do and who they were, but is not who they are.

The military has transformed them in some ways that are particularly misaligned with the university, contributing to what many of them experience as culture shock. Having been immersed in and socialized by the “total institution” (Goffman 1961) of the military, veterans arrive at postsecondary educational institutions negotiating their identity as a civilian, veteran, and student at the same time that they are navigating the less-than-total institution of the university. Suddenly thrust into individualistic institutions after living and working interdependently, veterans can struggle to reintegrate, and may experience life after the total institution as anomic. Post-military, they are likely to feel especially isolated, dis-integrated, and disarmed.

In addition, many veterans suffer the “hidden injuries” of coming from a working-class background (Sennett and Cobb 1972)—injuries that they may not be aware of or able to name, but impact them socially and academically. This is an aspect of their transition that has been under-examined. Recent research on the new generation of veterans and higher education has never made the connection between veterans’ social class and higher education. If class is considered at all, it is in one of two ways: either it is noted that enlisted service members are often from working-class families or it is

mentioned that the first G.I. Bill is credited with helping veterans move up from the working to the middle class, a contested claim (Field 2008; Serow 2004).

This oversight may stem from the fact that the military is an unusually class-leveling institution. While there are disparities in the class backgrounds of those who enlist, the military process of reinvention and reward based on rank diminishes the influence of social class. A study by Jennifer Hicke Lundquist found that not only is the military objectively a “socialist meritocracy” by several measures, it is also subjectively felt as meritocratic, especially by those who would feel disadvantaged in the civilian labor market (2008). The saliency of class diminishes.

Yet time during service does nothing to diminish many of the class effects that make higher education challenging for those who were from poor or working-class homes, therefore social class reemerges as an influential factor in the transition. While awareness of this link is not a panacea for struggling veterans, because colleges and universities continue to search for the best ways to facilitate the success of working-class students, it offers valuable insights.

The topic of veterans transitioning into higher education is an important one for several reasons. A successful transition is much more likely to result in degree completion, which will have a lasting impact on the veterans’ employment opportunities, especially given the current economy and labor market in which post-9/11 veterans have a higher-than-average unemployment rate (Pew Research Center 2011). A successfully integrated student-veteran may also overcome the stigma of seeking help, which is vitally important at this point in their lives for two reasons: first, in some cases the signs and

symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI) may not emerge or come to their awareness until they are at the university and, second, some veterans will have consciously avoided help-seeking while in the military for fear of repercussions (Burnett and Segoria 2009). Recent research has found that student-veterans are a population at risk—just as the veteran population in general is more likely to consider suicide than non-veterans, student-veterans are significantly more likely to consider suicide than other students (Lipka 2011). By increasing understanding of veterans’ experiences of transitioning to higher education, this research will be an important contribution for those committed to assisting veterans.

As campuses develop and evaluate initiatives to meet the needs of student-veterans, some best practices have emerged (see for example Ackerman and DiRamio 2009; American Council on Education 2008; Cook and Kim 2009).² Two of the recommendations most often mentioned are mentorship programs and university-supported student-veteran organizations. This research suggests that what veterans gain through those organizations and interactions is a sense of belonging, defined as “a feeling of acceptance and connection with the university community” (Grimes et al. 2011:62), a concept similar to what Durkheim would label integration and those in higher education would call engagement. “Sense of belonging” in higher education is associated with many positive outcomes, including increased sense of academic competence, greater persistence, and improved physical and mental health (Grimes et al. 2011:62). Yet,

² Although David Vacchi, an Army veteran researching the impact of college on veterans, questions the applicability of some of the models upon which these suggestions are based and notes a lack of empirical evidence that these practices are measurably helping (2012).

previous research has shown that “underrepresented groups” may have a more difficult time developing a sense of belonging (Inzlicht and Good 2006; Napoli, Marsiglia, and Kulis 2003; Walton and Cohen 2007). Veterans also reveal that they are not a monolithic group and there are some caveats about what they may find helpful; we should avoid the presumption that they all want to be around other veterans or that they will be comfortable with “military-like” environments and rhetoric.

To contextualize this work, the next section will address several questions: Who are these “new” veterans, and in what ways are they similar to or different from earlier generations of veterans? What is known about today’s student-veterans, and what makes them different from other students? And finally, what are the larger cultural, social, historical, and political factors that may influence the transition of veterans into higher education? The answers shed light on the cultural milieu that shapes veterans’ reintegration into civilian society, generally; their reception by and perceptions of the university; and inevitably also influences the entire research process, from the questions asked through to the interpretation and presentation of the findings. As the research process produces, in Giddens’ language, one story among many, consideration of the researcher and researched as situated in a particular place and time is a vital component in understanding and evaluating their co-created knowledge.

BACKGROUND

The United States was, until very recently, involved in two wars under the broader Global War on Terror declared by President George W. Bush at a Joint Session of Congress on September 20, 2001. Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan began in October 2001 and continues today. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) began in March 2003; the last troops were withdrawn from Iraq at the end of 2011. Although this has been the longest period of sustained military conflict in U.S. history, only 0.5 percent of the population has served in the military during this time period. To put that figure in some perspective, four million individuals have served in the military since September 11, 2001; in the four years of U.S. involvement in World War II, over 16 million Americans, 12 percent of the population, served (Pew Research Center 2011:76; Segal and Segal 2004).

While these wars have been different from previous wars in terms of the tactics, the technology, and the toll on soldiers, there has been consistency in some characteristics of those who enlist. During and since the end of the draft in 1973, enlisted service members have been disproportionately from low-income or working-class backgrounds (Gutmann and Lutz 2010; Kleykamp 2006; MacLean and Elder, Jr. 2007). Officers, who generally have a college degree prior to being commissioned into the military, currently comprise about 16 percent of the military; the remaining 83 percent

are enlisted personnel (U.S. Census Bureau 2012).³ As in earlier generations, about two thirds of those serving are under the age of 30 (Pew Research Center 2011:78). The military is still overwhelmingly male by about a seven to one ratio, although the percentage of women in the military is rising (Pew Research Center 2011:79). Between 1973 and 2005, the percentage of active-duty women grew from 2.5 percent to 14 percent (Baechtold and Sawal 2009:35); 17 percent of the 2.4 million veterans who had served since 9/11 were women, an unprecedented figure (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). The military has also become more racially and ethnically diverse, but whites comprise approximately two-thirds of the military (Pew Research Center 2011:78).

The “New” War and the “New” Veterans

In what ways are the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan different from previous wars, and how does that impact these “new” veterans? Christina Lafferty, Kenneth Alford, Mark Davis, and Richard O’Connor offer a succinct summary of what makes this “a different kind of war”—“duty tour length and pattern; danger level; and disengagement from civilian culture [and] uncertainty of duration and the types of casualties the War on Terror brings” (2008:5). These factors have taken a different physical and mental toll on soldiers. In previous wars, soldiers have been deployed for shorter tours and rarely deployed to a combat zone more than once. OEF and OIF soldiers have often been sent for longer deployments, times between deployments have shortened, and it is not uncommon for a soldier to be deployed two, three, or even four times for an uncertain tour of duty. Not only does this increase exposure to physical danger, but both Iraq and

³ One percent are midshipman or cadets. Data as of September 30, 2011.

Afghanistan are described as having no “safe zones,” so soldiers are under constant threat to a greater or lesser degree (Lafferty et al. 2008).

One effect of technological advances in armor and medicine is that “soldiers who in prior wars would have died are now surviving, albeit often with debilitating wounds” (Lafferty et al. 2008:5). As of the end of 2011, 1864 U.S. soldiers have died in Afghanistan and 4484 in Iraq, and an additional 14,342 have been wounded in Afghanistan and 32,200 in Iraq (icasualties.org 2012). In the Korean and Vietnam wars, the ratio of wounded to dead was three to one; in comparison, in Iraq that ratio is about sixteen wounded for every one death (DiRamio and Spires 2009:81). While the service-connected disability rate for all veterans is 14 percent, of those serving since 9/11, 26 percent have a service-related disability (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is so pervasive, with one in five soldiers reporting that they believe they experienced such a brain injury while deployed (Tanielian and Jaycox 2008:13), that it has been named the “signature injury” of these current wars, although symptoms may be hard to detect or may only emerge in new settings. As a relevant example, Sandra E. Burnett and John Segoria (2009) found that many student-veterans were not aware that they had a mild brain injury until they returned to the classroom. In some cases, faculty were the first to notice signs that the student was having difficulties.

In addition to physical wounds, many veterans suffer from depression and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),⁴ types of mental struggles that have been labeled

⁴ Two recent meta-analyses have reported a huge range of prevalence estimates depending on the sample and methodology (Ramchand et al. 2010; Sundin et al. 2010). What both studies revealed is that combat exposure increases the likelihood of PTSD and that when soldiers are retested, prevalence rates increase over the 12 months following deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan.

“invisible wounds,” for which about half do not seek diagnosis or treatment (Tanielian and Jaycox 2008:xxi). Iraq veterans are between two and four times more likely to commit suicide than comparable civilians (Gutmann and Lutz 2010).

Yet, there may be a false perception that *most* veterans are suicidal, wounded, or suffering from PTSD or other mental health issues, because these conditions have garnered so much media attention. Han Kang and Kenneth Hyams caution that “erroneously portraying these veterans as ill would add to the substantial challenges they face in reentering civilian society” (2005:1290). It is critical not to assume that they are deficient, flawed or a problem.

Student-Veterans

The educational benefits are a major incentive for many of those who enlist, and this is true even for those who have enlisted since the start of the recent wars. High school students who aspire to attend college may consider the military as “the next best thing to college” (Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell 2009; Kleykamp 2006:286). For some, the events of September 11th served as an additional spark and they wanted to respond in a meaningful, active way: “Joining the military represented some pragmatism but also no small measure of idealism. Some held substantial hope that they were making their own lives and/or their country’s situation better in some important ways” (Gutmann and Lutz 2010:38).

The new Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 entitles veterans to significantly improved educational benefits and has prompted comparisons with the original GI Bill, the 1944 Servicemembers’ Readjustment Act. Although the first GI Bill

is often credited with democratizing higher education and establishing a solid middle class, many veterans did not complete college degrees, instead using the benefits for a GED, vocational training, or attending some college courses. While some claim that the overall impact of the GI Bill may have been exaggerated, it did often improve veterans' skills and job opportunities (Settersten 2006). In the years following World War II, about 70 percent of men on college campuses were veterans (Bound and Turner 2002); in comparison, using data from 2007-08, veterans were 4 percent of undergraduates on college campuses (Radford 2009:vi). Corey Rumann and Florence Hamrick (2009) also point out that current administrators and faculty at universities are less likely to have experience with or exposure to military culture than earlier generations.

These are different economic times than World War II veterans faced, with even those who have college degrees struggling to find and hold a job with benefits, purchase a home, save for retirement—traditional markers of the middle class. The degree is no longer a guaranteed pass to the middle class. Veterans who have served at any time since 9/11 have a higher rate of unemployment, 12.1 percent, when compared with nonveterans, 9.4 percent, according to data collected through the Current Population Survey in 2011. The figures for post-9/11 veterans between the age of 18 and 24 are striking; their unemployment rate was 29.1 percent in 2011, compared with an unemployment rate of 17.6 percent for nonveterans of the same age (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012).

Spurred by the enactment of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the American Council on Education (ACE) has taken on an initiative to “promote access to and success in higher

education for the nearly 2 million service members and their families who will become eligible for newly expanded benefits” (Radford 2009:iii). In a report published in conjunction with that project, ACE began by researching demographics of veterans who are already enrolled in higher education. Drawing on 2007-08 figures, 85 percent of military undergraduates were at least 24 years old, 60 percent were non-Hispanic white, 73 percent were male, and 62 percent had a spouse, child, or both (Radford 2009:7). Many veterans are the first in their family to attend college (American Council on Education 2008). Like other nontraditional undergraduate students, military undergraduates are largely financially independent (Radford 2009:6).

The challenges facing this current generation of student-veterans may have serious consequences. An article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that nearly half of veterans enrolled in college have considered suicide, compared with 17 percent of all undergraduates; 20 percent of student-veterans have gone so far as to make plans to commit suicide (Lipka 2011). Consistent with Emile Durkheim’s discovery that lack of integration and anomie both correlated to suicide, it becomes apparent that veterans’ successful transition into higher education is not only vital to their future economic opportunities, but perhaps to their immediate survival.

This Historical Moment

Because identity is not fixed, but is historically and culturally variable, is “both sensitive to and adaptive to an environment of multiple risks and potential failures” (Archer, Pratt, and Phillips 2001:444), it is essential to consider this historical moment. Given that the military is largely comprised of white, male, enlisted personnel, we should

consider the factors most influencing working-class white men in the United States in the 21st century. Several potent and interrelated influences are the economy, the increasing militarization of society, neoliberalism as a master discourse, and the current narratives about veterans.

Many veterans who enlisted after 9/11 graduated from high school around the time that the dot com bubble burst, the stock market crashed, and the Enron scandal erupted. During the years of their enlistment, real estate values plummeted, oil prices soared, and the Global Recession cost millions of working-class and professional men and women their jobs, with men facing even greater job losses than women. In explaining how the Army, which was failing to meet its recruitment targets in 2005,⁵ had rebounded and was exceeding goals by early 2009, Cynthia Enloe points to a Department of Defense finding that as unemployment rises, so does military recruitment: “Potential young American recruits . . . were thinking of military enlistment as an appealing safe employment haven in the midst of a sagging domestic economy, when money for college was scarce and civilian jobs were drying up” (Enloe 2010:148).

Given the economic environment, the military is an attractive option because it is a steady job that will pay for college in the future and, perhaps, upward mobility. The military is also pervasive in the lives of young men and women, especially those from poor or working-class neighborhoods, in ways that are blatant and subtle. One of the more blatant examples of the militarization of youth is the greater access military recruiters have to high schools and to students’ contact information, which became a

⁵ Despite having lowered its standards so that the percentage of recruits who had not graduated from high school went from 6 percent in 2003 to 29 percent in 2007 (Gutmann and Lutz 2010:202).

requirement for federal funding under No Child Left Behind. Another is the growing number of Junior Reserve Officer Training Programs (JROTC) in poor urban neighborhoods with more people of color and many single-parent families (Pérez 2006).

Gina Pérez has documented how JROTC programs, which have the specific goal of attracting “at risk” youth, upon closer examination are playing on the perceived risk that boys will join gangs or get caught up in drugs, while girls may get pregnant (Pérez 2006). The military message is perfectly pitched to capitalize on the fears, insecurities, and aspirations in these families and neighborhoods where there seem to be few “safe havens” or avenues up and out for youth. The promises of economic and occupational gain are potent: “For all working-class youth with limited horizons, these appear as powerfully seductive messages” (Mariscal 2004). Perhaps even more compelling is the narrative of “bettering oneself” in the military. For young people aware of the messages about being “at risk,” and also being subject to heightened levels of surveillance, the prospect of “learning to be better citizens,”⁶ feeling pride, and earning respect is “no small matter” (Pérez 2006:58). Recruitment messages tap into the desire to be part of something greater than oneself. Consider the narration for an online “tour” available at Marines.com (cited by Keller 2000):

One must first be stripped clean. Freed of all the notions of self. It is the Marine Corps that will strip away the façade so easily confused with the self. It is the Corps that will offer the pain needed to buy the truth. And at last each will own the privilege of looking inside himself to discover what truly resides there.

⁶ The military states that JROTC programs are about developing citizens and are not intended as military recruitment, although there are numerous instances of high-level military officials making statements that contradict that claim (Pérez 2006:61).

Unhappiness does not arise from the way things are but rather from a difference in the way things are and the way we believe they should be. Comfort is an illusion. A false security bred from familiar things and familiar ways. It narrows the mind. Weakens the body. And robs the soul of spirit and determination. Comfort is neither welcome nor tolerated here.

You within yourself. Have no one else to rely on when the self is exhausted. No one to lift you up. There you have seen in yourself invincibility. You now confront vulnerability. You have faltered. And the root of your weakness lies painfully exposed. With the weight of failure heavy on you. You realize you have been overcome because you walk alone.

But finally we wake to realize there is only one way to get through this, and that is together. There is only determination. There is only single-minded desire. Not one among them is willing to give up. Not one among them would exchange torment for freedom. Finally, they just want to be Marines.

We came as orphans. We depart as family.

Anthropologists, historians, feminists, and political scientists have been writing about the omnipresent, if often subtle and unnoticed, militarization of the contemporary United States. Militarization can be defined as:

[A] process [that] involves an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals. Militarization is simultaneously a discursive process, involving a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies and their leaders, and the higher taxes or tribute used to pay for them. (Lutz 2002:723)

Since the end of the Cold War, unlike in previous peacetimes, the United States has not seen a massive reduction in the number of service members, but has instead maintained a large military with ever-increasing funding and capital expended to perfect military technology. Following the end of conscription in 1973, the military became the largest employer in the U.S. In recent peacetimes, almost one quarter of service members serve at the nearly 700 military installations the U.S. maintains overseas, a higher percentage

than any other nation (Lutz 2002:729; Segal and Segal 2004). At some point, the military-industrial complex became essential to our national economy and, bolstered by the ideals of defending our democracy, values, and way of life, there has been little serious questioning of how this influences the health of our nation. In sum, “the growth of a behemoth military and of military industrial corporate power have helped make what C. Wright Mills called ‘a military definition of reality’ (1956:191) become the common sense of the nation” (Lutz 2002:725).

In our everyday lives, we literally and figuratively consume militarism. Anthropologist Roberto González traced the marketing of a single Hollywood movie, *GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra*, and found tie-ins to fast-food kids’ meals, convenience stores, video games, and books, plus the usual product placement in the film, with the biggest product being the U.S. military. As in several recent movies, the Department of Defense provided equipment and personnel in exchange for rights to edit the script: “The synergies of the Paramount-Pentagon partnership were simple but powerful—free high-tech stage props in exchange for a two-hour recruitment advertisement for the military” (González 2010:16), not to mention the manufacturers of that high-tech equipment.

