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Student Veterans in Academic 'Contact Zones'
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In the current all-volunteer U.S. military, many low-income recruits enlist primarily for educational benefits. Yet many veterans encounter serious difficulties in transitions to civilian schools and do not graduate. While extensive research explores methods of military training and the effects of military service on socio-economic outcomes for veterans, little has been written about ways disjunctures between military and civilian pedagogies and culture shape veterans in civilian school settings. Using Lave's analysis of situated learning and Pratt's notion of 'contact zones,' this paper explores identities and practices of U.S. veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars as they re-enter community colleges and university classrooms. In-depth interviews, classroom observation and analysis of everyday discourse of veteran support organizations show disjunctures between soldiers' lived reality and the discursive constructions of 'warrior/hero', 'baby-killer' and 'student.' As they re-enter the civilian world, soldiers not only contend with these shifting identities, they also encounter educational institutions that do not easily respond to them as students. This research finds that conflicting teaching, learning and cultural norms of military and civilian institutions, combined with enforced silences about the wars, exacerbate academic challenges.

One day I'm a soldier; four days later I'm sitting in the back of a community college classroom, and I realize that none of the people in this room gave a shit about what I thought was important: what I thought was a good reason to be honest, what I thought was true, what I thought was worth caring about—they couldn't give a fuck.

— Jonathan, Northern University

How is it that I can get through all this stuff—throwing grenades and firing rifles, but I can't get through *community college*?

—Evie, Halcón College

Introduction

In the current all-volunteer U.S. military, many low-income recruits enlist primarily for educational benefits (Asch 1999, 2009; Mariscal 2007). Young people facing high unemployment rates and rising college costs are targeted by military recruiters before they leave high school,[1] as recruiters aggressively promote the idea that joining the military is not only a steady job, but also a route to college funding and to upward social and economic mobility. Recruiters promise that military training and combat experience will prepare young recruits to go to college and prosper. But the results are not as promised; only a small fraction of combat veterans are able to collect on that educational promise following military service,[2] and many ex-soldiers find that military training and combat experience complicate their ability to function in civilian schools. This disjuncture between the promise and the reality raises a question: What prevents the fulfillment of the recruitment promises of college education? This paper addresses

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[1] The No Child Left Behind Act mandates military access to public high school students' records for recruitment purposes (Feder 2009).

[2] According to a 2008 survey from the California State government-sponsored veterans' advocacy group Troops to College, 96% of all recruits choose to sign up for GI Bill educational benefit when they join the military, However, less than 8% of veterans follow through with using their benefits to graduation post-service. (These data were collected before the economic recession was in full force. There has yet to be a comprehensive follow-up to this study, but Veterans Administration data show that more students are beginning to enter civilian colleges, in part because in a declining job market, veterans who wouldn't have previously enrolled in school are entering schools specifically to support themselves through GI Bill funds).

that question by examining what happens when soldiers trained in military culture and practice enter civilian colleges.

With the end of the Iraq War, 45,000 troops have returned to an economy marked by recession and high unemployment. With the anticipated end of the war in Afghanistan, many more are expected to leave the military and enter college. By exploring the experience of military veterans enrolled in civilian colleges, I hope to provide a basis for addressing the real needs and challenges of veterans attending college.

This issue disproportionately affects low-income young men and women, and increasingly, people of color. Although many proponents of the all-volunteer military forces seek to de-emphasize the role of socio- economic class on military recruitment (Asch 1999, Asch et al. 2009; Kane 2007), US Armed Forces enlistment data show that the majority of wartime recruits come from poor and working class families. Reeves (2011) calls it "The New American Segregation": the divide between those poor and working class people who fight wars and those (primarily from middle and upper economic classes) who don't join the military. By tracing the effects of wartime military experience on veterans' educational lives, I seek to re-assess military service as a route to educational opportunity. By looking at how support for veterans is constructed on college campuses, I explore how militarism becomes naturalized on campuses, transforming veteran support into a method through which to silence dissent and discussions about the wars.

This paper has two specific objectives: First, to examine how veterans returning from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars understand, negotiate and make sense of their combat experience in the context of civilian college campuses. Second, to probe existing programs and services currently developed by administrators, student affairs officers and civilian supporters that are

intended to facilitate veterans' success in college. I seek to show the unintended consequences of veteran support efforts on civilian campuses that, while well-intentioned, prove in some cases counter-productive to veterans and their teachers and classmates. In this paper I argue that significant disconnects and inconsistencies in the processes of making and unmaking the soldier, coupled with combat trauma, can profoundly complicate veterans' ability to redeem the educational promises offered at recruitment. I also argue that some efforts to support veterans on campus can contradict soldiers' experience of actually fighting in wars and contribute to veterans' feelings of alienation from civilian classmates and instructors. Moreover, support for veterans on campus is often framed as support for the military, which leads to silencing dissent about the wars.

This paper is an attempt to link "little narratives to big ones" (Rowe et al. 2002); by telling the stories of returning veterans in civilian schools, I seek to provide a window into larger social processes. This paper explores methods though which soldiers are trained in obedience and reflexive action and inculcated in a mission-oriented fraternity[3] of warriors and then examines how these daily military practices translate in their subsequent lives as civilian students. It is part of a larger dissertation project that examines ways that soldiers[4] are discursively framed on civilian campuses in diverse and at times diametrically opposed ways: as heroes, as killers, or as simply irrelevant, when their experience of having fought in wars is

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[3] I argue this for both male and female recruits. I view the institutional U.S. military as so profoundly gendered masculine in traditions, rituals, training, identity, practice, and the project of war itself (Enloe 1990, 2007; Nagel 1998, Oliver 2007, Silva 2008) that it is not possible to talk about a universalized military subject (or 'soldier') without discussing military practices as both shaping and shaped by gendered ideologies (Enloe 1990:45; see also Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 2007 and Lutz 2004). For these reasons, I consider female recruits to be joining a fraternity; one that constructs them as permanent and immutable transgressors because of their gender. While I discuss this in detail in my dissertation, this is not the focus of this paper.

[4] The majority of participants in this study are active or former members of the Army, but I interviewed veterans across four U.S. military branches: Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force. I recognize that each branch of service promotes its own identifying nomenclature: Soldier, Sailor, Marine, Airman and Guardsman (used for both male and female Air Force and Coast Guard members). Rather than using the more ideologically charged term 'warrior' currently favored by the U.S. Armed Forces, I use the generic term soldier, which has been used historically to mean "one engaged in military service" (Webster's Dictionary 2011).

ignored in the academic context. In this paper, I explore some of these disjunctures between soldiers' lived reality and the discursive constructions of warrior-hero, killer, and civilian student. As they re-enter the civilian world, veterans not only contend with these shifting identities, they also encounter educational institutions that do not easily respond to them as students. Because wartime military experience can have profound implications for life after discharge, it is crucial to understand ex-combatants' attempts to rejoin civilian life and educational institutions.

Overview

First, I give an introduction and background to the paper, including a review of relevant literature and the conceptual frameworks used in my research, with a brief description of military training. Next, I discuss my findings that transitions from military to civilian-student roles involve contradictory practices, identities, and ideologies that complicate and compromise vets' efforts at integrating into the academic environment. I conclude with some reflections and recommendations about what may help transitions between roles of soldier and student, and a cautionary note about unintended effects of some campus veteran support efforts.

My study examines social and cultural processes of veterans' re-entry in civilian colleges. It does not talk about specific measures for veteran success rates in college; instead it looks at processes of training and enculturation, examining conflicting norms and practices between military and civilian institutions. I focus on the pedagogical and cultural differences between military training and civilian colleges, and explore the conflicts and contradictions that arise when war veterans return to college campuses.

Background

The Growing Population of Student Veterans

Recent changes in the GI Bill have increased the amount of financial aid available for education, making college a more attractive post-service option for former military personnel. For this reason, Veterans Administration (VA) officials estimate that new veteran enrollment in colleges could increase by 25% by 2014.[5] Every month, thousands of veterans exit military service and transition into civilian society. The State of California has the largest military veteran population in the country, currently at 2.2 million.[6] To understand the issues many veterans face, I focus the next section on the historical relationship between military service and education in the United States from World War II forward.

Evolving Understandings of the GI Bill of Rights: From "White Affirmative Action" to Deferred Compensation Package

In U.S. history, military forces have evolved from colonial militias, to conscripted armies, to the current all-volunteer armed forces. This evolution has framed what Congress and the U.S. public have deemed appropriate compensation for going to war. Similarly, military conflicts take place in distinct sociopolitical moments; soldiers return from each war to different public reactions, which shape different treatment and rewards. The following section offers a brief historical overview of the benefits offered to returning soldiers in the United States since the Second World War.

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[5] US Student Veterans of America report, information from the US Veteran's Administration: 2011
[6] State of California Veteran's Administration website www.veterans.ca.gov retrieved 8/30/11

Since the passage in 1944 of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill, many Americans have viewed military service as an opportunity for low-income recruits to gain access to higher education (Altschuler & Blumin 2009). The WWII-era perception that military service is a democratizing force and an effective method of socialization portrays military training as a process much like a factory: by instilling values of discipline, patriotism, heroism in combat, duty and citizenship, national military service turns irresponsible boys into college-bound men. This myth is embedded in a national imaginary of the "Greatest Generation,"[7] grist for academic analysis as well as popular fiction and film. In this narrative, war is both crucible and catalyst for shaping a national and individual character: it whips recruits into shape so that irrespective of their state at entry they will leave military service prepared to succeed in college, and subsequently, in life. The dominant narrative of the GI Bill in popular and scholarly historiography builds on WWII veterans' personal success stories and reinforces a reverence for WWII soldiers returning victorious from a "Good War" to receive their rightful rewards.[8] This was the dominant story for the post-WWII years, until the Vietnam War, when war veterans returned to a country that was deeply divided about both the mission of the war and the role of returning soldiers.

The cultural narrative suturing military service and upward economic mobility was grounded in material conditions; the original GI Bill, one of the last legislative pieces of the New Deal reform movement, made WWII veterans beneficiaries of one of the Federal government's

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[7] The term "Greatest Generation" is attributed to journalist Tom Brokaw (1998) to describe the generation that grew up in the United States during the Great Depression and fought in WWII . In this narrative, this generation came home from war to receive college education through the GI Bill and build the U.S.A. into a global superpower. This story is popularized in academic and popular press and throughout mass culture (Altschuler & Blumin 2009, Frydl 2009, Brokaw 1998 and Humes 2006). The Hollywood film industry has played an important role in shaping and promulgating the "Greatest Generation" narrative through depictions of U.S. soldiers in World War II, through films like "Air Force" (1943), "The Story of GI Joe" (1945) "The Halls of Montezuma" (1951), "The Great Escape" (1963), and more recently "Saving Private Ryan" (1998).

[8] For a good example of the promulgation of this narrative see Humes (2006) *Over Here: How The GI Bill Transformed the American Dream.*

biggest wealth redistribution initiatives in history (Frydl 2009). But the egalitarian promise of the GI Bill failed to deliver equally to returning veterans; the distribution of the housing and educational benefits went principally to White veterans (Frydl 2009; Kleycamp, 2007).[9]

Recruiting for the All-Volunteer Military

With the end of the draft and the advent of the all-volunteer Armed Forces (AVF) recruiters began to rely more heavily on economic incentives, signing bonuses and educational promises to staff a standing military force. Recruiters framed military enlistment as a personal improvement project and an investment in their educational and financial future (which the Army condensed into the five-word advertising slogan: *Be All You Can Be*). Recruitment and retention held steady during times when the U.S. was not actively engaged in declared conflicts, but after an initial spike in enlistment after Sept. 11, 2001, numbers of new recruits declined steadily, especially after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Asch et al. 2009).

My research begins with the premise that statistics about military veterans, the GI Bill and college education reveal some hidden assumptions: first, that formal education has become a commodity and a tool for military recruitment and that military recruiters explicitly and aggressively promote education as an enlistment benefit. Second, at a political moment in which government funding for schools, housing, jobs, and medical care are at recent historic lows, enlisting in the military is one of the few ways people can receive these benefits (Mariscal 2007).

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[9] While the GI Bill did not specifically discriminate, it constructed no barriers to the private discrimination practices that profoundly affected outcomes. Frydl (2009) and Cohen (2003) note that while the GI Bill education benefit would pay for any college or university, many colleges had admissions policies that resulted in exclusion of Black Americans, and that invisible constraints of racial discrimination embedded in U.S. institutions conferred advantage on White veterans. Katznelson (2005) reframes this counter-narrative of Black exclusion from the New Deal and post- World War II social policy programs as a story of White inclusion, calling this period a time "when affirmative action was white."

Beyond an historically racialized benefits structure, the practice of soldiering is also highly racialized (White) and gendered (male): even as the AVF relies increasingly on racial and ethnic minority male and female recruits and consciously and explicitly portrays itself as race and gender neutral, recent scholarship confirms that the social construction of Whiteness and hegemonic masculinity is infused throughout military practice.[10]

Dueling Narratives

Today, both male and female soldiers return to a society characterized by competing narratives about soldiers. For example, the official storyline promulgated by the military establishment and vigorously taken up by veteran service organizations defines the returning soldiers as warrior-heroes poised to become the next generation of national leaders.[11] But since the Vietnam War, a competing and contradictory narrative, that of the troubled veteran, has also been a central theme in U.S. cultural memory. Because the Vietnam War was divisive and the outcome unclear, Vietnam veterans returned to a country that did not, as a whole, see them as heroes, and many of them did not view their role in the war as heroic (Robbins 1999).[12]

As is the case with all ideal types -- whether that of the war hero or the psychologically damaged combat veteran -- the reality is far more complex. Echoes of these two narratives can be heard on contemporary college campuses, and student- veterans must navigate among these

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[10] The US military claims to offer the template for a colorblind de-racialized America (Moskos and Butler 2007). In contrast, my work follows Sue (2004) and Madriaga (2005) in viewing the US military as an institution thoroughly constituted in discourses of Whiteness (Roediger 1991, Ignatiev 1995) and ethnocentric monoculturalism (Sue 2004).

[11] For a prime example of this narrative, see *Time Magazine* cover story "The New Greatest Generation: How young war veterans are redefining leadership at home" (Klein 2011).

[12] The Vietnam Veteran narrative is inseparably tied to the perception of the Vietnam War itself. While there is no singular, unifying narrative about the prosecution and outcome of that war, parts of the Vietnam narrative are uncontested: 1) that it was a profoundly divisive war that left deep wounds in U.S. body politic, and 2) that Vietnam veterans returned home with physical and emotional scars, and that they were marginalized and often neglected by U.S. policy and public (Sturken 1991).

tropes. While there is not yet a coherent national narrative about the current wars, the dominant reality is that most American civilians have no actual involvement with the wars and are generally silent about them. On many civilian campuses, the dominant narrative for returning student-veterans is silence and erasure, or the nullification or distortion of their military experience. As I intend to show, the fact that their military formation and experience is erased in civilian classrooms leaves many student/veterans feeling alienated from their civilian peers. Equally alienating for many veterans, however, is the opposite path taken by some campus student services to welcome war veterans by hailing them as heroes for actions about which they feel conflicted. The glorification of actions about which many veterans feel conflicted produces another form of erasure, one that distorts the veterans' combat experience.

Research Rationale and Questions

While extensive research explores methods of military training (Lande 2007, Grossman 1995, Moskos & Wood 1988) and the effects of military service on socio-economic outcomes for veterans (Bouffard 2005, Bryant et al. 1993), little has been written about the ways military and civilian pedagogies and culture intersect among veterans in civilian school settings. Within this literature, I have identified three broad explanations for low veteran success rates in college: Some argue that those who volunteer for the military are simply not destined for college from the outset (Bouffard 2005, Grubb et al. 2003). There is a partial truth in this claim: most current recruits come from poor and working-class backgrounds and typically choose military enlistment as an alternative to low-wage jobs or unemployment, rather than college. However, military

recruiters promise college education as a benefit of the military contract, which implies the assumption that service members will be able to take advantage of that benefit after discharge.

A second explanation for low veteran success in college is that combat leads to durable symptoms of trauma that interfere with reintegration in civilian classrooms (Cantrell & Dean 2007, Armstrong et al. 2006, Tick 2005, Hoge et al., 2004). A third explanation, widely cited in campus student affairs literature, claims that civilian college campuses are unfriendly to the U.S. Military, and that this drives military veterans away (Bunting 2005, Roth-Douquet & Shaeffer 2005, Boulton 2005, Byman 2007, Lewis 2008, DiRaimo et al 2008, Lederman 2008, Holloway 2009).

These explanations are inadequate, separately and collectively, for the following reasons: the first two are stereotypic and stigmatizing, in that they assume intellectual and emotional deficits among low-income military recruits. The third places the locus of the problem on a pair of unsupported assumptions: that civilian college campuses are anti-military, and that all veterans are pro-military. My research shows that many campuses, even some famous for campaigns against the Vietnam War are currently quite friendly toward military veterans, and more importantly, that many war veterans are highly ambivalent about the U.S. military and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

My research takes a different approach, and it has led me to develop different conclusions. I began my research with the perspective that military and college are educational settings that operate with vastly different practices, norms and logics. My research focuses on everyday practices of military training and civilian academic education and views learning as taking place within complex social and institutional relationships; as veterans move in and out of military and civilian roles, they embody and enact social relations and ideologies through

practice (Dyson & Genishi 2005, Lave 1996). My research explores how the highly situated and explicit pedagogies of military training are lived out and transposed in civilian academic settings.