Catherine Lutz uses the term “‘the military normal’—a condition in which science, entertainment, business, and even high fashion deeply reflect militaristic values” (González 2010:19). What is the result? One of the results is that “today’s troops effectively received basic training as children” (Hamilton 2003 as cited in González 2010:17). Dave Grossman, a psychologist and Army veteran, claims that the effect of youth’s “marination” (to use Hugh Gusterson’s term (González, Gusterson, and Price

2009)) in violence as entertainment is that they are being conditioned to be capable of killing using the same techniques as the military but, crucially, without all of the accompanying discipline and restraints that soldiers learn. He describes this as “taking the safety catch off of a nation” (Grossman 2009:307). What is the evidence? Human rights activists and high-ranking military personnel requested that the writers of the television series *24*, which averages more than one torture scene per episode, stop showing torture because “US soldiers were imitating the show’s tactics” (González 2010:63).

Social scientists have also paid close attention to the ways that the media and politicians talk about the military. Reverend Kelly Denton-Borhaug, a Professor of Religious Studies, has mapped the language of sacrifice since 9/11 noting that, unlike in previous wars, service members and their families have been asked to bear the burden of these wars alone. President Bush, when speaking to military audiences, often acknowledged and praised their sacrifice, yet the general public was not asked to sacrifice, but instead was encouraged to go on about life as usual, perhaps visiting Disney World, as Bush suggested on September 27, 2001 (Bacevich 2008).

The president did not call for sacrifices from the civilian population, propose tax increases to cover costs, or bolster the Veterans Administration, but he did the opposite—urging Americans to consume more, asking Congress to cut taxes and VA services (Cole 2005 as cited in Denton-Borhaug 2007).

Denton-Borhaug suggests that the problem with the sacrifice discourse is that it is too easily subject to manipulation. A military that has internalized “sacrificial self-understandings justified through the values of heroism and unit cohesion . . . [with] roots in patriotism and nationalism” (Denton-Borhaug 2007) may willingly make those

sacrifices. As Ebaugh explains, “if a cause is clearly seen as worthwhile, members are willing to make extreme sacrifices to bring it about” (1988:46).

Anthropologist Andrew Bickford notes that soldiers are simultaneously myths and flesh and blood people. They may embrace the mythology to a greater or less degree, but in any event the mythology impacts them in material ways (Bickford 2011a) and the myths are always subject to change depending on the needs of the state. They can be “erased or highlighted,” “valorized or demonized” (Bickford 2011a:26, 198). The narratives are quite independent of the soldiers.

Bickford problematizes the current hero discourse, which on the face of it is honoring and supporting soldiers, as dehumanizing:

Hero worship is a way for the state to create a positive—and politically useful—emotional connection with soldiers. But it also results in an emotional disconnect. In the process, we forget who they are . . . An important aspect of the Hero is that a large portion of his or her past is obscured and unknown—resulting in a blurring of origins, of where she came from, who he was before he became a hero . . . Societal and political narratives of heroism act as a kind of war magic, transforming everyday citizens into something more than mere mortals. These narratives also act as an anesthetic, numbing us to their experiences. And by creating this anesthetic, we block out the need to actually think about what it means to be a soldier, or the need to ask soldiers themselves what they think or how they feel about being cast as heroes . . . “Heroism” is used and heroes created to aestheticize and glorify war and, it seems, is the ideological band-aid we use to cover up the suffering, wounding, and killing of disposable soldiers, the balm we use to soothe the suffering of the families and friends impacted—both emotionally and financially—and left behind. It is the anesthetic we administer to ourselves. They died as heroes, and who can question that? (2011b)

When we cast all soldiers as heroes, we have denied them any contested space and essentially stripped them of their individuality. They become symbols, not people. “The soldier is anonymous, a symbol of an aggregate” (Samet 2011).

Heroification and gratitude may be motivated by civilians' collective guilt at the extreme hardships and dangers soldiers have faced for a decade while the vast majority of us are completely untouched by these two wars. "To assuage uneasy consciences, the many who do not serve proclaim their high regard for the few who do. This has vaulted America's fighting men and women to the top of the nation's moral hierarchy" (Bacevich 2007:26). They've made huge sacrifices and we've made little to none.

Narrowing the focus, the next section reviews literature about social class in the contemporary United States, followed by a more specific focus on family and school influences on working-class students. The final section of the literature review will examine the military as an institution that can be a comfortable fit for young men and women from working-class homes, but may contribute toward their alienation at the university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Veterans do not arrive on a college campus as blank slates. They, like everyone, are shaped by social, cultural, and institutional interactions that will influence their attitudes, expectations, and preparedness. At the risk of essentializing them, it is valuable to consider which aspects of a veteran's biography would influence their ability to successfully navigate and adapt to institutions of higher education. A review of the sociological literature about the transition to college by Regina Deil-Amen and Ruth Lopez Turley (2007) finds that the primary contribution of the discipline is in the area of underserved populations in the United States and their transition to higher education and degree completion. The biographical factors most often considered are social class, gender, country of origin, and race/ethnicity coupled with a student's experience in K-12 school. Because those who enlist in the military are predominantly white male United States citizens from working-class homes, it is appropriate to narrow the focus to the literature about working-class males.⁷

The first section will briefly review the "big picture" of social class in the contemporary United States followed by some important and influential research regarding the educational consequences of class as a result of parenting practices and

⁷ This is not to suggest that female, minority, or disabled veterans (to name a few) would have the same experiences as white men, but that due to the relative homogeneity of the military as well as my research sample, they remain understudied and my own work cannot address their unique experiences.

working-class students' experiences in public education. By the time they complete their public education, many of them will have developed practices and attitudes toward higher education that have not prepared them for a seamless integration into university life. The section will conclude with research that explicitly articulates the experiences and ambivalence of working-class students in higher education.

The second section will draw from literature that provides insight into how the veteran's life-altering military experience and the structural aspects of that institution also may help or hinder their transition to higher education. In several ways, the military parallels working-class families in that both cultivate the communal over the individual, teach the value of interdependence rather than competitiveness, and promote deference to authority and experts. In these ways, the military compounds working-class men's notions about masculinity, relationships, and learning that are, again, not adapted toward higher education.

Social Class in the Contemporary United States

While some may proclaim, or wish, that class is no longer relevant (Lareau 2010:4), other class "believers" see the effects of class across issues of education, health, housing, occupations, and political participation, to name a few. They counter that class inequality is "hardening . . . in late capitalism" (Mac an Ghail 1996:394) and assert that class may seem irrelevant because it is hegemonic, and is therefore a largely unseen and unquestioned piece of the American ethos. Almost without exception, literature that examines class points to the persistence of the American dream, the myth of meritocracy, and the ways in which class is deeply, structurally embedded and reinforced in our

institutions. The mechanisms of class inequality are hidden, leading us to conclude that people are where they are, or have what they have, due to their own individual characteristics, successes, or failings. In the U.S., we speak in the language of equal opportunity. The result of this for those from the working class (or other marginalized groups) is that when they do not achieve, succeed, or move up the social ladder, they have learned to believe that the failure is their own, there is no one to blame but themselves. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb describe this as ownership of defeat:

[The “workers” they interviewed were] people who had experienced frustration, who had suffered from a gnawing sense of powerlessness, who had been treated for most of their lives as undistinctive. All of that experience, which had to do with the structure of class, had presented itself to them as a problem in the structure of their own characters; and so there lay an unspoken distrust of themselves below the surface, a feeling of doubt. (1972:182)

America opens up opportunity to all people, if not in equal proportions then at least enough so that a person must assume responsibility for his own status. (1972:119)

Beverley Skeggs (1997) asserts that class is a moral category bound up with issues of respectability and that tacit judgments based on class— notions of superiority, value, worth—go far beyond economic terms. In her terms, respectability is a mechanism of class-based pathologizing and othering, casting the working class as “polluting” and “dangerous” (Skeggs 1997:1), reinforcing Goffman’s assertion that class can be a source of stigmatization (1963:4). She describes those from the working class as feeling simultaneously invisible and hypervisible, constantly judged by others and assessing themselves. Skeggs describes her own work as “a study of how social and cultural positioning generates denial, disidentification and dissimulation rather than adjustment. It is a study of doubt, insecurity, and unease: the emotional politics of class” (1997:75).

More broadly, in the United States, with our valorization of individualism and the persistent belief that anyone can achieve the American Dream, those who falter must conclude that they, as individuals, are deficient (Sennett and Cobb 1972); any assertion that there are structural, class-based inequalities is dismissed as an excuse. Erik Olin Wright describes this as “the individual attributes approach,” which is essentially the belief that “the poor are not poor because of what the rich do to become rich, but rather because of their deficits in the relevant attributes that would enable them also to achieve higher statuses” (2010:339). In 1958, Michael Young wrote *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, coining the term and intending it to be a cautionary tale set in the future. The idea of meritocracy caught on quickly, but in a form that was exactly what he warned against. In a 2001 article in *The Guardian*, “Down with Meritocracy,” Young wrote, “It is hard indeed in a society that makes so much of merit to be judged as having none. No underclass has ever been left as morally naked as that” (Young 2001 as cited in Goldthorpe and Jackson 2010:96). The cultural climate silences individuals and leads them to “own” their problems.

Similarly, neoliberalism, while cloaked in the language of liberty and freedom, shifts “all responsibility for their well-being to individuals and their families” at the same time that it “assaults” educational institutions and dismantles institutions working “to protect and further working-class interests,” such as unions and welfare rights (Harvey 2007:31, 32). There is an accompanying tendency to paint those who need help as morally deficient. Political scientist Wendy Brown describes this process:

Neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational,

calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for “self-care”—the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. In making the individual fully responsible for her- or himself, neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it erases the discrepancy between economic and moral behavior by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences. But in so doing, it carries responsibility for the self to new heights: the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action—for example, lack of skills, education, and child care in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits. Correspondingly, a “mismanaged life,” the neoliberal appellation for failure to navigate impediments to prosperity, becomes a new mode of depoliticizing social and economic powers . . . subjects become wholly responsible for their well-being. (2005:42, 43)

The cumulative effect of the national myths of meritocracy and the American dream, coupled with the pervasive neoliberal rhetoric, is the promotion of individual solutions to class problems.

Finally, at this macro level, it is valuable to consider Bourdieu’s forms of capital (1986)—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic—which are all related to class positioning and offer a clear explanation of why meritocracy is not actually fair at all:

The structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices. (Bourdieu 1986)

Economic capital, which is money or property, is the most visible determiner of class position. Economic capital influences parenting, neighborhood, and education, as well as propensity to enlist and military recruiting practices.

Social capital is most easily conceived of as networks or connections. The types of networks that are available and most valuable vary depending on social class and institutional setting. Depending on social class, one may know people in manual labor

or people in professions, may have friends and relatives who have graduated from college or know no one who has even attended college. Depending on setting, one may have worked hard to establish oneself and make connections in a particular setting, such as a community or the military, but find that those networks are of limited value in academic institutions.

Cultural capital is often described as taste or “know how,” a disposition; as with social capital, it is possible to have cultural capital in a specific arena that does not “translate” in another. The qualities that make an exemplary soldier who is a role model for others are not necessarily the same qualities that make an exemplary student.

The final form of capital is symbolic—authority, deference, respect, status. Both Pérez and Skeggs reveal that the quest for respect may be more motivating for those from the working class because they are not so readily granted respect. The military may be the institution par excellence for symbolic capital. While the monetary rewards may not equal those of similar civilian peers, the structure of rank and authority are unparalleled.

Working-Class Lessons

A study that illuminates the forms of capital at work in families, Annette Lareau’s *Unequal Childhoods* (2003), reveals the ways in which class shapes children’s language use and the way they envision their appropriate role vis-à-vis institutions and “experts.” Due to differences in language use, Lareau found that children from middle-class families learn to expect to be listened to and conferred with; they have developed skills in negotiating that will benefit them in a variety of institutional settings; and their reasoning skills are likely to give them an advantage throughout their education and beyond. In

contrast, children from working-class or poor families are more likely to adopt a deferential stance toward authority in a variety of settings, more passively receive information without questioning it, and may find the kind of reasoning and challenging of knowledge that characterize learning in higher education to be both unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Ten years after Lareau's initial research, she returned to the twelve families as the children might have been graduating from high school and entering college or starting work (2011). Class-specific behaviors and attitudes remained largely unchanged. Working-class parents trusted the schools and their children to research colleges, gather information, and prepare applications. Middle-class parents consulted with school personnel and friends "in the know," visited potential schools, organized and actively supervised the application process, went over college essays word by word.

Social class continued to matter in the lives of the young people. It mattered in their high school experiences. It mattered in their transitions out of high school as many sought, often unsuccessfully, to enter college. Differences in how much education each young person acquired in turn influenced his or her options in the world of work. Social class . . . [made] a critical difference in the resources parents could bring to bear on their children's behalf. It was especially significant in parents' interactions with educational institutions. (Lareau 2011:261-2)

The consequences for the working-class and poor students were profound.

By attending hundreds of high school classes in a declining urban steel town, Lois Weis (2003a) observed how these differences are manifested. In the advanced classes, students engaged in dialogue with the teacher and they frequently asked for clarification about *ideas*; in contrast, in the non-advanced classes, teachers were more likely to dictate notes and if students asked questions, they were intended to clarify instructions, not concepts. While most of the students at that high school graduate, they are not prepared

to do well on the SATs or get accepted at a four-year university because they have not been taught “analysis, synthesis and evaluation of high-culture material” (Weis 2003a:98). She concludes, “This goes even further than the lamentable situation found . . . in previous studies, and must be understood as linked to the social class of the students” (Weis 2003a:94).

Lareau also discovered striking differences in views of and contact with institutions, such as the children’s school. Middle-class parents frequently engaged with the school—intervening, questioning, and exerting pressure. Rather than deferring to educators, parents would often describe to teachers the special needs and style of their child, expecting the teacher to adapt to the child. These parents were aware of the potential resources available through the school (for example, the gifted program) and went to great lengths to secure these benefits for their children. Working-class and poor families tended to view school as a separate sphere occupied by children and teachers. The educators were the authorities and parents expected that children would receive and accomplish what they needed to within the setting of the school and under the guidance of the teachers. They did not perceive it as their proper role to intervene or challenge what occurred and they did not feel that they had the expertise to weigh in on educational matters or decisions. Parents deferred to educators. Lareau found that on the rarer occasions when working-class or poor parents attempted to engage the institution, they were often ineffective in their efforts. Thus, the children would be unfamiliar with the notion of self-advocacy or the expectation that a school would cater to their individual

need or difference. In fact, Skeggs, in her study of working-class women, asserts that an “individual” is by definition a person with the time and resources to conceive of “self”:

“Individuals” are the product of privilege, who can occupy the economic and cultural conditions which enable them to do the work on the self. The “individual” is part of a very different class project to the one these women are involved in . . . They do not have access to the egocentric preoccupations which are the prerogative of a different class. (1997:163)

Supporting Lareau’s work, Jarrett Gupton et al., in trying to identify the unique issues and needs of first-generation and low-income college students, noted that not only were parents unable to provide concrete guidance, but they also had limited ability to be a support to children aspiring to college:

When students do not have a family support network that helps them prepare for college, then the information burden shifts from the adults as givers to the students as collectors, a role that low-income and first-generation students are ill equipped to play. (2009:245)

Prudence Carter (2005) would also add that lack of role models in working-class families and neighborhoods, what she calls “multicultural navigators,” leaves them without the networks (social capital) and “know-how” (cultural capital) to seriously consider and be able to manage the bureaucracy of higher education. Clearly, the advantages for middle-class kids and disadvantages for poor and working-class kids are cumulative, maybe even exponential.

After two years of interviews and observation at a high school with students from a wide socioeconomic range, Penelope Eckert (1989) identified two prevailing categories in the school, Jocks and Burnouts (categories she tentatively equates to the “lads” and “ear’oles” in Paul Willis’s (1981) seminal work). “The high school Jock embodies an attitude—an acceptance of the school and its institutions as an all-encompassing social

context, and an unflagging enthusiasm and energy for working within those institutions” (Eckert 1989:3). Jocks can be athletes, but those involved in student government or other school-sanctioned activities, essentially any student who has “bought in” to school, can be a Jock. A large majority of Jocks are from middle-class families and plan to go on to college. Burnouts are primarily working-class kids and though they, like the Jocks, accept the importance of getting a high school diploma, they do not “buy in.” “Their alienation from the school is based not on the feeling that school is altogether irrelevant to their lives and aspirations, but on the feeling that the school could be but is not serving their needs” (Eckert 1989:20).

Eckert’s contribution to the conversation is the recognition that Jocks not only gain experience working and negotiating with administrators, they also tend toward hierarchies and competition. This experience aligns with and prepares them well for continuing education. In contrast, Burnouts avoid hierarchy and competition, in part because their lives in the larger community require individuals to pool resources in order to survive, and in part because those networks will serve them well when they finish high school and look for jobs. Tom Nesbit describes how this adaptation translates into a:

distinctive working-class learning style that operates independently of formal training and centers around informal workplace and community networks. This learning style is collective, mutual, and solidaristic. People exchange knowledge and skills, hardware and software, and they use each other’s differences, which then become group resources. And so they develop an expanding learning network: a powerful working-class resource that stands opposed to the trajectory of dominant forms of workplace and institutionalized education that individualize and commodify learning. (2006:180)

Eckert asserts that there is a tacit bargain in the schools—in order to gain the favor and associated freedom of certain roles within the school, the students must accept and endorse the school’s norms and authority. Many Burnouts:

do not feel that the activities in the school, with the exception of some vocational courses, provide any kind of training relevant to their future employment; on the contrary, many feel that the kinds of managerial and competitive social skills encouraged in school activities are dysfunctional both in their social realm and in the labor force. The degree of fit between high school activities and anticipated future activities is an important factor in the willingness to accept the school’s bargain. (Eckert 1989:101)

In essence, schools are adaptive for the middle-class Jocks and maladaptive for the working-class Burnouts. “What the Burnouts learn in school is how to be marginalized . . . High school, therefore, is not simply a bad experience for these students—it teaches them lessons that threaten to limit them for the rest of their lives” (Eckert 1989:181). She described the process as “learning not to learn.”