To understand transitions from military life to civilian college I looked for the social-pedagogical practices involved in making and unmaking the soldier. To understand social, cultural and pedagogical experiences of student-veterans on civilian campuses, I studied their experiences in civilian college classrooms and in campus social organizations. My questions for this paper are: How do U.S. veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars understand, negotiate and make sense of their combat experience in the context of civilian college campuses? In what ways do civilian faculty, staff, students and troop-support non-governmental organizations (NGOs) influence this process?

Conceptual Frames: Military Socialization/Making the Soldier

This section begins with a review of selected literature on military training, followed by an outline of conceptual frameworks used to support my arguments. I view military training and civilian colleges as "Contact Zones" (Pratt 1991) where disparate cultural norms encounter each other, interact, and often clash.

The scholarship I looked to about military socialization draws on four basic sociological and anthropological frames. One group of sociologists views military culture as the internalization of social identity, institutional values, norms, and role expectations (Bourdieu 1977, Moskos and Wood 1988, Franke 2000). A second group focuses on the rituals through which new recruits are incorporated into the armed forces: combat exercises, marching cadences, battle cries and rituals produce shared beliefs and identities (Grossman 1995, Lande 2007). A third group of scholars, primarily anthropologists, emphasizes the everyday practices through

which soldiers make sense of their world (Herbert 1999, Aretxaga 2001, Shepler 2005) Finally,

discursive theories of socialization and culture examine how people entering the military adopt

militarized practices that shape their identities (Foucault 1977, Sasson-Levy, 2003).

> In the first four weeks of bootcamp, every single thing that you took as real-- about your cultural reality and your identity-- is not just called into question, but is raised and then erased. Norms about *everything*. Your norms about violence, about conduct, about role certainty, about moral reward. All the way down to spatial proximity between people. Every single one of those things is redone. And then your new identity is rewarded continually, for a longer period of time.
> -Jonathan, NU graduate and Gulf War Veteran[13]

Military socialization is inscribed in the bodies of recruits and lived out in daily practices.

It is well-documented in popular, academic, and military literature that military training involves

pedagogical processes intended to create group identity by dismantling new recruits' individual,

civilian orientation through sustained sleep deprivation, depersonalization, humiliation, physical

exertion, and ideological indoctrination (Grossman 1995; Cantrell and Dean 2005). Simultaneous

to unmaking the civilian, the soldier identity is formed through the processes of indoctrination

into military codes, rituals, and norms. This is achieved in part by applying a pedagogical

process intended to build intra-group bonds of mutual dependence through team-building

exercises.

Becoming a soldier is a corporeal process; beginning with basic training, the body serves

as the site of learning. Military social relations are reified through daily practices and occur

within the military *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977), or sets of internalized dispositions that lead veterans

to respond to their environments in militarily-structured ways even after they have left the

institutional military. The military habitus is lived out across spaces of training and combat;

inscribed in the bodies of soldiers and re-enacted or transformed in civilian classrooms and

campus veterans groups. Military disciplinary practices are inculcated, enacted and enforced by a

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[13] Jonathan recently graduated from NU with a PhD in Sociology.

hierarchic ranking system. Training provides direct and immediate reward and punishment. Success or failure is determined by performance of 'correct training' (Foucault 1977) instilled through operant conditioning (Skinner 1953, Grossman 1995).

Lande (2007) notes that soldiers learn to navigate daily activities and social relationships through their bodies' movements and processes. Learning to inhabit an institution requires learning quotidian functions in culturally specific ways. This process makes the body an essential foundation of the military domain. As Lande notes, in the process of militarization, when the civilian becomes a soldier "the body not only takes on new meanings (as a 'weapon,' 'vehicle,' and 'protective armor') and value (physical performance as a principle of hierarchy), it is lived differently and thus changes form." (96).

Military training involves specifically embodied rituals: breathing exercises, call-and-response techniques, a reward and punishment system, and gestures of hierarchal relations (e.g. saluting; march-and-parade commands). Through these embodied disciplinary practices, recruits learn to shed their previous self-identification as civilians and instead to identify as members of a military corpus (Foucault 1977, Lande 2007). Military enculturation requires individuals to master such tasks as defining community, setting boundaries, and articulating a national character, history, and normative vision of the way things 'should be.' These tasks, all centered around creating an accepted common sense (Gramsci 1971), are accomplished through the invocation of rituals and daily practices, and with community members' active participation (Gramsci 1971, Hall 1988, Rose 1999). I intend to show how these embodied practices contrast with the practices of abstract intellectualization required by the college student.

Basic Training, Civilian Colleges: Contact Zones

This research begins with the understanding that learning always takes place relationally, in social contexts (Chaiklin and Lave 1996). Pratt (1991:34) writes that learning takes place within spaces of difference and contestation, or 'contact zones,' where disparate cultures meet, engage, and struggle with each other, often in asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination. I view the socio-pedagogical space of basic training as representing a contact zone between civilian recruits and their military trainers, who are charged with erasing recruits' pre-existing habits and norms through methods of domination and subordination (Grossman 1995).

For veterans, college represents yet another contact zone: it is a social space of collision and contestation. While the common perception is that the civilian academy is a space of free, unrestricted intellectual activity, in actuality it is similarly regulated, albeit less overtly and to a lesser degree (Jaffee 1995). Academic disciplinary practices are inculcated, enacted and enforced by a hierarchic ranking system and gendered practices of privilege and expectation. As in the military, success or failure is determined by performance of 'correct training' (Foucault 1977) and adherence to traditions, conventions, and rank (Jaffee 1995). When veterans join civilian campuses, they are moving from one regulated social space to another. But the rules of the academy are much less explicit. As I will show, the norms of the two institutions are diametrically opposed, and in many instances, this disjuncture is a key factor in the veterans' low rates of academic success.

Research Methods

This working paper draws on ethnographic observation and participant/ observation, as well as in-depth, semi-structured interviews with students who are veterans from two educational institutions. The following section briefly describes the two research sites, my interview method, and an overview of my informants and recruitment process.

Setting: Rural Community College and Urban University

The majority of my ethnographic research for this paper was conducted at two sites in California: a community college in a rural agricultural valley town and an elite university in a cosmopolitan urban area. These two sites illustrated different, but related processes.

The rural community college ('Halcón College')[14] exemplifies the typical point of entry into higher education for veterans, most of whom need academic preparation before transferring to four-year colleges. The community college is located in a majority Chicano/Latino agricultural town that has been hard-hit by economic recession; in this respect, it is typical of many towns from which the majority of military recruits are drawn during times of war. Data from the top-tier university ('Northern University' or NU) show the inculcation of cultural/academic norms at a highly competitive, elite institution with extensive support for veterans. NU seems to represent a best-case academic scenario for returning veterans. Nevertheless, for many veterans transferring into Northern University, the clash between military and civilian academic and cultural norms is very pronounced.

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[14] All names of colleges, towns, and people are pseudonyms.

Halcón College

Halcón College is a two-year community college located in the town of 'Los Robles', a former agricultural hub in California's Central Valley. Los Robles is currently in transition away from agriculture and toward housing subdivisions and big-box outlet stores. Large swaths of stone fruit orchards and root vegetable farms were paved over for housing tracts in the 1960's, and this development pattern accelerated during the real estate boom of the 1990s and early 2000s. In 2011, skeletal, abandoned half-built housing developments mark the area, serving as reminders of the recent housing bust and failed economies of expansion. Latinos constitute 58% (U.S. Census 2010) of Los Robles' population. Manufacturing and business services have declined during the past five years, and electrical assembly jobs have declined precipitously since the early 2000s. Retail low-wage sales jobs are common, as big box outlet stores are major employers. There are at least six migrant worker camps run by private parties for profit, indicating that agricultural labor is still a major source of employment in Los Robles.

Northern University

Promotional materials for Northern University describe the campus as home to top scholars, accomplished writers, star athletes, and prize-winning scientists. NU has a reputation as one of the country's foremost research universities, and admission is highly competitive. It is located in 'Baldwin', a cosmopolitan urban center known for its liberal leanings and antipathy towards military projects and militarism in general, and the campus is a site for progressive and anti-war activism. Yet various military support organizations have designated the university one of the nation's top "Military Friendly Schools."[15] It is expensive to live near NU: the university is

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[15]The criteria by which campuses qualify for this designation varies, but it generally means that there are staff, funding, and supportive services dedicated to military veterans on campus, and that there is a difficult-to-quantify atmosphere of respect for former service members on campus. NU was named by Military.com as one of the "Top 50 Military Friendly Schools" (11/8/10).

located within a metropolitan area with one of the highest concentrations of wealth in the country, which is a factor in the high cost of living for students.

Interviews

To answer my questions about what and how people learn in and through the military and during a war experience, as well as how that socialization intersects with civilian schooling, I conducted in-depth interviews with 44 male and female student veterans who, at the time of the interviews, were currently enrolled in or had previously attempted college. Informants spent between 1.5 and 6 hours speaking with me (some over the course of multiple interviews). The average length of each interview was approximately two hours.

Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted in informants' homes or in campus buildings (libraries, student centers, or coffee shops); informal conversations took place in bars, during backyard barbeques, at parties, in college hallways, or in classrooms. I was a participant/observer for five months in a re-entry class for veterans at NU and in a civilian history class at Halcón College. The semi-structured interviews involved questions about participants' background and motivations for enlisting, military training practices (focusing on the introductory period of Basic Training), and their experiences in civilian colleges. To explore how student/veteran practices and rituals shape identities that are negotiated in daily life, I used participant-observation at veterans' club meetings, troop support events and social gatherings. For the descriptions of basic training pedagogies and experiences, I relied on informant self-report, but I cross-referenced this information by studying pedagogies elaborated in Department of Defense training manuals.

Informants

     My informants for this study were 44 military veterans (29 male and 15 female) who had been deployed to participate in the campaigns 'Operation Enduring Freedom' (Afghanistan) or 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' (Iraq). Because one of my analytic categories is the effect of war trauma on veterans' subsequent college experience, I sought informants who had participated in war activities as part of their military experience. I did not exclusively seek informants with explicitly combat-identified military occupational specialties (MOS), such as infantry, explosives specialists, or combat engineers. My assumption is that in conditions of insurgency and counter-insurgency warfare, anyone (U.S. military personnel or civilian nationals) in zones of conflict can be subject to combat-related violence.

     Although I did not pre-screen informants for family educational level and socio-economic class, most come from family backgrounds that did not include college as an expected educational goal; all but four were the first in their families to attend college (see Table I for numbers by race/ethnicity). All informants were between ages 23 and 33. They enlisted in the military for a variety of reasons: for access to job training and employment, for post-secondary education funding, and/or to get out of difficult or dangerous social situations (e.g. they were offered enlistment as an alternative to jail, they wanted to distance themselves from criminal involvement in their home towns, or they just didn't see any other available opportunities). All informants talked about a lack of economic opportunity in their pre-service lives as influencing their decision to enlist. For example, one informant, having grown up amidst violence on the streets of his hometown, said he enlisted (in December 2003, well after the Iraq war was underway) to help provide for his family. He explained his decision to go to war through a cost/benefit lens: "I knew there was a risk [of being killed in combat], but I always said, 'if I die in the streets of Oakland, my mom's not going to get anything. If I die in Iraq, my mom will get

$400,000.' That's a lot better." A few informants came from military families and said that they

wanted to experience what their fathers, grandfathers, or brothers had been through. With the

exception of one officer (who was commissioned after completing Naval Reserve Officer

Training Corps), all informants enlisted in the lowest ranks (E-1 or E-2 equivalents).

I recruited Northern University interview volunteers at Northern University Veterans'

Club meetings. At Halcón College, I presented my research request in classes in which veterans

were enrolled, and asked for volunteers. Other community college informants were referred by

word of mouth from other student veterans or faculty.

	Northern University		Community College*	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total	18	4	11	10
White	11	3	6	2
Black	2	0	1	1
Asian Pacific Islander	2	1	1	2
Latino/a	3	0	4	3
Native American	0	0	0	2
* Participants drawn principally from Halcón College, but also from 6 additional community colleges in Northern California				

Table 1. In-depth interviews: Iraq and Afghanistan War veteran-students by race, gender, site. N=44

Methodological Challenges and Dilemmas: Researcher Positionality

As an outsider to military culture(s) I saw my job as trying to understand, through

specific illustrations, how culture and dispositions are lived in informants' post-military lives.

There are epistemological challenges to doing research within communities of which one is not a

member.[16] I use extensive quotations in an effort to reflect as accurately as possible their experience and perspective.

I came into this research prepared for the possibility that my position as a middle-aged, university- trained civilian White woman might influence, positively or negatively, (I assumed negatively) potential respondents' decision to talk to me. I wondered if my civilian status might lead some veterans to be less forthcoming in their responses in formal interviews and informal social gatherings. I attempted to mitigate this situation with persistent endurance, hoping that people might become accustomed to and accepting of my presence: I attended every meeting, answered every question about my research project whenever asked, accepted every social invitation, and joined, by invitation, an online community of veterans. While it is likely that my outsider position has influenced interactions with informants, I believe that my outside status also allows me a lens through which to 'make strange' (and visible) dispositions and practices not often seen in civilian worlds.

Findings

I argue that the academy and the military are both explicitly teaching institutions. But for many, the transition from the military to civilian colleges or universities is not smooth because the two institutions have divergent logics, traditions, and missions. Moreover, I found that many of the techniques and methods used to teach soldiers how to fight in war and practice military occupation can lead to feelings of alienation from civilian society. This in turn can impede soldiers' re-integration into civilian life and create obstacles to their success in college.

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[16] Studying cultural practices from the outside presents particular challenges, but as anthropologist and Army Captain Alexandra Jaffee (1997) notes, there are also challenges involved in attempting to produce an ethnography while positioned within a 'total system' (Goffman 1961) such as the military. Jaffee found that she was unable to write an ethnography of her military experience because she was unable to experience her civilian and military identities as separate when she was inside the totalizing discourse of her military environment.

The following section looks at the re-integration of veterans on different scales. First, I discuss the experience of individual veterans and their interactions with teachers and classmates. These interactions involve what I call 'disjunctures,' or points of conflicting norms and practices. Following that, I examine how schools relate to, perceive, and 'construct' the student-veteran through discourses of hero-worship and what I call 'erasures,' or the nullification of their military experience.

For many veterans, aspects of their military experience have transferred positively into their post-military educational lives. Many informants report that through their military service they gained confidence in their abilities to learn new skills, work with people, and apply military discipline to their studies. For some working-class student-veterans, attending college would not have been possible without the entrée and funding they receive thanks to their military service. While this is the case for some veterans, a dramatic underutilization of GI Bill education benefits indicates that something frequently prevents veterans from taking advantage of educational opportunities and redeeming the promises made by military recruiters during the enlistment process. The following sections discuss two of these obstacles: disjunctures and erasures.

Disjunctures

Shifting from military training, through the trauma of combat, to civilian college is difficult, in part, because of what I call disjunctures between military and civilian norms and practices. Everyday practices of military institutions are based on a command structure and involve disciplinary procedures, rituals, and the raison d'être to create warriors prepared to carry out military missions. Everyday practices in academic institutions are significantly different. The obvious emphasis on the ability to read, comprehend and synthesize academic texts, and to write

in academic English masks more profound and competing cultural differences between military and civilian cultural practices, understanding and identities. These include expectations about command structure and hierarchy, discipline, comradeship and collective effort, in a context where most of their academic colleagues have no intimate knowledge of the veterans' experience. In the following section I will discuss two major disjunctures that complicate the path from military to college, which I have categorized as pedagogical and cultural.

Pedagogy: "This is too slow"

The teaching method of basic training is personal and hands-on, with intense emphasis placed on the relation between trainer and trainee. All of the research respondents remembered the smallest details about their drill instructors: name, voice, mannerisms —with intensely negative or positive effect; usually negative, but sometimes both. Because all recruits today train as if they are going to be deployed into combat zones (and many will be), they report that their learning processes felt very immediate and applicable to life or death situations. This expectation of immediacy and intensity created a feeling of disconnection for them when they returned to civilian schools, where veterans often experience the content and process of learning as passive, abstract, without context, and slow motion. Veterans said they were unaccustomed to the expectations of civilian classrooms, where they were asked to absorb facts and concepts without being called on to immediately demonstrate the practical application of their newly acquired knowledge. Halcón College student Evie said of her unsuccessful attempt at attending college: "I thought 'this is too slow'... there wasn't any hands-on, there was nothing that even got us out of the chairs. I couldn't learn like that. I was getting Fs, I was getting more and more frustrated-- I just wanted to go back into the military, to active duty. I dropped out of school."

Evie noted a sharp contrast between applied, adrenaline-filled training exercises, where failure to master a procedure could have fatal consequences, and the sedentary, abstract,

extended accumulation of knowledge (the relevance of which she could rarely discern) involved in academic study. She said that her inability to master what she considered the basic skills of being a student (sitting still in a chair, decoding academic texts, and participating in discussions) made her feel incompetent. Because in Evie's military experience success or failure was determined by demonstrated competence in activity, rather than subjective measures of comprehension, Evie felt like a failure at college, and did not believe she could succeed in that learning style. She sought to regain a sense of competence by returning to a more familiar learning environment; she ended up re-enlisting in the Army and is currently on active duty status.