Because class and gender intersect, interact, and intertwine through practices and processes, “class relations are always gendered and are constructed through gender” (Acker 2006:5). David Morgan describes the intersection of class and masculinity:

We can see two contrasting ways of ‘doing’ masculinity, and these are easily recognized within certain constructions of social class. The one is collective, physical and embodied, and oppositional. The other is individualistic, rational, and relatively disembodied. These can be broadly described as working class and middle class masculinities, respectively. (Morgan 2005:170)

To understand veterans’ positioning relative to the institution of higher education, it is informative to consider the practices and processes of working-class males as they develop through school. A broad range of research has found that working-class male students collectively construct masculine identity through practices that generate a sense

of group unity, belonging, and superiority, while, at the same time, rejecting that which is perceived as “soft” or “feminine” (Carter 2005; Mac an Ghail 1996; Pascoe 2007; Weis 2003b; Willis 1981). By the time they are in high school, many working-class boys subscribe to masculinity as the anti-feminine and associate much of the activity, behavior, and mental labor required by schools with “softness,” inferiority, and femininity.

For working-class young men, the prospect of continuing on to higher education is often unthinkable and undesirable. Having so thoroughly feminized those who “buy in” to school, to even entertain the idea is incongruent with a carefully constructed masculinity. Work by Louise Archer, Simon Pratt, and David Phillips (2001) explicitly reveals the attitudes of working-class males to higher education and “mental” work in general. Like Willis (1981), the researchers consider the men’s “negotiation of (non)participation” as intimately bound with their construction of masculinity. Most of the participants viewed men in higher education as middle class (which was viewed negatively), rich, immature, geekish, lacking common sense, and socially inept—images that were “incompatible with, and derided in terms of, particular (working-class) masculine ideals and demands of ‘doing’ working-class masculinity” (Archer et al. 2001:435–6). In essence, the working-class men viewed university students as those who could not hack the demands of work, who failed to meet the standards for working-class masculinity. Further, they denied that education was useful to them or would be more likely to help them gain employment; attending university was seen as a high-stakes gamble, not guaranteeing financial gain but likely to cause financial hardship. It also posed a considerable threat to their masculinity—the potential to be seen as they saw men

in higher education, the possibility that they would enter a field where those middle-class men had more “masculinity capital” and they would lack the “power, knowledge and expertise to participate on an equal level” (Archer et al. 2001:445). The risk involved in continuing their education was too great: “Put simply, the men think they have too much to lose” (Archer et al. 2001:438). Higher education was “a less ‘reasonable’, safe and desirable option for themselves” (Archer et al. 2001:445).

Another theme that emerged in this work and in Willis’s (1981) was the vital importance of the male peer group, which offered both a source of affirmation for a particular masculinity and a source of solidarity in the face of the school’s non-acceptance of them and their rejection of the school. Among those who would even entertain the idea of attending university, “participation would only be justified or beneficial if it did not entail class identity change; in other words, if you ‘stay the same as you were before’” (Archer et al. 2001:441). They saw changing as equal to betraying their “mates.”

Accompanying fear and anxiety, and perhaps more unexpectedly, many male and female students from working-class homes experience ambivalence about higher education. They may feel that they are sacrificing solidarity with family or friends or that they are betraying others. In order to succeed in continuing their education, they may need to eschew an alternative subculture and identity that served them well through education to this point, but must be shed to achieve in college. In some cases, they will radically revise their notions about what is masculine or feminine, and their notions about themselves. Morgan alludes to this when he describes “the defensive and uneasy

masculinity of the recent arrival into middle class occupations, localities or lifestyles” (2005:171).

In an issue of *Journal of Social Issues* dedicated to exploring issues of social class and education, editors Joan Ostrove and Elizabeth Cole write:

[Cole and Omari, same issue] conclude by problematizing the often unspoken assumption that upward class mobility is an unambiguously positive experience, articulating the possibility that there are hidden costs of this mobility both in terms of psychological well being, and disidentification and political alienation. (2003:687)

Reinforcing that point, Allison Hurst wrote: “Academic success should be perceived as a burden, rather than an unmitigated good, or windfall . . . Every working-class person who is encouraged to achieve individually leaves a community behind” (2010:6–7) and, further, “The competitive individualism required for social mobility through education is a doomed strategy for the working class to adopt” (2010:11).

Gupton et al. (2009) describe the transition of first-generation students into college as “culture shock”:

These students ‘enter an alien physical and social environment that they, their family, and their peers have never experienced.’ This transition is a culture shock and creates a cultural conflict between the home and college communities based on socioeconomic status (Thayer, 2000). Culture shock is an experience that arises from straddling two or more cultures. First-generation students are subject to it as they face numerous challenges in their attempts to move from the culture of home to the culture of higher education (Hsiao, 1992). (Gupton et al. 2009:247)

There is no shortage of literature about the experience of those from working-class backgrounds as they encounter and navigate their way through higher education. The experience is described as causing students to feel alienated and marginal (Ostrove and Long 2007), fraudulent, different, inferior, inadequate (Skeggs 1997:90),

uncomfortable, uncertain, unsure of their own identity, and out of place (Nesbit 2006:182), “very small, powerless, and dumb” (Granfield 1991:336), and “fraught with the fear of being discovered as incompetent” (Granfield 1991:343). They have “the sense of being nowhere at home” (Ryan and Sackrey 1984:119).

The Military

An overarching quality of the military is that it, like prisons, mental hospitals, and religious orders, is what Goffman (1961) named a “total institution.” The qualities of total institutions are that those who are new to them will go through an intensive process of socialization and indoctrination into the hierarchy, codes of conduct, and norms of the institution. Often the new recruits are, at least temporarily, confined to the institution around-the-clock; they are physically and/or psychologically isolated from the outside world; there is no separation between work and private life; and all aspects of life are scheduled (Caforio 2003:262). For those joining the military, this initial phase is known as boot camp or basic training. All the questions that arise in transition are answered—soldiers are told who they are, how to be, how they should wish to be perceived, and the performance for which they will be held accountable. This process is “mortification” of the old self and reconstruction as a new person (Caforio 2003; Soeters, Winslow, and Weibull 2003)—recall the Marine recruitment soundtrack.

Researchers have also noted that Lewis Coser’s concept of a “greedy institution” (1974) can be applied to the military (Segal 1986). Greedy institutions:

make total claims on their members and . . . attempt to encompass within their circle the whole personality . . . they seek exclusive and undivided loyalty and they attempt to reduce the claims or competing roles and status positions on those

they wish to encompass within their boundaries. Their demands on the person are omnivorous. (Cosser 1974 as cited in Segal 1986:11)

While Goffman emphasized the more physical aspects of total institutions, Cosser (1974) asserted that most institutions employed “non-physical mechanisms to separate the insider from the outsider and to erect symbolic boundaries between them” (Cosser 1974 as cited in Segal 1986:12). In essence, the military claims extraordinary amounts of time, energy, commitment, and loyalty (Segal 1986).

In stark contrast to the individualism and egalitarianism favored in American civilian society, the military is communal and hierarchical. This is an additional reason why the initial indoctrination requires such a clean break with the recruit’s previous life and disposition. War, as political scientist Regina Titunik points out, is “the most destructive and chaotic human activity, but it also requires the highest degree of organization and cooperation” (2000:234).

The new military self is a source of pride for many. In a study of men leaving the British Navy, Samantha Regan de Bere, found that the early immersion in the world of the Navy while separated from the outside world developed “naval identities” that were maintained, not merely while at work, but outside work as well (2003:92). The men also came to see themselves as an “us” against the “them” of civilian men, what de Bere labels “symbolic differentiation” (2003:92). There is a tendency for those in the military to see themselves as different from, and in some ways superior to, civilians:

Veterans have come to see themselves as a distinct category of citizen not simply because of their choosing to serve in the military, but in part because the professionalization of the military has produced a strong emphasis on distinction and separateness. Routinely in military training recruits are encouraged to see their comrades as their only sure support system and to view the broader civilian

community that they ostensibly defend as both inadequately prepared for discipline and hardship, and, potentially treacherous . . . Service members and veterans may see themselves as occupying a specific moral world. (Messinger 2008:270, 284)

Since the start of the 20th century, as soldiers have been valorized and held up as the ideal of masculinity, virtue, and citizenship, these notions are certainly reinforced (Belkin 2012; Messinger 2008).

The military also has a unique mission: to prepare men and women for the battlefield. Although some may assume that training men for combat is simply a matter of unleashing their “natural” aggression, that is absolutely incorrect on two counts: first, humans are reluctant to hurt each other and, second, unleashed aggression is the antithesis of the disciplined and highly controlled use of force taught by the military. A post-World War II book by Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall reported that only 15 to 20 percent of soldiers in combat fired their weapons (Grossman 2009:3) and other studies have revealed that throughout history, soldiers have been reluctant to kill. “Man as warrior” is not an expression of some inherent quality, the true expression of men’s “nature,” but rather it is an achievement, accomplished through a systematic process:

Contrary to essential claims about innate male aggression, that “soldiers are born,” an examination of state militarization programs . . . shows otherwise. States must invest so much time and energy into ‘making’ soldiers because the overwhelming majority of men (and, increasingly, women) do not in fact wish to become soldiers, and must be convinced that it is something one should do. This highlights a very important point: states must make men into soldiers because men do not come ready-made as soldiers, and do not come as ready-made defenders of the nation-state. Soldiering has to be made “natural.” By “making it natural,” it has to be made to seem like a natural course of events, a normal part of a man’s life, the uncovering or valorization of something that was already in him from the beginning. (Bickford 2011:219)

And yet, evidently killers can be *made*. Through what Grossman labels “psychological warfare conducted not upon the enemy, but upon one’s own troops,” (2009:253) using methods largely discovered by social scientists, that firing rate changed quickly and dramatically. Reports are that in Vietnam, 90 to 95 percent of soldiers fired their weapons.

One of many important lessons learned from what can now be seen as the gross mishandling of the return of Vietnam Veterans by the military, politicians, the media, and the public (to which Grossman attributes their high rates of PTSD) is that most soldiers deployed alone, met up with an unfamiliar unit, and returned home alone. Before and since Vietnam, soldiers go into combat with the men they’ve known since training and they go through some type of post-deployment decompression stage with those same men. This is the critical social component of training: men develop bonds with their comrades; they become a brotherhood. One of the central goals of boot camp is to construct soldiers who are intensely loyal to each other, even to the degree of sacrificing their own welfare for another. The idea of the unit and unit cohesion is critical not just for the military’s purposes of integration, but also for the soldiers’ survival. By design, a soldier is part of a collective identity, and that cohesion, the “bonds of brotherhood” are the means by which soldiers overcome the human instinct of self-preservation and resistance to killing other human beings. As Gwynne Dyer wrote: “the selfless identification of the soldier with the men in his unit is what makes armies work in combat” (2006:34). The parallels between this description and that of Durkheim are striking:

The first quality of a soldier is a sort of impersonality not to be found anywhere in civilian life to the same degree. He must be trained to set little value upon himself, since he must be prepared to sacrifice himself upon being ordered to do so. ([1897] 1979:234)

In the words of Gwynne Dyer, a PhD in military history and syndicated columnist:

Very few men have died in battle, when the moment actually arrived, for the United States of America or for the sacred cause of Communism, or even for their homes and families; if they had any choice in the matter at all, they chose to die for each other and for their own vision of themselves. (2006:33)

The intensity of these relationships is relayed over and over in the literature:

Combat fog obscures your fate—obscures when and where you might die—and from that unknown is born a desperate bond between the men. The bond is the core experience of combat and the only thing you can absolutely count on. The Army might screw you and your girlfriend might dump you and the enemy might kill you, but the shared commitment to safeguard one another's lives is unnegotiable and only deepens with time. The willingness to die for another person is a form of love that even religions fail to inspire, and the experience of it changes a person profoundly. (Junger 2010:239)

The intimacy of their bonds makes them vulnerable to accusations of homosexuality (Kaplan 2005), both from other soldiers as well as the institution.⁸ “Men form friendships that are not at all sexual but contain much of the devotion and intensity of a romance” (Junger 2010:155). Yet because those bonds are vital to the success of the military, the military provides a kind of sheltering top cover in three distinct ways: first, by cultivating the (heterosexual) warrior identity; second, through claims that the existence of homosexuality in the military is impossible, because they are not “allowed” in the military; and, third, through shifting policy⁹ that defines certain actions by certain soldiers under certain circumstances to indicate a “propensity for” homosexuality, and

⁸ As C. J. Pascoe documents, it takes far less than strong male friendship to provoke policing and the “fag” discourse from other men (2007).

⁹ The United States repealed “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” effective September 20, 2011.

others merely acts that can be neatly segregated from sexuality (Belkin 2001; Canaday 2011). Aaron Belkin exposes the ways in which:

the military has motivated service members to fight by forcing them to embody traits and identifications that have been framed as binary oppositions . . . troops have found themselves entrapped in dense webs of double binds that confuse them. (2012:4)

Soldiers must be dominant and subordinate; uncaring and nurturing; tough and submissive; intimately bonded with men, often in exclusively male settings, yet uncontestably heterosexual.

Judith Butler describes how people construct gender by invoking and repudiating those who do not fit the “naturalized” gender norms. Butler names those outsiders “abject identities.” Abject identities must be continually evoked (to remind everyone of their negative power) and then repudiated (to distance oneself from that identity and claim a normative gender identity). Butler calls abject identity a “‘threatening specter’ of failed gender” (Pascoe 2007:14). Judith Lorber (1995) reminds us that individuals are not the genesis of gender, rather that gender is an institution that creates individuals who perpetuate gender:

I do not locate [gender] in the individual or in interpersonal relations, although the construction and maintenance of gender are manifest in personal identities and in social interactions. Rather, I see gender as an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society . . . and is also an entity in and of itself. (1995:1)

As Michael Kimmel explains it: “The gender of institutions does more to shape the behaviors of the people in them than the gendered identities of individuals who populate

them” (2000:512). In other words, gender is a construction dependent on institutional norms and discourses about gender.

There are numerous accounts that describe the homophobic and misogynistic language and rituals used to denigrate soldiers, especially during boot camp or at the military academies, but, importantly, R. Claire Snyder points out that this produces:

a particularly precarious form of masculinity that always threatens to dissolve. Because armed masculinity can never finally be secured, the Manly Warrior must constantly engage in the practices constitutive of armed masculinity: He must constantly reestablish his masculinity by expressing his opposition to femininity and homoeroticism in himself and others. (1999:151)

The constant invocation of the weak woman or gay man requires an equally constant disavowal of those identities (Belkin 2012; Gutmann and Lutz 2010).

These endless performances of military masculinity and the shroud of homosexual exclusion ironically create a safe space for men to nurture and care for each other. When it is suggested that veterans will never form the deep friendships they did in the military, and especially in combat, it is true not only because of the rarity of the experiences they shared, but also because of the institutional construction, support and protection of those relationships.

Military masculinity also exacts a toll on the soldiers themselves; they learn to squelch or disconnect from their emotions and, not unrelated, they learn to avoid seeking help. Anthropologist Pearl Katz describes the way drill sergeants, as the role models for new recruits, are taught not to show emotion, as emotion was equated with a lack of control and an expression of individuality. Emotions were always perceived as negative or problematic:

Emotional expressions were synonymous with problems, arguments, weaknesses, bad attitudes, and poor motivation . . . A drill sergeant explained, “You’re not allowed to have feelings and emotions. You’re not supposed to show any weakness. Emotions are weaknesses. You can’t justify them.” (2001)

Given the easy access to lethal weapons and a strict hierarchy in which subordinates are susceptible to abuse by those higher up, drill sergeant’s total control over themselves and their soldiers was absolutely essential; unpredictable behavior was unacceptable. They learned to respond to recruits’ personal problems or illness by telling them, “Just suck it up and keep on going” (Katz 1990:471). There is no space for self-reflection or individual needs. As one drill sergeant explained, “If you are not in step, you learn to try to become invisible” (Katz 1990:472). Paul Higate (2001) has also noted the tendency to treat the body as a machine, therefore without emotion or certainly not willing to expose emotion.

Soldiers learn to suppress feelings of horror, fear, and helplessness while “in theater” as an adaptation essential for their functioning and, ultimately, their survival. Ironically, the inability to express those emotions as part of the processing of wartime experience and return to civilian life may damage relationships and distance soldiers from the very support systems they need (Lambert and Morgan 2009:244–5). This seems to go beyond the usual assertion that soldiers are reluctant to seek help for physical or emotional problems due to stigma, instead indicating that soldiers may become detached from their own needs, learning to “suck them up” without actually being aware of them; stated differently, they are “lacking a language with which to express distress” which results in a failure to notice their own distress or that of others (Green et al. 2010:1484).

For service members and veterans, the issue of stigma, especially around issues of mental health, is pervasive and perhaps cannot be overstated. A 2006 study reported that 60 percent of veterans who screened positive for PTSD, generalized anxiety, or depression will not seek treatment (Hoge, Auchterlonie, and Milliken 2006:1023, 1031). Soldiers with these problems are correctly perceiving negative public perceptions of those with psychological issues and, to avoid being perceived in that way, soldiers do not disclose these sorts of problems (Greene-Shortridge, Britt, and Castro 2007). Men, in general, and military men, in particular, are reluctant to seek help because they believe it is a sign of weakness and it does not fit with their notions of masculinity (Lambert and Morgan 2009; O'Brien, Hunt, and Hart 2005).

There are several external factors that may prevent veterans from seeking treatment. The military prescription for pain or hardship is “man up” (Brenner et al. 2008) and there is evidence that those who seek help while they are still actively serving are punished or dismissed (Zwerdling 2007). Men would not seek treatment or even admit they were struggling for fear that their fellow soldiers would see them as “not ‘man enough’ to stomach war . . . less than ‘real marines’,” a message sometimes echoed by their superiors (Enloe 2010:206). Soldiers may get caught in a downward cycle as the shame of needing help increases distress and isolation and decreases the likelihood of seeking and complying with treatment (Nash, Silva, and Litz 2009).

After several years in the military, men have been changed. They have become accustomed to a highly structured environment, learned to give and receive orders, been trained and drilled in the “right” way to do things, become integrated into a cohesive and

interdependent unit, walked the tightrope of a complex performance of military masculinity, developed camaraderie, and learned to suppress their emotions. And then, one day, without any fanfare, all of that is gone. “It is a self-perpetuating cycle of ‘creating warriors who . . . must ultimately reenter a larger civilian culture in which warriors values are minimally adaptive’” (Brooks 2001:208 as cited in Stalides 2008:12).

The refrain of veterans throughout the ages is “nobody understands,” except, of course, their military brothers. Soldiers have been “mortified,” made into (military) men through rites of passage, and then this new person is thrust back into the civilian world without all of the institutional structure, symbols, and support that made that military identity make sense. In a study of men who had left the British Navy, Samantha Regan de Bere wrote:

For every serving man and woman, much time, energy, and money is given over by the military to create and sustain a military persona . . . But there is no assistance with discarding this military persona, nor any help in building the necessary new social identity. If this task is to be accomplished, it is to be accomplished only by the servicemen or women themselves, as well as, perhaps, by their families and friends. (2003:101)

Soldiers are made, but not unmade. Drawing comparisons with another group that is cast out into the world after existing within a total institution, researchers have found that prisoners, like veterans, often suffer from depression and thoughts of suicide (Ekland-Olson et al. 1983). Although it would seem that being released from prison would be an unmitigated good in their lives, ex-prisoners discover that nearly every aspect of their lives must change—how they talk, eat, sleep and dress, how to plan their day. No matter how prepared they feel or eager they are to leave, they find that they are “strangers in a strange land,” isolated, alienated, and in limbo. “The ironic surprise about dreaming

following a stay in prison is that while inside one dreams about the outside, and on the outside one dreams of being back in prison” (Ekland-Olson et al. 1983:257).

Having reviewed literature that explores two salient aspects of the veterans’ biographies, social class and military, the next section will describe the methods used to conduct the research.

METHODS

In 2009 and 2010, I conducted a qualitative study that explored the experiences of military veterans as they transitioned to higher education, allowing them to share their own lived experience and sense making.

Methodology

Because I started the research knowing nothing about student-veterans at a university and, therefore, having no basis for developing hypotheses about them, I chose to use grounded theory (Charmaz 2000). I went through an inductive process of collecting data, immersion in the data, tentatively developing analysis and theory through memo-writing, and then circling back to the data and analysis to refine the theory. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed and preliminarily coded, allowing themes, categories, and analysis to emerge. Following a deeper immersion in the data, several strong, consistent themes became clear. Counter examples (in other words, student-veterans whose transition experience was different from the majority, who did not “fit” my claims) were also examined to see what they revealed. The analysis sections are an explication of these themes, with material from field observations and interviews as evidence and substantiation of analytical claims.

I started the project with a strong sense that going from the military to the life of a college undergrad would be a major shift in veterans’ lives, requiring them to adapt and

to negotiate their new role. Throughout the research process, I paid close attention to how they revealed or concealed themselves through their language; what they talked about and what was not said; and how they talked about others. I wanted to know what their challenges were and what it is they wanted and needed. I began by wondering, “What is happening here?” (Charmaz 1995:32).

Researchers using grounded theory acknowledge that their own experiences, values, and knowledge will inevitably influence what they see, how they interpret it, what questions they ask, and so on. The research participants also bring their own unique understandings and experiences to the situation. Knowledge is co-constructed—it emerges through the process of communication and interaction. Karen Rosenblum (1987) describes the numerous ways in which an interview is not a typical interaction: the researcher is essentially in control, as opposed to the usual give-and-take of conversation; although the participant may be a complete stranger, the researcher will seek intimate, or at least not self-evident, information; the researcher will try to strike a balance between professionalism and sociability. The interview is “simultaneously personal and impersonal” (Rosenblum 1987:396).

Michael Schwalbe and Michelle Wolkomir suggest that men, specifically, may perceive the interview “as both an opportunity for signifying masculinity and a peculiar type of encounter in which masculinity is threatened” (2001:91). Yet, face work in no way invalidates the data; rather, it is data. As such, what I discovered is one interpretation among many possible interpretations. As Kathy Charmaz describes it: “The product is

more like a painting than a photograph . . . an ‘artful product’ of objectivist description, careful organization, and interpretive commentary” (2000:522).

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the university’s Human Subjects Review Board in the fall of 2009, I began my research by attending a picnic with veterans who are members of a student veterans’ organization at a large public university in a mid-Atlantic metropolitan area. I also took field notes at a more business-like meeting of the organization held on campus. In both settings, I kept my interaction as minimal as socially comfortable. To recruit participants for semi-structured interviews and focus groups, I asked the group’s president if he would send an email to the organization’s listserv, with the criteria for inclusion being that the individual had to have served either active duty or in the reserves since September 11th, 2001 and they had to be currently enrolled at the university. This was followed, unexpectedly, by snowball sampling, as some participants spontaneously provided me with contact information for others who might be willing to be interviewed. After an initial round of interviews, the president of the Student Veterans Club¹⁰ sent my recruitment email again, but this second time added his own “endorsement”:

Julie Anderson, a member of the Student Veterans Club, has been performing research on the experiences of post 9/11 veterans. Please consider helping her. The interviews are non-intrusive and she is trustworthy.¹¹

¹⁰ The name of the organization and the names and specific biographical details of all participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

¹¹ It is interesting to consider if this description of the interviews as non-intrusive and me as trustworthy are equivalent to stating that I do not push respondents to go “off script” or, in other words, they are able to maintain and present their constructed narrative without threat.

After the interviews were complete, I attended a kick-off meeting of the Student Veterans Club at the start of the 2010-2011 academic year and I have remained somewhat aware of the organization's leadership and activities through the group's Facebook page.

The Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was comprised of open-ended questions that generally covered three areas. First, I asked about their reasons for joining the military (as well as which branch, assignments, and deployments). Second, I asked about their decision to separate from the military, their feelings about separation, and how they would rate the helpfulness of the military's transition assistance program. Finally, I asked them to describe their decision to enroll in the university and their early experiences at the university, including: the amount of veteran-specific information they received; how they experienced their first days and weeks on campus; if they felt they had to change anything about themselves; and their decision to disclose that they are a veteran and, if so, the reactions to their disclosure. I ended each interview by asking what would make things easier for veterans when they first start at the university.

Research Participants

In 2009-2010, I interviewed 22 veterans in 17 individual interviews, one interview with a couple, one interview with two female veterans, and a focus group with five male veterans (with four of the five participants later being interviewed alone). Although one man I interviewed met the research criteria, he was also a university employee in an office that assisted veterans, and he spoke with me in that capacity. Two

interview participants indicated on the consent form that they had sustained a brain injury that may compromise their ability to consent; as agreed upon with the university's review board, I proceeded with the interview but have not used any of the data. I did not ask for specific demographic information, but instead noted any specific details that emerged during the course of the interview.¹²

There were sixteen male and three female participants.¹³ Ten had served in the Army, six in the Marines, and one each in the Air Force, Navy, and National Guard. All but two participants had served as enlisted personnel. Six had enlisted or were in ROTC before September 11th, with the remaining thirteen enlisting after.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, of those who had been deployed overseas: twelve had been to Iraq (with the majority of them deploying there two or three times), four to Afghanistan, and there were a handful of countries throughout Europe and Asia. Several individuals did more than one type of job over the course of their service; the most common MOS (military occupational specialty) was infantry (six participants), followed by counterintelligence/interrogator, communications, public affairs/relations, and supply and logistics (which each had two participants). Most participants were either married or engaged at the time of the interview, two had been divorced, and four mentioned they had children. Although many veterans did not specifically state their age, of those who did, they ranged in age from 22 to 45, with a median age of 27 years old.

¹² An unfortunate result of this is that I do not know the race/ethnicity of participants.

¹³ Figures will only total 19 because the data from three of the 22 participants (the university employee as well as the two with brain injuries) were not included.

¹⁴ The participants who enlisted after 9/11 were, in many cases, just finishing their reserve commitment at the time of the interview. The standard contract for enlisted service members usually involves a commitment to four years active duty, followed by four years in the reserves. Those in the reserves can be "recalled" to active duty, a rarity in peacetimes, but not in the past decade.

Of all the research participants, only two did not mention attending college at some point prior to their current enrollment at the university. Three research participants had earned bachelor's degrees and five had earned associate's degrees before starting at the university. Of the three participants with bachelor's degrees: two of them (both women) earned those degrees prior to their military service; the third enlisted right after high school, separated to earn his bachelor's degree, and returned to a career as a military officer. Of the five participants with associate's degrees: one earned the degree prior to enlistment, three earned them during enlistment, and one earned it after separating from the military. Many of the participants had taken college courses during their enlistment. Several participants attended community college after their separation from the military, either to establish in-state residency or because they had missed the application deadline to begin immediately at the university.

Comparison of University Student-Veterans with the University Population

Those who participated in the research reflect the demographics of the military fairly well, but differ from the university's student population. To make some comparisons between the university's student-veterans and its general population, I have obtained data from the university's 2008-2009 Factbook¹⁵ and compared it with demographic data collected from university veterans responding to a Military Liaison Office questionnaire in early 2009 (n=274). While there is no reason to assume that the 274 student-veterans who responded to the university questionnaire are representative, it

¹⁵ Because approximately three-quarters of veterans are enrolled as undergraduates, I compared the veteran demographics with those of undergraduate students.

is also difficult to imagine that there is systematic bias; in any case, the comparison is intended merely to suggest general patterns, not as a rigorous analysis.

The comparison reveals that the student-veteran population at the university differs in several ways. While about three-quarters of all undergraduate students are under the age of 25, only one-quarter of veterans are under 25. Another 25 percent of veterans are between the ages of 25 and 30 and nearly half are over the age of 30. Veterans are usually closer to the age of graduate students, but they are primarily among undergraduates. This issue is clearly salient to student-veterans; every person I interviewed brought up their difference in age from most of their classmates.

When comparing racial and ethnic self-identification, the percentage of Asian veteran survey respondents was less than half of that in the university population, while Hispanics and whites were both substantially higher in the veteran population compared to all undergraduate students.

Although the Factbook did not include information about marital status or numbers of disabled students, the Military Liaison Office questionnaire did. Of the veteran survey respondents, almost 60 percent were married, divorced or separated. Nearly 25 percent of the respondents have a service-connected disability rating from Veterans Affairs. It seems safe to speculate that these numbers are both significantly higher than in the general undergraduate student population.

In brief, the veterans are older, and more likely to be white, male, married and disabled than their fellow undergraduates.

Limitations

As is often the case with qualitative research, my work will have limited claims of generalizability. Because I found participants through the Student-Veterans Club listserv, they are not likely to represent the population of student-veterans at the university. To be included on the listserv, the students had to proactively make a connection with the club. Those who were excluded might not be on the listserv because they were intentionally avoiding other veterans or the club, or they did not even know the club existed.¹⁶ I was not able to speak with any veterans who had dropped out due to an unsuccessful transition, although that would have provided another important perspective. However, my findings are quite consistent with other recent qualitative research about student-veterans (see, for example, Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell 2009; American Council on Education 2008; Cook and Kim 2009; DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell 2008; Radford 2011; Stalides 2008).

The choice to narrow my focus to white, male, prior enlisted veterans has the advantage that these demographics reflect that majority of veterans in general, therefore they comprise the majority of student-veterans. Unfortunately I cannot speak to the experiences of female veterans,¹⁷ disabled veterans,¹⁸ or the divergent experiences of racial or ethnic minorities, although I have no doubt that there are important differences in their transition that are worth understanding. The three women I spoke with were quite different from the men: of the three research participants who had received bachelor's

¹⁶ At the time of my interviews, the university was unable to identify veterans, so there was no way to communicate with them to let them know about the Military Liaison Office or the Student-Veterans Club. Veterans tended to sort of stumble across these things or learn about them from other veterans.

¹⁷ (for an article about female student-veterans, see Baechtold and Sawal 2009)

¹⁸ (for an article about disabled student-veterans, see DiRamio and Spires 2009)

degrees before their military service and were currently pursuing graduate degrees, two of them were women; of the two participants who had been officers, one of them was a woman. The women also spoke of different constraints and freedoms than the men. As civilians, they became more aware of their appearance and clothing; when they were wearing a uniform just like everyone else's, they had been relieved of having to ponder what their clothing might communicate. They also mentioned some positives of life after the military that the men did not. One woman was relieved to not factor in rank when socializing or seeking friendship.¹⁹ Another said that she felt freer to state an opinion or make a tentative assertion; in the military she would only speak when she was absolutely certain, because to misspeak might threaten the tenuous respect men granted her. For these reasons, and probably others, their interviews revealed that their adjustment was somewhat different from that of the men. The omission of disability, race, and ethnicity from analytical consideration is simply because I did not ask about them.

The next chapter reveals the most important factors veterans experience as they “collide” with the university.

¹⁹ As an officer, this woman had some constraints on the nature of her relationships with enlisted personnel.

ANALYSIS

Through the evolutionary process of grounded theory, I kept at the forefront the question of *transition* and, more specifically, what past experiences or institutional encounters most influence veterans' transition into the university. Framing the transition as a collision of biography with an institution, I will break the analysis into two sections. In the first section, I will explore the individual side of the equation, considering what pieces of a veteran's biography are most salient. In the next section, I will consider the qualities of a university that shape veterans' encounter with and incorporation into the institution.

Introduction

What every veteran had in common, whether they had stepped off an airplane from Iraq three days before they were in a classroom or they had been inactive for several years, was that in the new institutional setting of the university, they went through a process of identity renegotiation. In her theory of role exit, Ebaugh identifies a stage she named "the vacuum," which she describes as:

a period of feeling anxious, scared, at loose ends, that they didn't belong . . . people felt 'in midair,' 'ungrounded,' 'neither here nor there,' 'nowhere' . . . taken-for-granted anchors of social and self-identity are suspended for the individual. (1988:143, 145)

As Ray, a student-veteran, explained it:

There's some, some kind of, like, displacement that takes place, I guess, like you're going from one place to another place and you're completely new there again.

Others described it as the need to changed "your whole personality." As Nancy said:

You're just a private citizen and you realize that it's just, you're just kind of free-floating.

I see the lack of "anchors" as related to what Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker describe as "doing gender," a concept they broaden to conceive of as "doing difference," suggesting that class and race are also "done" (1995). They understand gender as "a routine, methodical, and ongoing accomplishment . . . Rather than conceiving of gender as an individual characteristic, we conceived of it as an emergent property of social situations" (1995:9). Importantly, the concept of "doing" is always tied to accountability: "to 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior at the risk of *gender assessment*" (West and Zimmerman 1987:136). Another aspect of "doing" difference is its emphasis on location and situation. "Doing" is *situated* conduct, carefully adjusted to fit specific situations or occasions, attuned to *local* processes, *local* management of conduct, and subject to accountability structures that are specific to the "institutional arena" in which interaction occurs (West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987, 2009). Adding even further complexity, Bickford adds: "A performance may be about . . . a certain type of history, state identity, opposition, and/or resistance" (2011a:191). All of these aspects of "doing" are especially important when considering people in transition. Because the performance of "doing" is context-specific, people feel "displaced" and "completely

new” until they learn the local expectations. Quite simply, they do not know how to “do” in a new setting.

Grounded in the theory of “doing” gender and with a focus on masculinity, Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe (2009) examine what men *do*, as individuals and collectively, to create the idea of manhood and then to indicate that they, themselves, are men. Like gender, masculinity and femininity are socially constructed, and based on normative conceptions that change over time and vary by geography, culture, race, religion, and so on. Schrock and Schwalbe define men as “(usually) biological males claiming rights and privileges attendant to membership in the dominant gender groups.” To claim those privileges, each individual has to successfully perform “manhood act[s] . . . a set of conventional signifying practices through which the identity ‘man’ is established and upheld in interaction” (2009:279). Masculinity is what is being signified by manhood acts; it is the result of how one is understood based on the effective performance of “man.” Schrock and Schwalbe also direct our attention to the ways in which masculinity is *locally* enacted. “Manhood acts” must be carefully refined based on audience and situation, and must involve evaluation of how “one’s other identities bear on the acceptability of a performance” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009:282).

As men, veterans must understand how to properly signify the type of man they wish to project in the new setting of the university. As working-class men, they must also manage their performance of a potentially stigmatizing identity. As veterans, they must construct their own meaning and decide how, or if, to signify as a veteran; at the same time, as Ebaugh reminds us, as an “ex” they will be subject to the expectations of others.

This may sound extraordinarily complex, but we all continuously, and often with little conscious effort, fine-tune our multi-faceted performances to the audience and setting. While many of the veterans initially found the transition to be uncomfortable, the discomfort decreased with time. As might be expected, the longer they had been at the university, the easier it became. Essentially, they decided who to be and how to be on campus, and the transition phase ended.

For the student-veterans I interviewed, the two aspects of their biography that posed challenges when they first arrived on the college campus were, broadly speaking, social class and military service. The following two sections will discuss the aspects of social class and military service that most impacted veterans' transition. The final section will then consider the institution of higher education from the veterans' perspective, specifically the "lack of fit" they initially experience.