All respondents in this study said that military training was effective for them because it incorporated military habits into daily practice. Veterans described the military as having "a teaching culture" in which structured, didactic, and practical pedagogies are combined to help newcomers master new skills. However, Northern University student Mark, who studies education, spoke about basic training instruction not as teaching, but as indoctrination and operant conditioning designed to assure reflexive action. He said that military pedagogy purposefully employed methods of infantilization as a means to teach subordination through re-training in the most mundane daily functions. Through corporeal, practical activity in the military milieu, this instruction not only inculcates obedience, but also serves as behavioral patterning and training for combat performance. Mark described how learning to drink a glass of water at mealtime became a de facto rifle drill:

> When you grab the glass in chow hall, you're told to shoot your arm straight out and put it down. You have to maintain the 'thousand yard stare' [staring into the distance, not responding to stimuli] while you do this. They make you do this is to brainwash you, but it's also to teach you the motions you'd perform for the rifle drill. It goes hand in hand. When you eat, you do the motions of the rifle drill, and when you do the rifle drill and marching, it's to teach you to unquestioningly follow orders.

Through constant repetition, daily activities like eating and drinking became linked with combat skills and habits of obedience. The military is a situated learning environment that creates (along with indoctrination) an activity-based practical setting for action. In contrast, civilian college is more abstract and deliberative, rather than action-based. The military pedagogical model is designed to prepare soldiers to function in a hierarchal bureaucracy and to habituate conditioned reflexes for combat. Academic evaluative and cognitive strategies are designed to train intellectuals to weigh and argue various perspectives.

In Northern University's academic environment, students are expected to problematize established knowledges, theories, and beliefs. They're asked to make connections among and between diverse perspectives, finding commonality and contrast. This type of measured intellectual practice is antithetical to the reflexive response required on the battlefield. The clash of these norms has ramifications for veterans after they leave the military and enter civilian colleges. While some veterans embrace the new discipline of critical thinking, for many it is a disorienting experience that leads to feelings of incompetence.[17]

Culture: Becoming a 'Good Team Player'

> You cannot succeed in the Army or on the TDC [Army Training Development Course] if you cannot work as a member of a team, working together toward a common goal. The phrases, 'we will,' 'we can,' 'our platoon' describe a common goal or interest… Ask yourself, 'Am I a good team player? Am I a Warrior?' If not, become one. Work on this today.
> --Army training manual (Klein et al 2006, B-8:6)

"Battle Buddies" and Following Orders

One of the biggest disjunctures reported by veterans in entering civilian schools was the stark change from collective practice and common goals of the military to the individualized practice of the civilian student. The comment I heard most commonly from veterans was that they missed

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[17] Mark is a student veteran who embraced NU's emphasis on critical thinking. For him, the major disjuncture had occurred in response to military pedagogies: he said he felt manipulated by this kind of training and took it as an object lesson in what education should *not* be. He is now studying to be a high school teacher at NU and writing a thesis on critical pedagogy.

the camaraderie and support of their military teammates. Soldiers supported each other to comply with the externally-imposed time and activity structures of the military. When veterans return to civilian schools, it is up to them to figure out class enrollment, schedules and requirements on their own, with neither the explicit orders of a command hierarchy, nor the support of fellow soldiers. In the following section I illustrate this disjuncture with the concepts of the "battle buddy" and an example of inculcated command response.

Early in basic training, every recruit is assigned a "battle buddy": a fellow soldier with whom one is mutually responsible for keeping on schedule, on track, and out of danger. In military training and operations, logistics are supremely important; meetings, meals, transportation and training all require coordinated movement. The "battle buddy" structure of mutual accountability is integral to the military habitus and has a practical application: on bases and in the field of combat, plans and schedules change, often at the last minute. Changes in schedule are transmitted and coordinated through a chain of command; if plans change and the soldier is not in communication with a battle buddy, unit, or chain of command, then the soldier doesn't know where to go. On an operational level, this may hold up the rest of the unit, possibly exposing the soldier and others to danger and threatening the military mission. On a social level, deviation from the group dynamic means one's place in the social order is lost. If you aren't part of a group and don't have a battle buddy to make sure you are where you are supposed to be and on time, you become disconnected from the system's structure.

Abel, a student/veteran at Halcón College, noted that military practice encourages mutual responsibility for learners:

> I think [the military] teaches you camaraderie and team work, where you always had to teach your buddy. If you see someone obviously make a mistake or if they could have the potential to make a mistake, get 'em out of that situation, you know, help 'em out, because if they go down, you're gonna go down. It's that weakest link thing. You're only as strong as your weakest link— that's how it was, that's what it teaches you.

In contrast, when student veterans arrive at college they are expected to make decisions about their individual educational trajectories. Many spoke about the difficulty of moving from externally imposed military time and activity structures motivated by command to the self-regulation and internal structure required of college students. Brett, a Halcón College student and Army veteran, noted:

> Throughout your military career you're told by your chain of command exactly every minute what to do and when to do it. In civilian school, it's really up to you to go out there and figure out how to do stuff—no one's telling you to do it, no one's giving you a 4 a.m. wake up call to get up and go to school. I think that was the biggest hurdle for me.

This difficulty adjusting to individualized civilian schedules was noted with far more prevalence in conversations with community college students, but only rarely with the Northern University students. For many veterans, community college is their first point of entry into the civilian post-secondary educational system. Their previous experience with schooling was either attending high school, where they were not expected to act as autonomous adults, or community college satellite campuses on or near military bases, where they were still subject to the structured discipline of military schedules. Thus, civilian community college represents an institutional contact zone—it is these veterans' first encounter with the demands and logics of the adult civilian educational system. New student veterans must learn to negotiate this system while simultaneously learning how to function as a non-affiliated adult in the civilian world. Many are learning how to be students while simultaneously learning how to navigate the daily demands of civilian adulthood: shopping, cooking, renting apartments, finding jobs, and getting medical care.

Significantly, most veterans talked about feeling alienated from larger social processes of individualism, interpersonal competition and self-focus, and their fellow civilian students were representative of those processes. The social disjuncture felt by veterans who feel the absence of collective sensibility shows up when they describe their civilian classmates as overly pre-

occupied with individual desires and well-being: almost a grotesque inversion of the collective

ethos they had learned in the military. This feeling leads to estrangement from their civilian

classmates, and it's often articulated in the remark that civilian life "doesn't feel real." As

Northern University student Grant said:

> When I got back, I just didn't feel like anything was real, and I still have that problem. Things were very tangible in the Army—you do this because if you don't, somebody can get hurt, or die. So you have to just get over yourself because what's going on is so much bigger than you. Then you get to the civilian world, and it's all about *your* feelings and what do *you* want to do, and you learn all this stuff in school and then you graduate and maybe you don't even use it. So it's just a very fake world. So it's kind of hard to get motivated sometimes.

Habituation to external command response posed a problem for Army veteran Yesenia

when she wanted to enroll in college after leaving the military. She had joined the Army with the

intent of leaving her childhood home to be independent from her overbearing father. Her stated

reasons for joining the Army were: "I wanted to 'Be all I could be'[18]; travel, get paid, get the

college money, make something of myself, and get out of town." Although she spoke about the

desire to go to college as being a prime motivation for enlisting, Yesenia struggled to adapt in

community college because she was unable to identify what courses she wanted to take. Yesenia

recently transferred to a four-year state college, but she continues to have trouble choosing an

academic major.

> In the Army, you don't really think for yourself, you just do what you're told, so you don't really grow as a person. Instead of my dad telling me what to do, it was my First Sergeant. Or Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam became my dad. And when I got out it was like— ok, now what do I do? What am I going to study at school? I changed my major like 10 times. Now I have to hurry and finish my degree—what do I study? I'd go around asking people what I should study. I want somebody tell me what to do! I'm still trying to figure this out- I'm going back to school now and I still don't know what I want to study—why can't I figure out what I like?

Since GI Bill benefits pay for only a limited time in school, Yesenia felt that her

indecision cost her crucial time that she needed to finish: the clock on her GI Bill benefits has

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[18] She is alluding to "Be All You Can Be," the official Army recruitment slogan in 2000, when Yesenia enlisted

been ticking since she entered college. Yesenia attributes her indecisiveness about personal choices to being habituated to following orders.

That NU student veterans did not report difficulties negotiating the individual focus of the civilian academy can also be explained by the fact that to have transferred into the university, they must have acquired and mastered these complex skills; they must have completed all academic prerequisites with a sufficiently high grade point average, applied, and been accepted by a competitive university. Moreover, all NU student-veteran informants had received extensive support and mentoring, either from civilian instructors, family members, partners, or veteran service organizations. All noted that without coaching and support geared specifically toward preparing them for the norms and demands of the university, they would not have made it to NU.

Culture Clash

Student veterans on civilian campuses must learn to interact with classmates with widely varying beliefs with no such mandate or training of mutual dependency. Because there is little direct instruction on how to live in a socially heterogeneous civilian campus environments, student veterans and civilians often don't know how to bridge these divides.[19] This cultural mismatch or disjuncture can be seen in various examples with veterans on civilian campuses.[20] Table 2 provides a synthesis of differences and discontinuities among military and civilian pedagogical and cultural characteristics.