Class

Social class is a difference that the veterans did not name, yet class forms a backdrop for many of their narratives. Though we did not explicitly discuss the usual indicators of class origins (for example, family income, parents' education and/or occupation), several veterans made remarks that indicated that they were from working-class homes. Frank's comment was typical:

My parents certainly were not going to pay for it, college, just because they just didn't have the money. They had four other kids to worry about.

Like many students from working-class families, in high school Stephen did none of the necessary steps to apply for college (Lareau and Weininger 2006) and his parents never

spoke of the value of higher education until he was enlisted. In response to my question about why he joined the military, he answered:

The reason honestly I was in my junior year of high school and, ahh, it was over the summertime and I was just thinking, “What in the world am I going to do after school?” Ahh, my, none of my family went to, to college and so the whole idea of filling out admissions and doin’ even SATs and . . . you know, all that, all that stuff. I just didn’t, I didn’t do any of that stuff so I was kind of in a crisis.

While Stephen’s lack of action foreclosed certain avenues after high school, his lack of role models also may have prevented him from imagining himself as the “type” of person who would go to college. As Bufton described it, working-class students come to view higher education as “not for the likes of us” (2003).

Several of the veterans I spoke with had started college before enlisting but did not finish for financial reasons. One veteran had accumulated a large debt to attend a private college for three years before he became convinced that he would never earn enough to pay it off:

I paid for all that you know, with loans, and I’m looking at all this loan debt and I’m looking at the fact that I’m . . . *not* making money . . . and uh, so I was, the whole idea was to get college paid off, ‘cause they could, they would pay up to sixty-thousand dollars of your loan debt, repay it and whatnot, and so I went in with that idea and I told them, “Look, this is the only reason I’m joining the Army, I want to get the sixty-thousand dollar thing.”

Another was prepared to start at his “dream college” right after high school:

I was all excited to go and I did all the orientations and stuff and I signed up for my first semester of fall classes. I got there and I got my first bill and I was, sort of, you know, got sticker shock and . . . I wasn’t even going fulltime, I was only going ahh nine hours . . . So, um, you know, like, I, I need to do something and, you know, just out of the blue, Marine Corps, Marine recruiter called me up the next day and was like, you know, “Can we talk?” And I’m like, “Yeah, sure!”

For Carl, college didn’t work out for different reasons:

Um I joined [the Marine Corps] in 2000. I was uh, I was 22 and I was very heavily in debt and I had, umm, really . . . I had gone to college. I had tried. I'd been hacking away at college for about three years and I was still a freshman and I had a lot of, I had a lot of fun but I was, I was not getting anywhere. Um, I just lacked a lot of self-discipline and I was just a kid and um so I decided to join the service.

His description is filled with the sorts of phrases recruiters might use. He had “fun” but he wasn’t “getting anywhere,” he lacked “self-discipline,” and he was “just a kid” (not an adult/man). In each case, enlisting in the military was the next-best option.

Their issues that are attributable to social class fall under four categories. First, there are descriptions of class reemerging as a constraint; veteran’s narratives closely match the literature about working-class students in higher education. Second, veterans reacted to what they saw as other students’ lack of gratitude, seriousness, or appreciation for their education. Third, the interviews revealed discomfort with the student-professor dynamics in the classroom, which reflect a more middle-class style of interaction and learning, and disappointment in (the failure of) faculty to manage the classroom and other students. Finally, several of the student-veterans described their experiences with university administration as leaving them feeling disrespected and unlikely to reach out again.

Throughout their narratives, there is an undertone of anger that may stem from several sources. It is important to consider that many of them left the military under semi-voluntary circumstances. Even if they had intended to stay enlisted for longer than they did, or had planned to stay for a twenty-year career, the prospect of deploying to a war zone over and over simply became untenable—it was too risky and took a high toll on their relationships. Because enlisted service usually involves four-year contracts, there

are infrequent windows of opportunity to either reenlist or separate. This may cause a soldier to separate even if they are not entirely ready, rather than incur another four-year commitment. The result is that many of them, unlike other “exes,” hold no particular resentment or negativity toward the military and, when the usual tensions and discomforts of the new setting (such as a university or workplace) or role (such as student or civilian employee) arise, there may be a tendency to feel anger toward that which is new.

It is also relevant that post-9/11 veterans in general are angry. A Pew study found that 47 percent of them reported that they had frequent bursts of anger or irritability (Pew Research Center 2011); the percentages are higher for combat veterans (57 percent) and much higher for combat veterans who experienced traumatic events (75 percent).

Finally, student-veterans, like other adult learners, may feel a sense of being demoted. In her study of adult students, Carlette Jackson Hardin (2008) wrote: “adult students enroll in college after spending years in careers and find it traumatic to be novices after having been successful in their occupations. One adult student maintained that such changes destroy one’s ego” (2008:53). Thus, while their anger toward students, faculty, or administrators may seem undeserved or misdirected, it is important to consider the magnitude of the changes in their lives, the intensity of their emotions during the transition, and the university as the place to lay blame in the absence of a more appropriate target.

“I Was Never a Rich Kid”: The Reemergence of Class

While their remarks hinted at a working-class background, perhaps even more revealing is what veterans had to say about their experiences at the university. Though class was never spoken about directly, their comments will reveal that it does seem present socially, emotionally, and academically. Class consciousness may have been dormant or inconsequential while enlisted, but military service did not erase the ways in which class influences veteran’s experience in higher education. Although student-veterans I interviewed often attributed their feelings of loss, uneasiness, and uncertainty to their veteran status and deficiencies in the university itself, their alienation could also be attributed to their invisible (and also unacknowledged or unrecognized) identities as students from working-class families. Descriptions of disorientation and discomfort permeated my conversations with the veterans when they described their first days and weeks on campus. Frank felt completely unfamiliar with college:

I’ve never been to a university before in my life and it was, I said this a while ago, I was probably more nervous and scared coming here than I was going back to Iraq the third time, because I’ve been to Iraq and I know what’s ahead of me. No idea what this was going to be like. I really didn’t.

While they were enlisted and within the closed military setting, the veterans had accumulated social, cultural, and economic capital, and also symbolic capital—authority, deference, respect, status. But their capital did not translate into the academic setting, leaving them feeling disrespected, angered by the perceived entitlement of their younger classmates, and grappling with a fear of incompetence after having been highly competent in their previous role. They were “cultural outsiders” (Granfield 1991:143) or, as Ben described, they had “lost the social graces.”

Granfield described working-class students in higher education as “fraught with the fear of being discovered as incompetent” (1991:343) and Beverley Skeggs wrote:

The working class are never free from the judgments of imaginary and real others that position them, not just as different, but as inferior, as inadequate . . . engendering surveillance and constant assessment of themselves. (1997:90)

Indicative of this, Ray said:

I might get looked at like, “This guy’s annoying. He’s, like, he’s just five years older than we are.” It makes me not want to say things, like participate sometimes. There’s still more I got to learn as it is, but I don’t want to sound stupid too.

Frank also made a comment that revealed some insecurity about his academic ability when compared with others:

I’m quickly humbled when there’s a, when I’m sitting in a government class talking about international politics and I hear a 19-year-old 18-year-old intellectually answer a very difficult, what I what I feel is a difficult question, very intellectually. Smart answer, knows an argument, hits the argument, even forms a thesis statement in a matter of a minute, and I’m blown away. So that I’m quickly humbled, I’m like, wow, these guys are really smart you know coming in to this university. I wasn’t that intelligent, I’m *still* not that intelligent, I’m working on it.

When I asked the men in a focus group if they generally revealed or concealed their veteran status in the university setting, Ben offered the following statement that hints at both class anxiety and a concern about being stigmatized due to his enlisted service:

[It] may be different coming back as an officer and, and going to school, but coming as enlisted you are deemed upon as being too stupid to have gone to go get your bachelor’s degree, or incompetent.

And Beth echoed a similar perception:

There's a stigma on, you know, the whole grunt, jarhead type of stereotype. I think people think, "Well that means you probably couldn't make it in school, so you went to the military."

"I Was in Iraq When I Was Their Age": Anger at other Student's Entitlement

Veterans made several remarks that support Sennett and Cobb's finding in *The Hidden Injuries of Class* that working-class people bristle at what they perceive as middle-class people's entitlement and lack of appreciation for their educational opportunities:

We found intense resentment against intellectuals and students . . . What workingpeople hated to see was students acting as if they didn't care about the freedom that was open to them, as if they were wasting themselves when others so desperately wanted the chance for control over their lives that they had. (1972:234)

Considering that many of the veterans valued college enough to enlist during a war, their resentment is not surprising. Ray stated:

There's no sincerity in trying to get the education. It makes it hard for me to, like, get anything done, too . . . I have a comm class I'm taking. It's an entry-level class and, it's like, there's *nobody* doing the group work. And I'm like, "OK, if you don't want to be here, you don't have to be." I don't know, that's the way I look at it, and I'm here and, well, you're screwing with me.

And Beth reinforced the sentiment:

You come to school and you get in the classroom and . . . you see this guy on his laptop playing a game in the middle of class and you're like, "You don't even take it seriously, you know. You don't even know what it's like to *not* have that opportunity."

In interview after interview, veterans were shocked or irritated by other students who were texting, sleeping, or playing computer games. They experienced it as a slap in the face. As Frank said:

I look at a kid to my left or right, to an 18, 19-year-old or a 20-year-old and you know they're talking or texting or something, they're not paying attention in class and it's really annoying and I think, "Well, where was I when I was 20?" I was in *Iraq* when I was their age, for the first time.

"Sit Down and Shut Up": Students as Insubordinate, Professors as Lax

Some insights into the veterans' preferred and expected mode of learning were revealed in the following remark from Ben. He seemed to want the younger students to accept the authority of the professors and keep their silence, exactly as lower-ranking military had to do in the presence of those who out-ranked them. He had slipped into his animated style of talk where he sort of role-plays. In the following quote he was describing a classroom situation, sometimes speaking as himself, sometimes as classmates (who he calls "one of these college kids"), and sometimes as a professor:

A lot of these college kids, and this is one thing that always pisses me off, they argue with the professor about their grade, about their project, about whatever. And veterans are like, "What do you want me to do? OK. Gotcha', I'm going to do it." College kids are, like, "I don't understand why you want me to do this." [Ben imagines himself saying] "Well, shut up, you're 18 years old, you don't understand a *lot* of things. Just do what he tells you or she tells you to do and you'll be fine." Or they'll get up and they'll go, "Well, actually, I think my answer was right." And if *I* was the professor I'd be like, "Really? Well, my *ten years* getting a PhD says you're wrong. Sit down. Shut up."

His narrative speaks to both a military and a working-class style of learning. Those from the middle- and upper class may have been socialized to challenge and question authority (in this case, a professor), or to conceive of their grades or class assignments as a matter for negotiation, while both the working class and military have been socialized to defer to authority. In the military knowledge is received by subordinates from superiors; challenges to that authority are punished. Veterans found the students who questioned professors disrespectful and insubordinate. Ben also seemed to wish the professor would

“pull rank,” that is, to simply dismiss the students because of his position of authority rather than engage in the negotiation. Carl explicitly stated how surprised he was when a professor did not react to a student who had arrived late, slept, and stepped out for coffee:

To just see that that’s accepted, like the professor didn’t jump down and choke him right there in front . . . I mean, wow.

It seems to indicate a misunderstanding of a professor’s role in a college classroom.

Professors are not equivalent to drill sergeants, and if veterans expect them maintain order and discipline in the classroom as a drill sergeant would handle subordinates, they must be disappointed and bewildered.

On the other hand, perhaps it was those other students’ ease in the classroom and in interactions with professors that provoked him. The university is a place where middle-class civilians have more capital and veterans are lacking the “power, knowledge and expertise to participate on an equal level” (Archer et al. 2001:445). In many ways, the veterans feel that they should be superior to the other students (due to age and experience, which would have translated into higher rank in the military), not equal to them, and certainly not below them.

“I Felt Disrespected”: Failure to Engage the Institution

Like the working-class parents in Lareau’s study, several veterans who attempted to engage university administrators felt disrespected and deflected. Ben claimed that, in some offices, as soon as they saw someone with a backpack, “suddenly you’re a student, I can now, you know, not treat you as an adult.” Bill, who had attended the university

before his military service and had reenrolled, shared a fairly lengthy account of seeing an academic advisor:

So I wanted to meet with an academic advisor. I'd *never* felt like I, I'd put such a *burden* on this person to actually sit down and discuss with me like, [she asked] "Well, well don't you know how to look . . . ?" And I was like, "I don't know how to use [University] Web." There, there was never Blackboard when I was here before. And I, and I told her, I was like, I was, "I've been in the military. I don't, I don't know how this works." [He mimicked a heavy sigh from the advisor.] "Well, here's what you got to do." And then she says, "Well, I'll just do it *for* you then" and she checks off, she's like, "you need to hold onto this and, and you need to pay attention to what classes you're taking and just follow this list." [He was thinking] "Aren't *you* the academic *advisor*? Like shouldn't I be able to *call* you or *e-mail* you if I have any problems?" But, I mean, it was like the fact that I wanted to make an appointment to meet with her, I mean it was like an *inconvenience* . . . stuff wasn't as automated as it is now, you know? And I guess the, the advisor told me, she was like, "Oh, well no wonder! We're on the 2009 catalog. You're still, you know trying to graduate on a 2005 catalog." "Well, how am *I* supposed to know that, you know? I'm just going off of what classes you guys give out and that's what I'm gonna take," but . . . You know, now I have my little roster of what I'm supposed to take and I mean, I'll be *damned* if I'm going to talk to *her* again, she might cut my head off or something. "I don't know, maybe I have the wrong idea of what your *job* is but . . ."

The advisor seemed to assume some baseline level of knowledge about how things "work" at the university, but Bill had no way of knowing the kinds of information and resources she mentioned. Because he felt mistreated when he asked for help, he concluded that he would not ask for help in the future. Similarly, when Ray went to the military liaison with a question about tuition:

I felt, like . . . disrespected . . . I don't know, it boggles my mind why he was the way he was when I saw him and now I don't know how to talk to him.

Another failed institutional interaction created another veteran reluctant to seek help or advice again. Somewhat ironically, that same individual, the military liaison, said that the initial transition for veterans is a critical time: "That's the critical piece is where a lot of

them get frustrated with the system and quit or drop out,” a statement supported by research: “When faced with university-imposed barriers, adult students were less tolerant than traditional students and often discontinued their education rather than adding stress to their lives” (Hardin 2008:51).

There was an interesting counter-example. Randy was inspired to join the military because a grandfather he greatly admired had been a high-ranking officer in the Army. Many members of his immediate family had graduated from the university he was attending, including both of his parents, a sibling who had gotten an advanced degree, and another who was currently attending. Randy came to the university on a four-year ROTC scholarship right after high school. In his words, “I would’ve probably enlisted right out of high school but I got the scholarship so I figured I’d come play the college game for a little bit.” While he was still at the university, he joined the National Guard and, when several friends from his unit volunteered to deploy, he went with them to Iraq for 10 months. At the time of our interview, he had reapplied, “which is not very easy to do when you’re in a combat outpost in Iraq,” and returned to the university to complete his degree. Due to some of the specifics of Guard deployment, there was confusion with the Registrar about whether or not he qualified for in-state tuition and after some “fumbling around” about it, he said:

I was at the point where I was about to withdraw and then my Mom²⁰ got involved and she started calling State Senators and she called one person who, it’s terrible, I can’t even remember his name, but, uh, he thought it was ridiculous so he I guess wrote up a bill with another guy and um he called me once I’d landed back in the States and got like all the like, all the information directly from me

²⁰ It is also noteworthy that he was the only one who mentioned a parent except in answer to my question if any family members had served in the military or in a passing way.

and they were writing that into it where that people in my situation would be covered for in-state tuition if anything like that happens. And it magically got fixed after that. Like I checked my account summary or whatever and it, now it says in-state.

Of course, it wasn't really "magic" at all. It was a college-educated parent who had the cultural and social capital to effectively intervene and insist that the situation be corrected. She was prepared to go public with a potentially embarrassing story of a war veteran being treated badly, which could have been, in the words of the military liaison, "political suicide" for the university. Far from remaining deferential, she had, in fact, provoked state legislation to close this loophole. Not only does Randy's biography hint of a middle-class upbringing, his mother's style of advocacy does too.

The Military

The military as an institution makes veterans' transition to the university challenging in some ways, but interview participants also described a long list of positive effects of their service. They had become skilled leaders, earning them respect and affording them the opportunity to mentor and mold younger soldiers in a way that they enjoyed and took seriously. Veterans spoke of having gained life experience and a broadened world-view. They were proud of having been a "part of history" and carriers of truth, in a sense that those who only know about the wars from the media or second-hand sources are not. Several of them felt that professors respected them and valued their experience and perspective. They were competent, trusted adults with training and skills. Veterans also credited their service with making them more disciplined, focused, mature, and having a strong work ethic, all qualities that were particularly helpful to them as

college students. One veteran described gradually coming to think of graduation as a new mission:

When you're deployed, you're thinking, "Do I have bullets? Water? First aid kit?" That's what you need for your mission. But I realized it's my mission to graduate, and this is what I've got to do to complete my mission.

As David described it to me, he had found his first six months at the university difficult, but "adapt and overcome is our thing."

The research revealed three primary struggles in their transition that can be connected to their service. First, adjustment to life post-"total institution" with the nebulous identity of "veteran" compounded the difficulty of reintegration back into society. Second, many veterans were still grappling with service-related issues. Third, they had difficulty forming relationships. The net result was that veterans felt alone and vulnerable when they first arrived on campus.

"The Military Gives You Everything": Life after the Total Institution

The military requires the death of the pre-institution self and rebirth as a new person, an embodied subject of the institution. For enlisted service members, this process begins in boot camp, which Carl described in this way:

You know, when I, when I first got out of boot camp that was "wow!" Going from boot camp. Three months. Boot camp in the Marines is three months of seclusion. You don't use the phone, you don't read newspapers, you don't watch TV, you don't have the Internet, you don't . . . you get letters from home and cards, that's *it*. You don't get packages, you're not allowed to get packages. You're cut off and you're in three months of indoctrination and training and then you go back out in the world. That was a shock. It was like "My goodness, people are so undisciplined and nasty. Ahh! Get away from me!" You know, that's how it was from boot camp.

In his comment we hear how, within three months time, not only was he changed (“indoctrinated”), but also he had come to see civilians as inferior (“undisciplined and nasty”). Over time, soldiers occupy a distinct habitus, “the site of the internalization of externality and externalization of internality” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990:205); becoming the military creation, a soldier, involves the absorption of physical and mental requirements and then the projection of those altered states. Those who occupy the habitus form a bounded collectivity, an in-group, that allows them to recognize their shared identity even outside the military institution that shaped them. The research participants described their ability to identify other veterans on campus, without any obvious clues, through such subtle things as gait, muscle tone, or the way a person “carries” himself; it is as if the military transformed not only their mind, but also their physical body.

As a total institution, the military provided not only soldiers’ material needs, like housing, health care, and a paycheck, but also a strong sense of purpose and usefulness (Conan 2011). When I asked Frank what he missed most about the military, he answered:

Like, the camaraderie, the brotherhood of, you know, grabbin’ a guy and, you know, who doesn’t know anything, you know . . . and you say, Okay, I’m gonna’ take this guy, I’m going to mold him into a Marine and I’m going to take him to Iraq and then he’s going to perform and then you bring him back safe. No greater feeling on the planet, I mean, you could be in, honest opinion, you could be in charge of a bajillion dollar company and not have that same amount of responsibility of people’s lives, I think. And that accomplishment, I don’t know, it was great. So I don’t have that anymore, and that’s hard to cope with sometimes, um, ‘cause the only thing I worry about is that essay paper I have to turn in . . . I mean, I just don’t have that anymore, so that’s kinda’ hard.

In answer to the same question, Mark said that what he missed most was the camaraderie, but he also missed:

Leading soldiers a lot, having younger soldiers that I can train and mentor and stuff, 'cause it, what happens is you deploy, you get all this experience, you train, and then you come back and you have guys that are gettin' ready to you know replace you or guys that are much younger than you that are tryin' to do the job and so you want to come back and like give them some practical knowledge and um, you know, hopefully to save their lives, I guess is the, the um, the idea. So I miss that. I miss training soldiers.

On a deeper level, Colin talked about his struggle to even accept that he really was out of the military:

The whole thing . . . it took time, took time. It took time, a lot of patience but it's just *accepting*. Accepting that you're out. Accepting. It's just the *hardest* thing to do.

Another veteran felt that his time in the military had wiped out his connections to and memories of his life pre-enlistment, essentially eliminating the option of just going back to the "old" (pre-military) self. He described a tendency to relate everything to his time in the military:

Everything that as an adult, that you associate with what's going on, it's like, "Yeah, when I was at Fort Hood . . . Yeah, when I was in Iraq . . ." but before that, like, you don't remember anything 'cause you went through this whole shift in life and, like, does it matter what I was doing my first year of community college [he attended before the Army]? What was I doin'? I can't remember.

Or as Timothy put it:

I try not to be "One time in the Army . . ." try not to start everything that way or relate everything to the Army. But I'm a different person. After eight years, I relate a lot of my life to the Army.

In essence, soldiers are "made" through a well-honed, systematic process.

Although Ljubica Jelušič wrote, "A military mind produced in this kind of military socialization would require a broader range of resocialization approaches, mainly focused on the 'demilitarization' of values" (2003:356). But there is no "unmaking," no ritual or

rite of passage, and there is no boot camp for the next phase in their lives. And, critically, they will not be part of a collective, a unit, or a brotherhood when they are at the university; as Colin said, “*Here*, you know, you’re on your own.”

Certain aspects of their service contributed to the struggle to reintegrate. Their own sense of being unknowable existed in tension with their *imaginings* of what others thought about them and others’ *actual* ideas about veterans as a category. There were many comments to the effect of “people don’t know” or “they can’t know.” Over and over they said, “no one can understand unless they’ve been there.” While I tended to consider this as an inevitable consequence of their shared experience, Deborah Harrison describes this belief as intentionally constructed by the military:

They consult military priests, doctors, lawyers, and social workers, rather than their civilian counterparts. They are taught to believe that civilians are incapable of understanding the military life, and they are encouraged to become more or less insular within the military world. (2003:74)

Veterans also exist in a kind of public space, subject to the expectations of others and the shifting winds of public discourse about them and the wars. Ebaugh describes this as the way in which “exes” need to deal with other people’s reaction to their previous role:

The attitudes of such people often involve ignorance, stereotypes, curiosity, and a lack of sensitivity to the nuances of a previous role. (1988:6)

Veterans specifically are subjects of a kind of illicit curiosity, perhaps because they may have broken a taboo:

This shroud of myth and mystery that surrounds killing is still firmly in place; unlike sex, it is not a ‘taboo’ subject that can be liberalised or legitimately experienced by interested parties due to its illicit nature being part of the very fabric of our societies. (Molloy and Grossman 2007:202)

Two veterans had been asked by other students, “How many people did you kill?” or “Did you kill anybody?” Perhaps because politicians and the media tout killing of the enemy in war as an achievement, we assume that the individual who did the killing would wish to boast. One of those two veterans, Stephen, was planning to run for President of the Student Veterans Club because he was interested in starting initiatives to make others on campus more familiar with veterans, to counter what he described as a fear of veterans or the notion that they are “either heroes or babykillers.” Stephen, who was one of only four research participants who had not deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, also liked the idea of some of the student-veterans going to speak at high schools, describing this as a “golden opportunity” for high school students to meet with “actual combat vets.” It is striking that a veteran who had not deployed, and who acknowledged how that was a real divide between him and most other veterans, seemed to have developed a public relations strategy using combat veterans to promote the image of the military.

Though no one mentioned being called “babykiller,” they either felt indifference or, in some cases, they felt judged or politicized. There were remarks along the lines of “students are sick of hearing about” veterans and/or the wars. David said me that he doesn’t go out of his way to tell other students that he’s a veteran because “they don’t care.” After Ray revealed in class that he was a veteran, something he had not done lightly, he felt a negative reaction:

I think you do get alienated once you tell. In my comm class, I hadn’t told anybody and the vibe was different, and then one day I had to blurt it out, ‘cause it was like improv or somethin’, and . . . after that I went in and . . . I said “Good morning” to this girl, like, a couple of times, and she just got really *distant* for some reason, like as if I was a bad person. I don’t know, that’s how I felt.

Of course, it's not certain that he is correctly "reading" her or correctly attributing her behavior to his disclosure. Regardless, that was his interpretation and would influence any future disclosure.

Aware that the war has variable meanings, Anna worried that if Muslim students knew that she'd been in the military or deployed to Afghanistan, it would be a barrier between them:

That might make me not approachable in the future if they see me . . . they might just not want to deal with that kind of thing, 'cause they don't know what mentality I have on the war or whatever . . . I'm not . . . I don't want to seem racist or discriminatory, but, especially if someone is like, Muslim, you know, or something, I even *more* don't want to say I was in the military or even in Afghanistan because I don't know what their view is on Americans being there, so I just don't want that to come between whatever, if we're going to communicate. And if they ask me, then I would say it, but I wouldn't brag about it or say it like it was a good thing 'cause it might not be for them.

In the interview, she shared that she had no friends on campus, perhaps because of the real (or perceived) burden of being held accountable for U.S. foreign policy.

Even when they did not experience any negative reactions, it seems that they don't quite trust how people really feel. Some stated that the lack of anti-military sentiment is because it's not "PC," because culturally "we're not supposed to be trashing soldiers," suggesting a kind of inauthenticity instead of true acceptance or respect. In the interviews, several veterans brought up, unsolicited, their feelings when they were told, "Thank you for your service." They usually said something to me along the lines of, "that's nice to hear," but then offered a more complicated response to it. Nick explained:

I'm trying to think of the right word to say, but it's sort of um expected now I guess people want to do, you know, "Oh, thank you for your service" kind of thing. I appreciate it and you know it's, it's nice to hear, but you know, it's one of

those things where it's like, you know, when you say "Bless you" to somebody who sneezes. It's sort of a reaction now, you know?

Supporting that sort of automatic response, Charlie stated:

Every person I've told that I'm a vet is, you know, first off thanks me very quickly and then, you know, like they wonder more about it, they inquire about it more.

And Bill described his reaction:

I mean, you know, the weirdest of all these things is like when people thank you? I've never really known how to take that. So I learned to just, you know, when someone says "thank you," I say, "well thank you for your support." You know, just kind of like give it back.

A West Point professor, a civilian who has observed many of these exchanges, believes that the expressions of gratitude are "a mantra of atonement. But, as is all too often the case with gestures of atonement, substance has been eclipsed by mechanical ritual" or, as a soldier she knows states, they are:

an obligatory salutation . . . somewhere between an afterthought and heartfelt appreciation . . . 'Deep down,' the Major, who served in Iraq, acknowledged, 'my ego wants to embrace the ritualized adoration, the sense of purpose, and the attendant mythology.' The giving and receiving of thanks is a seductive transaction, and no one knows that better than this officer: 'I eagerly shake hands, engage in small talk, and pose for pictures with total strangers.' Juxtaposed in his mind with scenes from Fallujah or Arlington National Cemetery, however, his sanitized encounters with civilians make him feel like Mickey Mouse, he confessed. 'Welcome to Disneyland' . . . Today's dominant narrative, one that favors sentimentality over scrutiny, embodies a fantasy that everything will be okay if only we display enough flag-waving enthusiasm. (Samet 2011)

The problem with these sometimes exuberant displays of gratitude is that they, like the "heroification" described by Bickford (2011b) and Bacevich (2007), seem to absolve the civilian of any further obligation—to either think seriously about what we have asked of our military and if displaying a flag and shaking hands is really adequate

repayment. As Matthew Gutmann and Catherine Lutz, anthropologists who conducted in-depth interviews with anti-war Iraq veterans, explain:

The yellow ribbon campaigns have tended to silence and harm these veterans. As one dissenting veteran told us, though, on his return home from Iraq (after having to buy his own body armor), he angrily but methodically collected several hundred yellow ribbon magnets off the cars in his city: he saw those car owners' magnet displays as empty posturing by people who were in fact indifferent to the moral problem of the war and its veterans. (2010:9)

Veterans may be unable to accept what are even genuinely felt sentiments because civilians don't actually know what the soldier has done:

They see congratulatory civilians spitting, in a sense, on their experience, making them out to be someone other than who they are. (Gutmann and Lutz 2010:145)

For those veterans who are still reckoning with their own actions and responsibilities, who are seeking forgiveness or redemption, there may be a sense of shame that if we really knew what they had done, our reaction might not be a simple "thank you."

The Toll Taken: Discovering and Dealing with Service-Related Issues

As we would expect, many participants felt there were some negative effects of their service. At a minimum, they had to learn how to "carry" their wartime experience (Gutmann and Lutz 2010:144). As a veteran-turned-antiwar-activist explained it, soldiers need to believe in the rightness of their cause while they are in combat in order to protect their own sanity. As they prepared to deploy, soldiers' belief in the:

rightness of the cause of bringing 'freedom' to the Iraqi people was constantly drilled into their heads . . . they absorbed the lesson that their mission was worthy and their methods were noble. (Gutmann and Lutz 2010:91)

While they were deployed, that belief was bolstered by chaplains who, "by portraying the purpose and actions of the U.S. military in Iraq as righteous and religiously sanctioned

. . . were meant to keep as many soldiers on the front lines as possible” (Gutmann and Lutz 2010:133) and a President who insisted that the proper way to honor the sacrifices of those who had died was to “stay the course.” It is when they return home that veterans begin to reckon with their own actions and permit themselves to question the cause (Gutmann and Lutz 2010:147). As a veteran I interviewed observed:

I would say interestingly, I think the most critical people of the war are people that have actually been there. A lot of people might think that soldiers are gung-ho about going to war, but I’ve never met anybody, I mean there’s, there’s some crazy people in the Army, but I’ve never actually met an intelligent rational person in the Army that likes going to war. Or likes what they do in war. Or is happy about that. Never. And I mean, that, I would also say I’ve never met any of these people that aren’t critical of the government or aren’t critical of what the policies are, or what they’re doing over there. It’s just, there’s really nothing they can do about it, so . . .

Gutmann and Lutz found that soldiers who were in Iraq at the beginning of the war felt that they were doing something good:

In the first days and months after the initial offensive to occupy Iraq, the conditions were tough but morale among the troops was fairly high, especially compared with what was to come in the second year and beyond. At first there was the adrenaline rush of being part of a seemingly unstoppable military force, as well as the still pervasive sentiment that this was a dignified assignment, one that was not only supported by the American people back home but, more importantly, welcomed by the majority of Iraqis in palpable ways every day. (2010:82)

But as the war continued, it became clear that the Iraqi people wanted the military gone and the soldiers could see the deteriorating conditions:

Troop morale is dependent on soldiers believing in the righteousness of their mission. If their leadership tells them they are being sent to liberate another country, they ought to be sure that’s what the troops find themselves doing. Otherwise they begin to question the whole shooting match. (Gutmann and Lutz 2010:117)

Like other veterans who deployed multiple times, Colin's opinion of the war began to change:

I'm against this war. Yeah. I'm very against this war. Like I said, I would like to go back to combat but not in Iraq or Afghanistan, you know. Maybe a new war or something. Yeah but not, not there. I don't agree with that war.

I asked, "And did you when you enlisted?" Asking for clarification, "Did I agree with the war?" I answered, "Yeah. I mean, did your opinion change while you were in or . . . ?"

Colin replied:

It changed the third time. It changed the third time I went over which was in the beginning of '08. So it changed cause I had gone towards the push and then I went towards, you could say 2004, 2005. And then I went back in 2008 and this time I was, you know, the first push I was on the road, I was on the streets, I was living in some of their houses, I was sleeping with some of them, you know, um. And this last time I was back on the road and I saw the difference between 2003 and 2008 and, you know, don't agree with it. Don't agree with it. Don't agree with the war. Don't agree with, ahh . . . you know. Don't agree with it. At all. At all.

There was intense anxiety in the face of the unfamiliar. In the military, there is an effort to prepare for every possible scenario; it seems likely that the most dangerous situations were those that were unanticipated. As Colin explained:

Especially for a veteran, he needs to know his surroundings. He needs to know everything, see what's going on.

And Frank made the surprising statement:

I wasn't this nervous going to Iraq the third time as I was coming to university, I will say that flat out, uhh, cause I know where . . . the enemy's easy. They're right in front of me. This . . . I had no idea what I was getting myself in to. I didn't have training for school.

Although only one veteran mentioned that he had been diagnosed with PTSD,²¹ the veterans were grappling with the types of stresses we have heard about in the media. After the very long days in a high-adrenaline environment, Timothy felt deeply tired after he separated, but he and others struggled to let go of the hyper-vigilance they'd needed as truck drivers, constantly scanning the road for potential IEDs or fearing attack when sitting at a red light. Even two years after leaving the military, Timothy had frequent insomnia.

Several veterans were not prepared for the number of students on campus and the crowdedness at times. One was struck by the number of Middle Eastern students. My interview with Colin was particularly interesting because he not only contradicted himself, but he seemed to be reevaluating his past experience as he was talking. So, for example, he initially said that he adjusted quickly to being on campus and he fit in easily. But he went on to describe a litany of difficulties: censoring himself, controlling his temper, accepting that he was really out of the military, becoming opposed to the war during his enlistment, and a variety of situations that were “triggers.”

Colin had attended a meeting of the student-veterans organization, but had a negative reaction:

I found that, you know, it was too, too much, too much. It was almost like, it was almost as if they were still *in*, so . . . and it's just, I want to leave that alone. I want to leave that type of, you know, language and attitude alone and transition to, I guess, more calm profession. And um . . . It kind of triggered my old behavior. You could say that. It kind of triggers the, the, that, that culture and I don't think it goes along with, you know . . . If you're out the military stay out the military,

²¹ I did not ask veterans about any injuries, PTSD, or mental health issues. I also chose not to ask them if they had been in combat. I was concerned with making them recount painful experiences and I wanted to keep the focus primarily on their first days and weeks on campus and how they felt during their transition.

you know, it doesn't go together . . . 'Cause it just triggers, almost triggers my mind that we're back in and that's what I do not want. And that's what several Marines have said . . . a lot of them didn't experience too many great moments and they're trying to like . . . for instance, for me, I'm trying to forget about it. I'm trying to say that was the past . . .

When I asked my next question about what the first days and weeks on campus were like for him, he answered:

At [the university], um, how was the first week? (*Long pause.*) It was, it was more . . . I can't really explain it. How was my first week at the university? First two weeks? I adjusted quick within the first week. But . . . I don't know . . . I, I thought I fit in pretty easy.

But as we kept talking, he starting to realize or remember things that had been very difficult when he was new:

So many people as well . . . like, for instance, for me, I was in a combat zone all three times. I experienced somewhat, you know, you know . . . you know, some combat. So when you're walking around with a lot of people that, just that alone can really, really, you know, it really stressed me out. That's, well, there it is . . . One of the transition things from first week of university was the amount of people. That just . . . it was, it was just tough, it was just tough. Not only that, there was a lot of Middle Easterns, so that took a while to sit next to a Middle Easterner. It's sad but, you know, that's how it was. That's how it was. I came up here and I couldn't believe how large that population was and that, that took a while, that took a while to just accept and be "Hey they're not gonna shoot you. They're not gonna, they're not gonna hurt you." So that's another one, that kind of, that's why I think my first semester was kind of hard and I didn't do so well. 2.7. When it was, it was just too much. Okay, this is what you're relating to, it was just, it was a lot. It was, ah, hmm . . . yeah, it was. I still remember, you know, mentioning that to my girlfriend, you know, having trouble to be here in the [student union building], um, I saw that they have the little prayer stuff, so . . . being around that kind of triggers, you know. And then triggers, you know, being back in Iraq and then you have the, you know . . . You walk out of the [Military Liaison Office] and there, you know, it's like a military base. And it's just like a military base, walk two steps, there's the prayers [referring to a meditation and prayer space]. Just, it's just a lot, it's just a lot. So, um, you're always watching out, you know, you still have those thoughts that, you know, somebody might come in. Situations like that.