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[19] A commonly stated goal of post-secondary education is to teach students to critically examine opinions and data from multiple points of view. Morson (2004) argues that this is a critical function of schools saying "We live in a world of enormous cultural diversity, and the various languages and points of view of students have become a fact that cannot be ignored. Teachers need to enter in dialogue with those points of view and to help students do the same. For difference may best be understood not as an obstacle but as an opportunity." (317) However, formal curricula designed to foster teamwork and appreciation for cultural diversity on most community college campuses is scarce to non-existent. At NU, curricula specifically designed to teach respect for and understanding of cultural differences tend be concentrated in required diversity courses; every undergraduate must take at least one 3-unit diversity course to graduate. This requirement does not exist at Halcón College.

[20] My dissertation explores more deeply the ways that cultural difference is lived out on campuses. In this paper, I offer a few brief examples.

Military Training	Civilian College
Binary thinking, job is to quickly identify ally-or- enemy, right-or-wrong	Job is to discern and appreciate shades of gray
Truth is absolute	Truth is relative-- culturally, historically, etc.
Competency based	Comprehension based
Evaluated by success/failure outcome measures	Evaluated subjectively
Kinesthetic, hands-on	Abstract
Individual is rewarded for subsuming self into success of the group (group orientation)	Individual is rewarded for standing out from the crowd with unique insight or perspective (individualistic orientation)
Hierarchy is explicit and valued	Hierarchy is covert and deprecated
Military manages your time	Demands independent time management

Table 2. Summary of Contrasts Between Military Training and Civilian Colleges

Respect and Difference: "I won't call you Rachel"

Small, daily conflicts on campus can arise from misaligned cultural norms, even when both sides are attempting to demonstrate respect. Halcón College student/veterans note that the generalized informality of community college is pronounced and distracting after the strictly enforced behavioral norms they practiced in the military. Iraq war veteran Evie talked about a college instructor who intended to mitigate hierarchal relations between teacher and student by asking Evie to address her by first name. Evie refused to do so because she believed that this was disrespectful. In this conflict, both sides believed they were holding a position of mutual respect, but they were coming from opposing cultural reference points: "My instructor told me 'Don't call me ma'am. Call me Rachel.' And I said 'I won't call you Rachel,' because I consider her my superior and that applies wherever I'm at. That's one of those disciplines that won't ever leave me, and that's important to me; that's very, very important to me."

In this instance, both parties were attempting to signal respect within an imposed hierarchy. The instructor sought to reject hierarchic norms and signal respect to Evie by insisting on being called by her first name, while Evie held to her training in military practices of respect

for rank by refusing to treat her professional superior as a peer. In Evie's view, she was signaling respect by using the honorific "ma'am" even though this meant that she refused to comply with the instructor's wishes (or in military terms, a direct order). Evie resolved the conflict of cultural norms by choosing to honor a disciplinary practice that had become an important part of her identity (one that 'won't ever leave' her). This case represents a relatively benign example of ingrained cultural beliefs overriding norms of the civilian institution. However, other examples of cultural differences illustrate different stakes for students and instructors. NU student Mitch said it was difficult to keep his temper in class when he perceived disrespect by classmates towards professors. He said that his training led him to feel personally offended when civilian students spoke over the instructor during lectures at his (pre-transfer) community college. In this case, Mitch identified with the instructor and took public umbrage on her behalf: "A couple of times I would stand up in class and go 'It's really rude when you disrespect [the professor's] time like this. It's rude to me. It's rude to your professor.' I'd say things like that, but not that often. Mostly I'd just sit there and get mad in my own head and just get madder and madder." Mitch said that these outbursts had negative effects: he appeared to classmates as short-tempered and perhaps unstable. In saying that he usually remained quiet, getting "madder and madder," he signals that keeping silent exacted an emotional toll.

The issue of perceived disrespect was more pronounced among veterans at the community college level. Lack of defined social roles and universal behavioral norms continually came up as a problem for student veterans on both campuses, but veterans at NU mostly spoke about civilian student behavior they considered disrespectful at their pre-transfer community colleges, saying that the culture at N.U. was more respectful toward professors. NU student Grant described the problem as a lack of clearly defined roles in civilian schools.

You have to know your role. In the Army, the teacher's the teacher. That's the boss. Some [civilian] kids at community college-- you don't see it here [at NU]-- will give lip or not take teachers seriously or not listen, or pack up early, and things like that—that would just not happen in the Army. I still don't pack up early. I think it's very disrespectful. That's carried over for me.

Erasures

Social Invisibility and Erasure

The All-Volunteer military has allowed the majority of U.S. civilians to live their lives untouched by the current wars. The fact that many college students are unaware of, or disinterested in the current wars adds to feelings of alienation felt by many war veterans on civilian campuses. For some civilian students, the veterans' war experience is unknown and irrelevant. The invisibility of veterans' actual wartime experience, or what I call 'erasure,' heightens the disjunctures for returning veterans. Not only are veterans expected to shed their collective identity and adopt an individual one, but their military experience often becomes invisible in most of their civilian classrooms. NU student Kevin said he felt like an "outcast" when he started at community college:

> Having tattoos and looking older, I felt like kind of an outcast, especially when I was first starting in school. I was in class with 16, 17, 18 year olds; I was only 24, but it was like a big jump. I didn't really get along with very many people. I just kind of did my own thing. I mean I just felt no connection with people. I tried to be friendly, but it was just...nothing ever happened, connection-wise. Everything just dissipated…

NU student Grant spoke about his frustration returning to school after a 16- month deployment leading a bomb-detection squad in Iraq. He said civilian classmates were not interested in hearing about his experiences or opinions: "I'm kind of a wealth of knowledge about what's going on over there [in Iraq] and they [students] wouldn't ask me questions -- they didn't care. I thought I had some insight but nobody really cared about it."

This feeling about the invisibility of his war experience surfaced again for Grant during an English class at his community college. Students were asked to choose a poem to read, and many of the poems Grant found to be frivolous or unimportant. When it was his turn, he read a

poem about death in war. The following quote illustrates some of his frustration. and his desire

to communicate about the deadly realities of war and the ephemeral nature of life:

> I definitely remember saying in class 'this is really stupid'—we were reading poetry. I brought in the poem Death of a Ball Turret Gunner[21]. It's really graphic: basically this guy gets killed and they wash his body out [of his gunnery turret] with a hose. I read that poem because of how simple it was, and because there's no thought to when people get killed over there [Iraq]. They make it out to be some heroic thing, but you just get blown up, and you're just dead, and that's just it. So I'm trying to tell everybody 'you think you're so important, but if any of you got hit by a car this morning, we would all still be in class here, learning today's lesson.' And maybe ten people in this world would care, like your parents, and some family and friends, and most of them will actually get over it within the year, and only some affected for a very long time. You know how… (pauses)…how insignificant you are. When they want you to be very significant, but you really don't matter.

In reading this poem to the class, Grant was attempting to make his experience with death and

war: to make *himself* visible in the civilian classroom. He was attempting to introduce the painful

reality of war into the consciousness of the students. For Grant, death in war is not "some heroic

thing" as "they" (presumably U.S. society) would have the class believe, but simply the end of

life. This quote demonstrates that for students like Grant, silence about the wars is a source of

difficulty.

Ideological Erasures: Creating Heroes, Silencing Debates

  The military establishment celebrates the warrior-hero who fought, putatively, to defend

the nation and its freedoms. This perspective is taken up and amplified by civilian troop-support

organizations. But forcing a hero identity on those for whom that label doesn't fit contradicts

their experience and can create cognitive and emotional dissonance that can lead to alienation

from civilian society. For example, Bridget, a former Army intelligence specialist and

community college student, spoke about being ordered to participate in actions that directly led

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[21]The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner *(Randall Jarrel 1945)*
From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from the dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

to civilian deaths. Her job was to interpret intercepted messages and identify "target packages" of Iraqis to be arrested or killed. She spoke about the psychological burden of the trauma of being both victim and facilitator of violence. She said she did not see her work as heroic and indicated that she suspected ulterior motives of civilians who force a heroic mantle upon her and other veterans: "People want to make us icons. They want heroes. We're not icons. We can't all be heroes for them." That soldiers "can't all be heroes for them" implies that civilians insist on this narrative because they need to feel better about having sent the soldiers to war. This heroic narrative acts as another form of erasure that foster feelings of disconnection from civilian classmates and society, which in turn heightens the often-heard complaint of combat veterans: that 'no civilian can ever understand me.' Moreover, when this hero narrative is promulgated by pro-troop organizations, it tends to preclude dissent or discussion about the wars. For some, this creates more cognitive dissonance that can negatively affect their attempts at civilian schools.

Northern University student Connor is another example of a veteran who deals with conflicting feelings about his actions during war. While deployed in Afghanistan, Connor worked as a turret gunner on a weapons- mounted armored security vehicle. A 20-year-old recruit from rural Northern California, his job in Afghanistan was to "destroy, neutralize or suppress insurgent forces." But his first sergeant, translating that mission into battlefield *realpolitik,* told him his job was to "kill Haji." In the first of three two-hour interviews, Connor spoke at length about emotional and spiritual crises he faced on returning to the US after a tour of duty in Afghanistan. Connor said that he realized his participation in combat violence created a rupture with his previous worldview and caused him to lose his Christian faith. His remorse turned to violent fantasies aimed at the US military.