Some described how their service, and the ways that it had changed them, took a toll on their relationships. Two of the men got divorced during their enlistment, which they attributed at least in part to their deployments. Two interrogators felt that becoming good at their job had damaged the number and quality of their close relationships. Mark said:

I'm really suspicious of people for the most part . . . 'cause just, my job, and what I've had to do, um, I'm just really suspicious of everybody. And, uh, and, I mean, I don't, I certainly don't want to sound racist or anything or anything like that but I think that it's good to keep a sense of like skepticism about people that are around you and, you know, anywhere you go. I pretty much keep you know very few people close to me. I try not to, uh, have a lot of different friends, stuff like that, um, and that's just part of my training, it's part of my experiences um as well as, like, it's tough to, it's tough to always be suspicious of people so you kind of like separate yourself from them. But I can't really speak to like why I'm suspicious it's just something that, it just kind of happens I think, or maybe it's indoctrinated, I don't really know.

Along the same lines, Carl told me:

I got divorced when I was in counterintelligence, umm . . . a lot of marriages . . . I, I can't even . . . I don't even know anybody who's still married in counterintelligence, um . . .

I asked, "Why is that?" and he replied:

Umm, very high deployment rate. Um, there is just a certain . . . I really don't know . . . it's almost like an atmosphere. Um, counterintelligence is different. It's just a little bit shadier, you know, and it's different because you are . . . you don't wear name tags, you don't wear rank, you call each other by different names, if at all. So, you know, you're . . . you're taught to lie and you're taught to be deceitful. You have to be 'cause that's your job and you know it's almost like this mentality that sabotages marriages, you know. It just does. And uh it was very hard.

Adjusting to the pace of civilian life was not easy for some who described the nagging feeling that they were stuck or standing still, that they should be doing something more. This was heightened when their old unit was deploying. Reminiscent of

the statement that prisoners dream of life outside while in prison, but dream of prison once they are outside, Bill said:

As much as I wanted to not go anymore, I can't sit still now. So I mean, it was, like it was weird talking to my buddies when they were getting ready to go back. And so I was like, "aw man it's about that time," you know, and then I'm stuck here. I'm not used to being in one spot for a prolonged period of time.

"I Was Kind of Here by Myself": Difficulty with New Relationships

There was one thing every veteran I interviewed had in common. When I asked what they missed the most about the military, every person answered it was the camaraderie, using the terms "brotherhood" and "like family." Although members of fraternities are also "brothers," Bill, who had been in a fraternity at the university prior to enlisting, said that the two were not comparable:

I have really really good friends here, you know. Like some of the guys from my fraternity like they were great about, you know, writin' letters while I was in boot camp, you know, they sent care packages while I was gone, you know, and they'll always be like my brothers and my close friends. But it's a different kind of friendship. And my closest friends here are really cool and understand the fact that me being friends with you is completely a different relationship than the friends I had in the military. And they're like, "Hey, you did and saw things, you know, that we didn't and so you know I can only imagine that you're gonna have that kind of, you know, relationship with those guys." And I was like "yeah" so . . . but I mean I, I talk to my buddies all the time.

In some cases, veterans revealed that their relationships with their "buddies" (a term used exclusively for military friends) were even closer than bonds with their family, because their family could never fully understand their military experience, which had been so profoundly life-altering. Ben, who had been medically discharged due to injuries sustained in Iraq, said:

When I first got here, ahh, still on a cane, still wounded . . . it was difficult, ahh, I don't know, to make friends. It wasn't difficult to *talk* to them, it's just, they're so

much younger than you . . . you have nothing really in common with them, ahh, it's hard to take them seriously, so, finding other, other veterans ahh, was, was important.

Although he said he would have preferred not to talk about his military service, people often asked him about the cane, so he found himself talking about it.

Because soldiers spend so much of their day in the company of men and in a masculine environment, Paul Higate observed the tendency of ex-servicemen to gravitate toward masculinized occupations such as police, firefighter, prison personnel, or security: “Ex-servicemen ‘chose’ to enter an environment they sense will be characterized by strong currents of gender familiarity” (2001:455). This environment may provide “ontological or emotional security within a recognizably gendered cultural milieu . . . may offer the promise of camaraderie and homosociability” (2001:456).

The loss of those relationships, coupled with the sense of being unknowable, generates a void and a profound sense of loneliness and isolation after leaving the military, but those close friendships were nearly impossible to replace. It was difficult for veterans to develop relationships with their younger classmates because they did not see them as “suitable” peers or potential friends. There was a pronounced distancing from other students. The student-veterans’ language tended to either infantilize or otherwise dismiss other students, calling them “kids” or “these dumb-ass students, 18, hippies” who “mouth off” in class. “They’re *so* much younger than you, you have nothing really in common with them, ahh, it’s hard to take them seriously.” But other comments revealed that it was not so much the difference in age as the difference in experience. Coming from a battlefield, having been in such an intense and different environment, veterans

struggle to refocus, to make academics their priority, and to tolerate what they may experience as “whining over nothing” from fellow students. John said:

The military teaches you what’s really important. And, a deployment focuses that tenfold . . . People who think that, their idea of hardship is having to work late on a Friday afternoon on a holiday weekend. You just, you just wanna smack the shit out of them.

When they were in the military, the student-veterans I talked with had a tremendous amount of authority and responsibility at a relatively young age. To then be side-by-side with younger people as their *equal* was uncomfortable. There is a loss of adult status for veterans turned undergraduate students. In my interview with Ray and Anna, I asked, “Is it hard to go from, like, being in such a serious, dangerous, leadership position to being a student in a classroom among other students? I mean, does it seem . . . is that weird?” Ray answered:

It is for me. It is *very* weird for me. ‘Cause these are the same age kids that came to me and, umm, in my eyes then, they were just all messed up and I needed to square them away and, you know, and now I look back and I’m like, these are the same kids here. I’m just, I’m in class with them and, you know, I’m the same level and I know as much as they do, as far as anybody’s concerned and, which is, I don’t know, what’s the term? Like, when you’re brought down to below where you’re supposed to be.

I wondered if the term he was searching for was “demotion.”

David described a similar experience, a tendency to treat the younger people as he would have in the military. He said the 18-19 year old students see him as a big brother and he described how he had to resist going into his “Sergeant mode” when those same 18-19 year olds were not motivated or following through. He had to remind himself to be “politically correct to them and talk to them in a nice tone of voice.”

By frequently evoking the language of difference, the student-veterans may be able to save themselves from the feeling of being demoted, by reinforcing to themselves and everyone else that they are not like “those other students.” The downside of the distancing is that they don’t develop relationships that might ease their transition. For many of them, that hole could only be filled by other veterans which, because many student-veterans avoid any sort of public display, was not an easy task.

The University

The transition was not only influenced by veterans’ biographical history when they arrived on campus, but how that biography shaped their experience of the university. My research suggests that veterans in transition seem to experience the university as primarily what it is *not*. The military is a total institution; the university is not. The military has been described as a “surrogate household” fostering “high levels of dependency” (Higate 2001:452) and providing all of life’s basic needs; the university does not. The military trains and prepares soldiers for new terrain, culture, language, and equipment. The college “rules of the game” are vague and varied; students learn them by osmosis or transgression. While the military consciously and deliberately reinvents, the university only holds the potential for reinvention, and this is largely an interior, personal process. Soldier is a 24/7 identity; student is not, at many institutions and for many students. The military makes claims on the whole person and dictates soldiers’ use of time, choice of dress, and so on; the university does not. In the military, there is a clear hierarchy or “chain of command” and a clear code of behavior based on that hierarchy; the university organizational chart is invisible to students and cannot guide appropriate

interactions based on “rank.” Military culture is communal; the university culture is individualistic. In general, where there was indoctrination, structure, and routine in the military, the university is by comparison chaotic and free-form.

The university is a terrain, a space occupied by people, and a culture. As an actual physical space to be navigated, veterans often spoke of maps, finding their way around, or being lost; considering how dangerous unfamiliar terrain would be in the military, it makes sense that this might be more than a little unsettling. As a space occupied by people, it is disorienting because it is difficult to tell who is who; there is no way to distinguish friend from foe, a particular stressor on a diverse and crowded campus. As a culture, a university is much more varied than the military, which intentionally strips soldiers of individual expressions of culture through things such as hairstyle, clothing, and posture. When veterans spoke of culture, it was usually using the term “culture shock”; what shocked them was the “bad behavior” of other students. Though Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini claim that college, like the military, requires both desocialization, “pressures to unlearn certain attitudes, values, and beliefs and participate in a new culture and social order,” and resocialization, “pressures to learn new attitudes, values, and beliefs and participate in a new culture and social order,” (2005:61) this is accomplished as students are exposed to new people, experiences, and ideas. The university does not so much drive the process as it does provide the setting where these processes may occur. Students are not closely monitored and assessed on their conformity to certain standards. The resocialization is nebulous, not standardized.

What compounds veterans' problem with all of that difference is that they have to navigate with no boot camp, no training, no manual, no unit, and no mentor; and, unlike middle-class students, they have received less social, cultural, and educational preparation. They are left to fend for themselves. The two most common challenges described by veterans was the lack of structure and the difference in educational style.

While it might seem that soldiers would enjoy the freedom of life after the military, several of them were uncomfortable with the "free-form" life at the university, describing it as "chaos" in contrast to the military's structure. Charlie said:

Maybe it's every college um and I'm just not used to it 'cause I was used to a very structured lifestyle in the Army. And once I got here it was very, ah, you know, free-form.

Along the same lines, Nancy stated:

It's kind of a weird experience because you go from, like, this being all you know for a long time and then suddenly you're just completely responsible for you. Nobody is telling you what to do. It's all your call. And it's a little bit intimidating . . . So, you know, you're just a private citizen and you realize that it's just, you're just kind of free-floating. It's a little bit awkward I guess.

As Frank described it when I asked him how he decided to leave the Marines after eight years:

Because, the alternative was go back to Iraq for fourth, fifth, sixth time or go to Afghanistan. I think the *easier* decision would have been to stay in. I say that because, you know, the military is so it's, it's very easy to be in the military because they tell you where to go, how to dress, how to be there and what time, all the time, every day and ahhh, you know, so all's you have to do is just follow directions.

Issues that might seem unimportant to others, and especially to those accustomed to the university, were not so insignificant to them. On two different occasions, Ben told

the same story about his confusion about titles, which were not as easily ascertained and responded to as rank had been:

I had no clue, like . . . I still don't really know the difference between an associate dean and an assistant dean is. I don't know who's on top of each other. I don't know who I need to go to talk to get things done. And as somebody, you know, and, and coming from me that was the difficult part, because you *do* have issues you need to get handled, you don't know who to talk to, you go and you try to talk to people and it's frustrating . . . I think that was the difficult part 'cause you don't know where to go.

It is as if he wanted to translate the university bureaucracy into the neat military categories; his inability to do so was disconcerting to him.

Veterans reacted not only to the style of interaction between professors and students, they also often struggled with professors' style of teaching and what they perceived as unclear expectations. There is a distinct difference between training and teaching. The military trains, with the goal of essentially making the body react instinctively rather than having a delay or a process of thinking through options. Knowledge is concrete and broken down step-by-step. Bill described how soldiers are taught in the military:

They broke it down Barney style like, "This is your gun. This is the end the bullets come out of." Like, I mean, little stuff like that, but that's how you learn it. And so to me things in school are kind of rough because they're not broken down simple style . . . If there's anyone who knows *anything* about the military, if you break it down in very small baby steps, we'll get it right and that's the best way. Not that we are slow, but that's how we were taught. We were taught in very basic increments.

In contrast, the university teaches. Knowledge is often abstract or theoretical. The notion of "a" truth is contested. Ambiguity is not necessarily problematic. As the

antithesis of “Barney style,” educators specializing in adult learners describe the necessity for developing dialectical thinking:

Dialectical thinking ‘allows for the acceptance of alternative truths or ways of thinking about similar phenomena that abound in everyday adult life’ (Merriam and Caffarella 1998:152). Mature thinkers can tolerate ambiguity, if not outright contradictions; this level of consciousness allows us to function within the complexity of our daily environment. (Merriam 2005:10)

This is not to characterize veterans as immature in their thinking, but to highlight that the military cannot tolerate ambiguity, therefore it does not cultivate dialectical thinking.

Veterans often lamented the lack of clarity from professors. Ben, while describing how professors appreciate veterans in their classes because they, unlike most other students, talk in class, went on to say that he thinks professors also like veterans because they don’t *argue*, they only seek *clarity*:

I’ve never heard a veteran in any of my classes argue with the professor about an exam or about, you know, a project that they had to do, or why. They may say, you know, “What you want me to do? Stop giving me these broad generalities. Tell me, you know, what is it that, you know, you want, and I’ll meet it.”

Or Bill made this comment:

When I write papers, you know, I told my professors, you know, “Hey, it’s been five years since I’ve written a paper. I don’t know what APA style is. I don’t know what, what kind of margins you want here.” I was like, “This is what I wrote. Tell me exactly what you want next time and I’ll fix it,” you know.

These remarks are reminiscent of Weis’ description of most working-class students only asking questions about form, but not content or concepts. Ben does not see the professors’ “broad generalities” as an indication that there would be a wide range of acceptable work. Again, what might be perceived as liberating was instead intimidating.

In this chapter, the data were mined for the fine-grained ways in which individual student-veterans talked about their transition experience. In the next chapter, the data are considered as a whole, searching for comparisons between those students who described a smooth transition to the university and those who had a harder transition to see if any common factors emerge. Because the university does not have the luxury of providing each student with custom-tailored resources, the discussion section describes patterns that could allow educators and administrators to identify groups of student-veterans who may need greater supports.

DISCUSSION

Based on interviews with 22 student-veterans, I have not discovered a simple formula to help veterans make an easy transition to college, but there were a few common factors that emerged as helping veterans become more confident and comfortable on campus. Because those factors have valid sociological explanations, I am suggesting that they are not mere anomalies.

As I reviewed the interview transcripts, I compared those who felt they had made the transition easily with those who did not, looking to see if any patterns emerged. A few things that seemed to make the adjustment easier are self-explanatory. There were two research participants who had attended the university before enlisting and, although they both described some administrative hassles as they returned, they did not mention any other difficulties. The student-veterans who already had a bachelor's or associate's degree prior to starting at the university described a fairly smooth transition; their previous experience with college education would have prepared them for the academic expectations, the bureaucracy, as well as more intangible things such as the social life of students, campus culture, and so on.

Two student-veterans had been out of the military for several years before starting at the university. After he separated from the service, Nick had quite deliberately allowed himself time to adjust to civilian life in stages. He decided to first get a job and, when he

felt that he was ready, he started college. This had allowed him to make the adjustment to being a civilian before the additional adjustment to being a student. When Steven separated, he was able to keep to keep working as a civilian at the same place he'd been assigned for the past two years. Because he had lived and worked in the same general area for a number of years, he was been able to maintain continuity in his career, perhaps making the transition to college more manageable than it might be for a veteran who was new to the area, or starting a new job, or otherwise making additional major changes at the same time as starting school.

Ben and David were both in their final semester at the university at the time of our interview so, not surprisingly, they were both well integrated. Both were also active in seeking out and trying to help new veterans on campus.

In addition to these, there were three less-obvious factors that helped veterans integrate: having a close friend or relative who was already at the university and willing to give advice, becoming involved with other student-veterans, and/or having plans to continue in the military or a military-related career.

Colin, who had a rather difficult adjustment, believed that having a close friend already at the university made all the difference in his ability to get through that transitional period. His friend not only familiarized him with the geography of the campus, things like the dorms, restaurants, and gyms, but also what Colin called "the freshman stuff." An example was that his friend told him that if he wanted to use the fitness center he should not "be shy," he could just "walk right in." The friend also advised Colin to visit Rate My Professor before selecting classes, so he could be

forewarned if a course or professor was going to be difficult. As the semester began, the friend's role shifted to reassuring Colin when he was stressed:

I mean, what made it easier for me was that I had, like I said before, I had a friend that we went to Iraq the first time and we always stay connected together . . . So he showed me around, you know, he gave me a tour . . . just give you an overview of what you're getting into, you know. And I think that's ah, especially for a veteran, he needs to know his surroundings. He needs to know everything, see what's going on . . . Someone telling me to calm down, "Just calm down, you'll be alright, you'll get along, you'll fit in" . . . I'd be telling a different story.

When I concluded the interview by asking Carl what might have made his transition easier, he answered:

I didn't really have a rough time that I remember. I went to another Marine who had gone before me here. Because that's really the only way. So I went to him and said "How does it work?" and he says "Okay, here's the veteran liaison at [the university]. Just get in contact with him." So I went straight to him and then he sat me down and, line by line, this is how you do it. And then I just started knocking out all those things. So, umm, the very first point of contact was the veteran liaison and then that, he just, he was great.

I commented, "It was probably good that you knew someone who'd been here."

Carl replied:

Definitely. I think if I didn't, um, I would have been a little bit more lost 'cause, I mean, he explained so much. I sat there and talked to him. I took him out to dinner and just sat there and grilled him about everything--how the process works, you know, what classes are good to take in the summer, stuff like that.

There are sociological explanations for why these kinds of connections ease the transition. Ebaugh discovered that the "exes" she interviewed had an easier and quicker adjustment if they knew people in the place they were transitioning to; for example, if they were switching to a new career and they already knew someone working in that field, or if they had cultivated connections as they were preparing to switch careers.

Ebaugh calls these connections "bridges": "There seems to be a direct relationship

between the number and quality of bridges and the degree of role adjustment and happiness after the exit” (Ebaugh 1988:146).

Paul Higate (2001) theorizes that veterans may continue to seek the company of other veterans, as well as military-like careers, to maintain continuity of self. It allows veterans to preserve aspects of the military culture and identity. This also dovetails with Giddens’ ideas about creating a cohesive narrative, a project that occurs during times of transition and must be easier in the company of others who have shared a similar life experience.

For several student-veterans, finding the Student-Veteran Club was a tremendous relief. Ben explained what purpose the connections with other veterans serve:

There’s strength in the fact that we all understand that we share the same values as each other, we all served and we believe in that service and we believe in the country. Finding . . . other veterans . . . was important. Just being able to hang out with people who are like you and your age and have some of your same experiences.

John described relief that he didn’t have to explain himself or “talk about it”:

What I like about Ben and . . . some of the other guys is, is you *don’t* have to talk about it. Everyone just innately knows, they understand and you can just be yourself and it’s real comfortable.

They found comfort in being with other veterans, saying things like “it eases” or “it keeps the brotherhood alive that we all miss from the military.” David struggled his first year on campus; he had no friends and he felt “lonesome” before he met other veterans. He explained how being around other veterans helped:

I had no friends . . . I was kind of here by myself and then I found the Student-Veterans Club . . . So from there I got involved. And I was like, Oh, here’s my niche. Socially, I think I’ve gotten, I feel a lot better now being around the other veterans. Uhh, it, it makes me feel a little better, umm, the Student-Veterans Club,

it's the kind of support that I needed . . . Umm, that's helped me just, to have kind of that support I needed. Umm, the family's there, I've always had the family support, but, uhh, it's sort of the, ahh, military guys that you feel that, I don't know, it makes the backbone better . . . Being around other vets has helped me.

When he got involved with a student-veteran group, he started “feeling better, like I actually had a belonging here.” In his qualitative study collecting narratives of student-veterans, Dimitrios Jason Stalides stated: “Social support in terms of connecting veterans with other veterans, therefore, is the key to helping veterans adjust to the college environment” (2008:99).

Just as having “bridges” helped with maintaining continuity of self, discovering other student-veterans allowed a space to freely share that aspect of their identity. Recalling how often participants said, “no one understands,” it makes sense that being with others who *could* understand was a relief. Through the Student-Veterans Club, they were also able to develop a “sense of belonging,” which is a feeling of connection to and acceptance within the university community. Ashley Grimes et al. find that sense of belonging is “particularly relevant to the veteran student population due to the nature of their experiences” (2011:63). The club also provides a form of social support, which research has shown can serve a sort of “protective” function for veterans, decreasing rates of stress, depression, and PTSD symptoms (Fontana, Rosenheck, and Horvath 1997; Johnson et al. 1997; MacLean and Elder, Jr. 2007; Pietrzak et al. 2009). As Richard Settersten and Robin Patterson explain, social support, coupled with the individual's own meaning making, can have enduring impact:

How one appraises and copes with stressful experiences may be as, if not more, important as the experiences themselves in determining adaptation . . . Individual appraisal and social support processes, dually combined, are central to

determining the psychological and social consequences of early military service for veterans in late life. (2006:9)

A somewhat less expected finding from my research is that student-veterans who planned to stay in military-related fields did not describe difficult adjustments. Upon reflection, it may be that those individuals feel less pressure to change themselves or to immerse themselves in the new university culture in an effort to shed the military culture. Because they intend to use the various forms of capital they developed in the military after graduating, there is little effort to minimize their “military self” in the university setting. Frank, a part-time employee in the Military Liaison Office and a student, was a prime example. During the focus group, he said that his first day on campus, he wore his uniform. The other men around the table made various gestures and sounds of surprise and disapproval, and two of them stated that they would never *imagine* wearing their uniform on campus. Frank had a tendency to speak using military expressions—he’d talk about being in class and mention students “to my left and right flanks” or “at my six.” The Military Liaison Office was planning to hire some work-study students and he said that he would have “Lance Corporals,” though that was not their actual rank, it merely implied that they would be beneath him. While Ben explained how aggravating he found it when a person at his (civilian) job continually referred to people by their former rank or job title—because Ben had been a medic, the co-worker called him “Doc”—Frank constantly evoked military culture and terminology. But Frank was getting his degree as fast as possible so that he could continue to “serve my federal government, just in a different way.”

There were two factors that seemed to make the transition harder. The first was withholding identity as a veteran and the second was consciously avoiding other veterans. Because veterans are “invisible,” unless a veteran wears some outward display, it is difficult for them to find each other. Those who consciously hid that they had served often continued to feel alone and lonely. It was a double-edged sword. Participants shared several different reasons for hiding the information, and there are likely others that they did not share with me—reasons that are more complex, subconscious, or too personal. Though they may have felt they were avoiding negative judgments or easing their adjustment, they were also losing the possibility of the social support or friendship that other veterans might have provided. The very act of withholding may have been a self-fulfilling prophecy; it suggests that if you treat an identity as stigmatizing, it is stigmatizing as its consequence.

Similarly, although veterans often had reasons for avoiding other veterans or the Student-Veterans Club, they were the same people who described a bumpier transition. Timothy told me that, although he knew about the Student-Veterans Club, he didn’t get together with them because he wasn’t ready to think about things related to the military:

When I got back I was just tired . . . I didn’t want to be around that, be near what it was to be a soldier. It took about 4 or 5 months to look back, to look at pictures and think about it.

Recall Colin, who said that spending time with other veterans was “too much”; for him, it caused an automatic reversion to that former military self and triggered memories he wanted to forget. Some participants felt that they had to avoid other veterans as a strategy

of “moving on” or “leaving that behind.” As Ray put it, “I really have to just get immersed in this different culture, just try to deal with it.”

Bill told me that, unlike many others I interviewed, he did not feel a common bond with everyone else who had served. He only felt that bond with those with whom he had served side-by-side:

I haven't taken one, one inkling of a step to get to know any of the veterans here . . . But I just, I mean, ahh try, try and word this properly, like Marine Corps I still have my Marine Corps language in me. I don't want to be vulgar or anything. But it's like, it's like a pissing contest sometimes you know? “Well, where have you been? What have you done?” This and that and it becomes a distraction. You know, like some guys are just, are just like that, you know?

I replied, “You know, it's funny. Like as an outsider looking in, I always thought that was like how you're connecting.” Bill continued:

Yes and no. There's friendly competition and then there's times where it just gets out of hand and, you know. But I just, I don't want to. That's why I don't attend those things, you know, I just, I don't want to be around . . . My camaraderie is with my, my brothers from where I was, that I went through like . . . I mean, yeah, they did their part and you know I commend them and I shake their hands. But you weren't with me, you didn't do what I do, so I don't know you, you don't know me. Let's just leave it at that.

“Bridges,” and sense of belonging, and social support are beneficial to everyone who is adapting to a new situation, but there is an important additional consideration for veterans that is never stated explicitly—veterans have been in one of the most integrated settings imaginable. Durkheim points to the Army as a site producing altruistic, or heroic, suicide, a type of suicide that is the result of being overly integrated to the point “where the ego is not its own property, where it is blended with something not itself, where the goal of conduct is exterior to itself” ([1897] 1979:221). Without social ties, veterans may rapidly swing from over-integration in the military, with its potential to create altruistic

suicide, to dis-integration, the situation that creates what Durkheim labels egoistic suicide. Without the support of family or friends, veterans are cast adrift rather than caught in a net. Durkheim's *Suicide* simultaneously predicts the high rate of suicide among veterans and that social support, a new source of integration, would be an important ingredient in the antidote.

Veterans not only face the sudden loss of integration with their military buddies, but they may also be a sort of “perfect storm” of risk factors for suicide. Thomas Joiner (2005) found that suicidal intent is likely when three factors exist: habituation to pain, perceived burdensomeness, and failed belongingness. In a qualitative study of suicide risk factors among combat veterans, Lisa A. Brenner et al. (2008) discovered that they often had all three of the factors identified by Joiner: they described an increase tolerance for pain coupled with a well-developed ability to dissociate from pain; they believed they were a burden to their family and friends due to their lost sense of purpose and identity; and they missed the camaraderie from the military but struggled to relate to civilians.

The need to develop effective strategies to help student-veterans transition is urgent. In the final chapter, I will share recommendations from my research.

CONCLUSION

What can this sociological inquiry offer those concerned with helping veterans succeed in higher education? First, it may be worth asking who *should* help them succeed. Should the military better prepare them for civilian life and for higher education? Arguably, yes. But, at present, they don't. As Ben pointed out, the military has no incentive to prepare soldiers to transition and succeed after the military. Military leaders get rated on retention rates, not the future civilian successes of their soldiers. The military has invested a tremendous amount in its soldiers and it is not eager to lose them, especially during times of war. Although all soldiers are provided with transition assistance, none of the veterans I interviewed found it to be particularly valuable or relevant; it is logical that the quality of transition assistance would not be the military's highest priority.

The university is left with the potential, and perhaps the responsibility, to help veterans earn that degree. In the previous chapters, I have explained *why* the transition to higher education is challenging for many student-veterans. In this chapter, I will explain how it may be made easier. The primary issue can be summarized in a few words: when they first arrive on campus, some veterans don't feel like they fit in, they're lonely, and they need to connect with someone, be it faculty, other veterans, or whoever. I have five suggestions: identify the veterans on campus; facilitate programs that enhance sense of

belonging; sensitize faculty; centralize resources; and maintain ongoing dialogue with the student-veteran population.

First, the university has to identify its student-veterans. This may seem simple and obvious, but it is neither and on many campuses it's not happening. Often, the only way to identify veterans on campus is by finding students receiving educational benefits from Veterans Affairs, but this is at best a subset of the veteran population and will include veteran's dependents, who are unlikely to require the same types of programs and assistance. The university at which this research was conducted began to voluntarily request information about military service on its admission application in 2009. Prior to then, there was no way to directly contact the veteran population to provide information about specialized resources and services. In addition, the university had no way to track retention, graduation, or veterans' use of services, therefore there was no information to assess the success of veterans on campus.

The primary purpose of identifying student-veterans is to communicate with them as a distinct population that may require additional resources to successfully make the transition. Based on Lareau's (2003) description of those from the working class passively waiting to receive information, rather than actively pursue it, it is interesting to consider what I think of as the "If you build it, they will come" approach to information dissemination at many universities. The university seems to operate from the stance that students will find what they need on their own; they will come across an office, hear from another student or professor, stumble across information on a web site. An administrator told me that one reason the university does not provide customized information to

veterans is that they do not want to flood students with information. But do working-class students have any idea of the range of resources they could/should expect? How or why would they look for what they could not imagine? Lareau discovered that students from working-class families had neither the experience or know-how to navigate the university bureaucracy on their own. Couple that with the fact that in the military, information is communicated directly. Soldiers are told what they need to know. Even if what veterans seek at the university is here, “if you build it, they will come” does not work for them. The information must be delivered to them, individually, starting the moment they are admitted.

Second, student-veterans need social support and a sense of belonging; there are two primary avenues for achieving this. As I described in the previous chapter, the Student-Veterans Club was vitally important for many veterans, and the university should support and promote this type of student organization. On the other hand, there are some veterans for whom that type of club will not be helpful. Another means to develop a sense of belonging is through a mentor.

Veterans I spoke with were very positive about the idea of assigning each new incoming student a mentor who was another student-veteran who had been at the university a year or longer. Interestingly, those I interviewed who had been at the university for a little while expressed an eagerness to be a mentor; it taps into their skills and experience as leaders, which many of them miss, and their desire to continue helping each other. Beth said:

Veterans like to reach out to other veterans, you know, and it’s like they wanna help each other out. We all want to help each other out because that’s what we do

and that's what we've always done. It's nice just to help each other. I think that, I think that that's the gap, that bridge for somebody comin' in, the people that are already here.

And Ray described the value of mentorship:

That's somethin' *totally* I'd be willing to do, 'cause like, I don't think there's a better replacement 'cause military people are so used to mentorship as it is . . . I think it's the best form of teaching there is, you know, mentorship and, you know, how better to, you know, carry that on. That's like, umm, you know, somewhat kind of a bridge . . . it bridges the gap between university and the military, 'cause you, you got a mentor and you don't have to be totally dependent on that mentor, but, if you have a question, you know, it's a serious question, you can't go to a veterans, ahh, liaison or veterans representative that you don't even know about, you just talk to that person, you know.

Note that both Beth and Ray use the word "bridge." Even those veterans who did not want to participate in a veterans group said that having a single mentor would have helped. David suggested that veterans who did not want to mention their military service, and therefore would not be likely to join a student-veteran organization, might still need some type of support. A mentor might be a better resource for them:

There has to be a reason why people . . . wouldn't say they were in the military . . . I think maybe if what they saw, what they've seen or what they went through in the military they want to forget, they want to overcome it, it's understandable. But even more so for those type of people that we should have help for them. Even though they don't say they need it, eventually they'll fall down, there's nobody there to pick them up.

As a couple of veterans mentioned, the one-on-one might allow the new student-veteran to describe more sensitive issues than they would be comfortable bringing up in a group or with people they don't know well:

If somebody has a disability, they're not going to say in front of everybody, "Hey, how can I get help for this?" But if you have that one on one I think that would be great 'cause they can be like, "Hey, I can't hear, who can help me out with my hearing disability, or my foot disability?"

A mentor serves as the type of role model, or “multicultural navigator,” that Carter (2005) mentioned was missing for many working-class students. By having other veterans serve as the mentors, they will know the language and culture of both the military and the university:

Mentors hang around through transitions, a foot on either side of the gulf; they offer a hand to help us swing across. By their very existence, mentors provide proof that the journey can be made, the leap taken. (Daloz 1999 as cited in Merriam 2005:11)

Third, there is a need to sensitize faculty to student-veterans’ issues, as well as the resources available at their university. As was mentioned earlier, in some cases faculty are the first to notice that a veteran is struggling in class (Burnett and Segoria 2009), so they should be aware of the potential manifestations of traumatic brain injury or PTSD. Since veterans show little interest in developing relationships with other students, this may leave faculty as their greatest resource, and, as my research revealed, veterans appreciate earning the respect of professors. Establishing relationships with faculty helps students to develop a sense of belonging (Grimes et al. 2011) and leads to a number of positive outcomes, including “scholarly self-confidence, leadership ability, degree aspirations, and retention” (Sax, Bryant, and Harper 2005:653).

Fourth, establish a “one-stop shop” for student-veterans. The scope of this can vary widely, but at a minimum there should be at least one administrator who is the central point of contact and can connect veterans with resources. As soon as they begin at the university, student-veterans have to navigate their way through the Veterans Affairs department, the university financial aid office, and the registrar in order to complete the necessary documentation to receive their GI Bill benefits. A person on staff who

understands the process well can provide guidance. This person and/or office should, like faculty, be aware of the university's resources and services for veterans, such as a peer mentorship program, a student organization, counseling staff trained to work with veterans, and so on. Because any veteran receiving VA benefits will have to provide certification to a university's registrar's office, this can be an ideal location for the "veteran expert" on campus.

The university where the research was conducted has unusually extensive services for veterans. In 2009, it was one of the few schools in the country that had hired a full-time and a part-time person, both veterans and students at the university themselves, to serve as military liaisons. The interviews revealed a few caveats about that type of "one-stop shop." Some participants noted the strong military character of the employees as well as their physical space, describing it as "like a mini-base." It might seem that veterans would appreciate the familiarity of that kind of atmosphere, but some of them who were not ready to process their military experience or who did not want memories unexpectedly triggered, found the office uncomfortable. It seemed that the two liaisons had a blind spot—they could not see anything that retained ties to the military (culture, language, symbols) as problematic.

A second caution is against equating pride in service with willingness to disclose service. During the interviews, I asked each participant if they were generally upfront about the fact that they are a veteran and a number of them gave answers that mentioned pride. Steven answered, "I think so yeah. I, you know, I'm certainly proud of it." But more concerning is that both of the military liaisons also made that same connection.

When I mentioned to Frank that some veterans seemed reluctant to say that they were in the military, but that he didn't seem to hesitate, he stated:

I'm very proud of what I've done . . . Some decide to say "I *am* a veteran and, and I'm proud of what I did and I want the community to know that I exist," or some are very standoffish.

There is an underlying assumption that someone who is proud of their military service would put their veteran identity front and center. But there were several reasons why veterans were reluctant to share their identity, and in no case was it because they were not proud; those individuals should not be invalidated or disparaged.

Fifth, and finally, adhere to the slogan "nothing about us without us." At a national Veterans on Campus conference in DC, a student-veteran, in addressing what campuses could do to better serve the population, said "Nothing about us without us," meaning that student-veterans, not just administrators, should be involved in meetings, committees, and policy-making. Especially today, as there are fewer faculty and administrators with military experience and with a growing population of student-veterans who are unlike earlier generations of veterans, it is essential to keep student-veterans at the table whenever there is a discussion of policy, programs, or services that affect them. Steven, the veteran who was planning to run for President of the Student-Veterans Club, had been to some meetings with the Military Liaison Office. He described a "disconnect" between that office and the members of the club:

There's some good things that I've seen [them] do, but we're not synced up with initiatives or goals and I think the veterans and the full-time "veteran support staff" is what I'll call them, need to be on the same page . . . So there is, there is a disconnect. Everybody's heart is in the right place but I think knowing priorities of which ones to focus on are not there.

And, when you think about it, “nothing about us without us” is the purpose and goal of qualitative research. As the ultimate authority on their own experience, all that student-veterans need is someone to listen and respond.

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