> None of the stuff we did when we were deployed really hit me at the time. I just did it. And after I got back, [the feelings] starting building, about what we did and what we are doing, all the killing. It built into a really festering feeling inside me. So I became very angry toward the Army

as an institution. I used to think if I could just destroy this entire military infrastructure, I would be wiping out a parasite in this world. And I thought 'if I could just kill it all' -- not the people, but all the equipment and the buildings… I used to fantasize about that.

Despite those negative feelings, Connor said that the combat environment felt more "real" to him, saying he missed the asceticism, discipline and sacrifice he felt in Afghanistan and the intensity of deployment. Immediately after returning home, he volunteered to go fight in Iraq. Despite his contradictory feelings, Connor felt his military experience overall was positive in his life, because it got him out of his rural small town and is now paying for college. But for Connor, the re-integration process means he now has to deal with his conflicting feelings about what he did.

After discharge, soldiers return to schools, families and communities and deal with their contradictory feelings. While some veterans successfully make the adjustment, many become addicted to drugs and alcohol, engage in fights, domestic violence and criminal behavior; unprecedented numbers are killing themselves.[22] I argue that it is not possible to fully unmake the soldier and remake the civilian, if society will not allow the soldiers to honestly address the 'mission' and the consequences of the current wars. As I will show, veterans' support organizations enforce a separation and silence dialogue with civilians, thus maintaining the gap between civilians and veterans and making it more difficult when veterans return to civilian schools.

Enforced Silences, Ghosts of Vietnam and the Production of Militarized Common Sense

On both the Halcón and Northern University campuses, the spectral image of the scorned Vietnam veteran remains a potent reference point. The trope of the beleaguered veteran harassed by civilian college students is invoked most often by representatives of the military

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[22] Nearly half of college students who are U.S. military veterans reported thinking of suicide and 20 percent said they had planned to kill themselves, rates significantly higher than among college students in general (Lipka, 2011).

establishment, veterans' advocates and school administrators. It is rarely mentioned by student

veterans, even at the historically anti-war Northern University. [23] Many veterans talked about

professors and civilian classmates who did not support the wars, but the vast majority in this

study said they felt no animosity from civilian students or teachers. In contrast to the widely-

circulated trope of civilian college students labeling soldiers "baby-killers," most in this study

said they either feel invisible on college campuses, or if they are noticed, they are treated

respectfully, and are often afforded high esteem by fellow students.

Over the 20 months I spent at the two campuses, I saw no evidence of civilian animosity

towards military veterans. The only people I heard use the term "killer" to describe U.S. combat

soldiers were the veterans themselves. Many I spoke with self-identified, with regret and

remorse, as killers. An example is Halcón College student Garrett, a former infantry soldier in

Iraq, who enlisted at age 17. He said he left the military because he "couldn't keep taking

peoples' lives." Garrett said he felt the only skill he learned in his deployment was how to kill,

and says he now must deal with aftermath of that experience on a daily basis.

> I wish that I would have taken something from my actual craft and been able to use it in civilian
> life. Unfortunately, no one, no one, *no one* is hiring someone that can go kill people. Our soldiers
> have done some very, very messed up things. We're young. We were brought to war too young.
> We're forged to be killers. It's not something that a 17-year-old kid should go through.

Erasures are enforced, paradoxically, by veteran support organizations, on and off

campus. Erasures are also created as a matter of policy, through ways that campuses formulate

support for veterans. I argue that for veterans like Connor and Garrett, the re-integration process

must involve dealing with conflicting feelings about their actions in war. But there is not much

room in pro-troop support networks for veterans to address those mixed feelings. Many veteran

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[23] For example, a Veterans Administration representative, speaking to a NU veterans' re-entry class, told a story about his friend, a Vietnam veteran and Marine Corps recruiter, who said he feared coming to speak at Northern University, even in the relatively-tranquil 1980s. He quoted his friend as saying: "I was more afraid coming to this campus than I was at Khe Sanh" (referring to one of the bloodiest battles of the Vietnam War). Obvious hyperbole notwithstanding, the image of the scorned veteran continues to hold discursive sway on the Northern University campus.

service organizations emphasize unconditional support for the troops, but this 'unconditional' support comes with a condition: it must not include ambiguity or dissent about the wars or about the military mission itself.

A training I attended for community college instructors illustrates this priority. It was billed as a military 'cultural competence' training for civilian instructors. The curriculum had been developed based on the assumption that a successful teacher of veterans must be familiar with and able to enact specific military rituals. Embedded in this training was the idea that teaching veterans requires support for the U.S. military and its projects. For example, the trainers told us that in order to become culturally competent, we needed to be able to correctly identify military weaponry[24] and differentiate between the battle cry of the Army ('Hooah!') and that of the Marines ('Oorah!'). At the training, the trainers divided the auditorium into two groups and directed us to perform those battle cries competitively against each other. In doing so, the trainers reconfigured the discursive space: civilian trainers became proxy drill instructors, while the community college teachers embodied the recruits. Thus, support for the student veteran is embodied and enacted as support for the military.

We were also given a list of "Questions to Avoid Asking Veterans." Most of the questions on the list were patently absurd (e.g. "Are you crazy like the Vietnam vets?"). But embedded in the list was the question, "What do you think of the war?" Labeling this question as inappropriate and off-limits is a disciplinary practice that effectively silences discussions about the war and thus conflates support for veterans with tacit support for the wars. In this way, militarism becomes part of the hidden curriculum (Apple 1983) of community college students and produces a form of militarized common sense.

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[24] We were asked to identify RPGs (Rocket-propelled grenade launchers) and identify the differences between M16 and M4 carbine rifles.

If the problem of veteran reintegration is framed as not having enough support for the military on campuses, then the solution must be to have more and bigger campus military displays and events. But the glorification of a mission from which many veterans feel estranged only serves to alienate those veterans, while silencing the perspective that pro-troops does not mean pro-military, or by extension, pro-war. Northern University student Jordan doesn't go to campus Veterans Day events or participate in other campus displays of national pride. He explained it this way, "I don't want to have to sit through something that's going to infuriate me. I'm not very good at keeping my mouth shut, but I don't want to speak up and smash someone else's point of view… But if we're really going to talk about this you can't just toe the party line and have these fucking talking points like politicians."

The following two photos illustrate this problem. The first (Photo 1) was taken at a Northern University basketball game on Veterans Day 2011. To honor veterans on campus, the athletic department invited student-veterans to participate in a halftime show, which featured an exhibition basketball game between the veterans' club and the campus ROTC cadets. The show concluded with a patriotic tribute. A reverential silence descended on the crowd; fans rose to their feet and stood, many with hands over their hearts in salute, while members of the vets club unfurled a gigantic flag across the court. This particular flag ritual has become increasingly common at Major League sporting events, but it was the first time it had been performed at Northern University.

This moment illustrates a conjuncture of what Michael Billig (1995, 2009) calls "banal nationalism" (or the suturing of nationalist symbols to popular cultural icons or events) and the "hot nationalism" of overt assertions of national supremacy. This event is one example of the

ways that militarist symbolism is sutured to a nationalist narrative, in the apparently non-militarist, non-nationalist university.
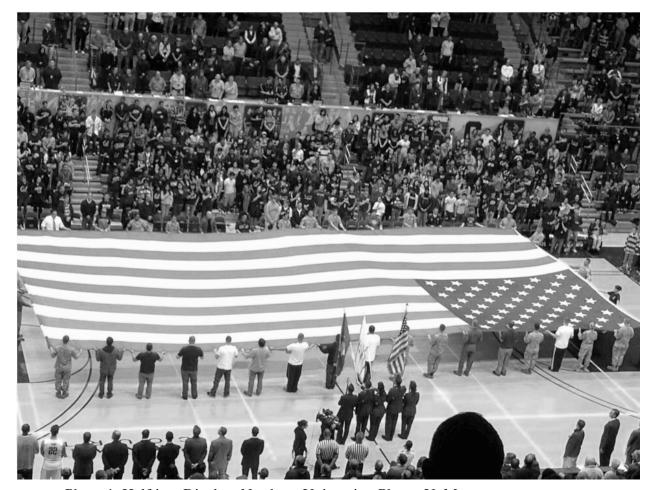

Photo 1. Halftime Display, Northern University. Photo: Y. Mun

This nationalistic and militaristic display can be contrasted with the symbolism and message in the following photo (2). Again, the US flag is used to make a statement, but to different effect. This image illustrates the complicated relationship many soldiers have with their role in the wars and the way they have been positioned as unalloyed heroes. In this image an unidentified soldier holds a flag upside down in the international symbol of distress, signaling objection to using symbols of nationalist patriotism to mask the violence of war. Students like Jordan and Garrett would probably share these sentiments. I argue that successful reintegration into civilian society and schools requires that they be able to express their conflicting feelings

about their actions in the wars. Otherwise, the erasure of their experience as a result of imposed

heroic narratives contributes to their feelings of alienation from civilian society.

Photo 2: "There is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people."[25]

    This image illustrates the complicated relationship many soldiers have with their role in

the wars and the way they have been positioned as unalloyed heroes. In this image an

unidentified soldier holds a flag upside down in the international symbol of distress, signaling

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[25] The photographer is unknown. Photo from: http://howgoodisthat.wordpress.com/2008/10/16/there-is-no-flag-large-enough-to-cover-the-shame-of-killing-innocent-people/

about their actions in the wars. Otherwise, the erasure of their experience as a result of imposed heroic narratives contributes to their feelings of alienation from civilian society.

Making the Military-to-College Transition

Successful transitions to college among the participants in my study always involved support from others. On campus it may be an instructor, staff member, counselor, or other students who serve as guides, tutors, and cultural interpreters. In the veterans' home environment, it is often a partner (girlfriends for the men in most cases) who helps the student-veteran navigate college application process.

Clearly, having tuition, fees, books, and housing funded through the GI Bill is a major support, and it is the only reason many veterans are able to attempt college. But the paperwork required by the VA is often difficult to decipher, which is why many veterans depend on academic counselors trained in processing military paperwork. Most community colleges and many universities won't pay for this special training, but in this study, student-veteran success and satisfaction was much higher when they had access to trained benefits counselors, and social and academic support systems. In general, student veterans at the university had access to a richer array of support services than did those at the community college. This is an important factor in my research, but in this paper I will not go into these differences in depth.

For student veterans at Halcón College, issues of socio-economic class and privilege surface constantly during interviews. Halcón student veterans often refer to the financial burden of civilian living expenses, having given up the subsidized housing, food, and medical care provided in the military. After living in the "Army bubble" (described by one male Halcón student-veteran as a self-contained biosphere in which all necessities were provided), veterans

are on their own, and success or failure in school is their personal responsibility. For recently returned veterans trained to affiliate as a group member and retain a communal identity, this disjuncture, coupled with the harsh financial realities of a recession economy, proves daunting. After juggling community college classes with two part-time retail jobs (to pay for dental bills not covered by the VA), the veteran who reminisced about the Army bubble dropped out of school and re-enlisted.

Many veterans drop out of community college and re-enlist, and many never return to school. While we don't have exact numbers on the drop out rates for veterans at community colleges, these rates are believed to mirror attrition rates for community college students across populations (Grubb et al 2003). These drop-out rates are very high: 35 percent of community college entrants who report working toward a degree last a semester or less at a community college before dropping out (Brint 2003). For veteran students at community colleges, high drop-out rates can be understood at least in part, but not wholly, as evidence of a lack of financial and social support (Bouffard 2005). In fact, veterans with access to GI Bill funds often are in a relatively privileged financial position compared to their lower-income civilian classmates; the GI Bill pays not only tuition and books, but offers a housing allowance.[26]

My data point to differences between student-veterans' experiences in the two different college contexts. There are stark differences in the support systems in place for student veterans at Halcón Community College and Northern University. The University has myriad programs and funds available to help student veterans adjust to university life.

Student veterans at the four-year university report they are seen, act, and self-identify differently compared to their counterparts at community college. Northern University prides

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[26] The housing stipend varies by county, adjusted for local housing market differences. Students in the high-priced urban area around Northern University receive up to $2,100 per month for housing, where in the more rural county in which Halcon is located, the stipend is about $1,200.

itself on being a "military-friendly campus," which means they have staff dedicated to administering to the needs of campus veterans. For example, one staff member is exclusively dedicated to ensuring that veterans receive their GI Bill benefits by certifying eligibility and submitting their paperwork. There is also an advisor on the NU campus who serves as the veterans' advocate, offering supportive counseling and referrals to campus and community services.

At Northern University, academic enculturation for student veterans often takes place within a context of uncritical esteem for the military, which is reified in common practices (rituals at their gatherings, ground rules for interactions at meetings, jokes, and banter). Veterans are given the message that they are valued members of an elite institution, and this message resonates with their experience in the military. This message is provided in various contexts, but especially in the veterans' orientation class offered to entering student veterans to introduce them to NU's customs and codes. This class serves as a method of making transparent NU's social and academic norms. The content and structure of these classes are intended to educate students about how to conduct themselves in the academic (civilian) world. Many of the intended academic lessons directly contrast with the lessons that were taught as part of basic training, military service, and combat. In this class, the message of military exceptionalism is constantly reinforced, and veteran students are encouraged to be proud of their military service. Student veterans at Halcón College were more likely to drop out, not only because of difficulties re-learning civilian and academic norms and practices, but also, like their civilian community college student counterparts, because they lack social and financial support. Many community college student veterans said that in civilian school they felt their identities as competent,

powerful, physically oriented 'hands-on' (and sometimes anti-intellectual) 'warriors' were

compromised.

This tendency to feel isolated and alienated is less common at Northern University,

especially (and crucially) because of the many campus peer support groups (veterans' clubs,

special veterans' classes, events and discussion groups). With extensive academic, social and

economic support structures, most student veterans at Northern University do succeed

academically and are more likely to continue to graduation, but their re-integration in civilian

college can still be problematic. For the NU veterans who have positive associations with the

military, and can easily fit into an environment where support for veterans is conflated with

support for the military, the veterans' club and campus military events help them. Those who

don't agree with the mission of the US military or the current wars are less welcome in the

campus veterans' group and for them, the militaristic veteran support is alienating and acts as a

form of erasure.

Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed pedagogical and cultural disjunctures felt by veterans who

attend college after leaving the service. Halcón College and Northern University represent two

'contact zones' for student veterans, each presenting distinct pedagogical, cultural, structural,

and social disjunctures for military veterans. Many of the same techniques and methods used to

train soldiers to become expert practitioners of war and military occupation (de-personalization,

shame and humiliation, the use of force and violence for the purpose of domination, suppression

of emotional affect, dichotomous worldview of good allies and evil enemies) when combined

with the physical and psychological trauma of being both victim and perpetrator of violence, can

lead to feelings of extreme alienation from civilian society and impede soldiers' re-integration into civilian life and can lead to failures in civilian schools. Civilian teachers, students and veteran supporters can all play roles in maintaining or ameliorating these disjunctures.

Disjunctures are intensified by an environment that simultaneously lauds veterans as warrior-heroes while erasing their experience and enforcing silences about conflicting feelings about their experiences during war. My research finds that veterans' re-integration process in college is complicated by their conflicted feelings and civilian response to their military role in a divisive and increasingly unpopular war. At one extreme is lionization found in pro-troop support groups and veteran re-integration classes. At the other end are veterans isolated by their war experience from civilian life and estranged from their privileged professors and classmates. At either end of that spectrum, ex-combatants can feel deep alienation. In between lies the space in which veterans must learn the norms of higher education and reintegrate into post-combat civilian life. The conflicting understandings both of military service and veterans' needs as civilians, often shared among college personnel, veteran supporters – and even veterans themselves – are a major, important source of the documented educational "failures" of the veterans.

This paper has examined veterans' learning experiences as they integrate into civilian college settings and their previous military socialization comes into contact and conflict with civilian academic, student, and institutional norms. I have attempted to link "little narratives," stories of returning veterans in civilian schools, to the "big narratives" of ways in which veteran support is conflated with support for the militarist nationalism and, ultimately, support for U.S. wars. The articulation of these narratives discursively constructs veteran students as heroes, even when their lived experience contradicts this image.

By examining the pedagogical and cultural disjunctures student veterans face, we can gain a better understanding of the challenges they face in succeeding at college and reintegrating into civilian life. We can also improve the way schools, faculty, staff, support groups, and civilian peers support and interact with veterans as students. I argue that we must broaden our national discussion about the role of the military and the wars we fight by making college campuses a space where this narrative can be discussed by both those who directly participated in combat and those who have no direct connection to the armed services. In doing so, we can better understand how historical processes shape our words, thoughts and actions, and the consequences of our national policies. In examining how civilian academic discourses articulate with nationalistic ideologies of militarism, I hope that this paper might contribute to a larger discussion about ways in which ideologies can support or hinder the success of military veterans, and civilian's understandings about the wars. I have attempted to show how militarized norms and identities live within the de-militarized subject and how civilian academic institutions participate in the construction of militarized common sense.

A first step in understanding veterans' adjustment challenges and reducing the dropout rate would be to listen to what they have to say about their experience and the transition from combat to college. What's needed is open dialogue between civilians and veterans, unmediated by support groups that require tacit or overt support for the current wars. In addition, broad institutional support is needed to allow veterans to achieve the educational promise for which they have paid an extraordinarily high price.

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