

University of Nevada, Reno

**From soldier, to civilian, to student: student veterans' transitions from overseas
deployments to the university classroom**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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Abstract:

The implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill in August 2009 made approximately two million veterans of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan eligible for higher education subsidies, and colleges and universities are experiencing an increased enrollment of veterans. Ultimately, in order to understand how veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan experience the drastic environmental transition from an overseas military deployment, to civilian life and into colleges and universities, this research explores student veterans' experiences from the moment they enlisted in the military until the time the study was conducted. The findings are based on in-depth interviews with eleven student veterans from the University of Nevada, Reno who had been deployed overseas since 9/11/2001. The participants revealed a range of reasons for enlisting, as well as a range of experiences within the military, during their deployments, and finally their transitions home and to school. For the most part, their stories indicate their time in the military had positive effects on things such as their engagement in class and discipline to their studies, but at the same time some student veterans did not feel entirely comfortable on a college campus. Student veterans are typically older and with different sets of experiences than most college students, and some have expressed feeling alienated by peers and professors' comments about the military or wars.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Nearly a decade has passed since American troops began fighting in the Global War on Terror (GWT), including Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan that began in 2001, and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) that began in 2003. Since service members began returning home from tours of duty, much attention has been given to the mental and physical health needs of returning veterans, while less attention has been given to the some of the more subtle, but wide-spread effects of leaving the military, re-entering civil society, and entering other types of institutions such as occupational and educational settings. With the enactment of the new Post 9/11 GI Bill in August 2009, which increased educational benefits for veterans of the GWT, many veterans are returning home and enrolling in colleges and universities across the nation, oftentimes from combat. Presumably, individuals returning from foreign territories and especially those returning from combative environments will face greater difficulties reintegrating into civilian life upon their military discharge than personnel who have been stationed domestically. Therefore, this research focuses on how student veterans returning from overseas deployments cope with the environmental transitions to civilian life and into higher education upon leaving the military.

This research was conducted using qualitative methods in which a purposive sample of eleven student veterans who volunteered to participate in the study was interviewed. Each participant had been on an overseas deployment (either a combat or a non-combat deployment) at some point after the terrorist attacks on 9/11/2001, and had either graduated from, were attending, or were about to transfer to the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), a mid-sized, public university in the western United States. All interviews were recorded, later transcribed, and systematically analyzed.

This exploratory research is ultimately intended to identify some of the difficulties that veterans experience leaving the military and entering post-secondary educational institutions. However, in order to fully understand this process and to effectively interpret what each participant described as their experiences in college, it was first necessary to address their previous experiences in the military, a setting which can be understood as a “total institution.” In the words of Erving Goffman (1961), a total institution is a place where individuals sacrifice their independence, live and work together for a period of time, and are set apart from the rest of society. Unlike other total institutions Goffman describes in his work, such as prisons or mental hospitals, the military is unique in that it has an instrumental purpose and people volunteer to be part of it. Its members not only sacrifice their independence, but in the process sometimes sacrifice their own lives, limbs or psychological well-being. This research demonstrates that the characteristics of the military that classify it as a “total institution,” along with its instrumental purpose of national defense, have lasting imprints on its members even after they have been discharged. Unlike leaving other total institutions, after returning from an overseas deployment, some veterans may be recovering from physical and psychological wounds. Although this research does not specifically focus on wounds from war and how they interfere in veterans’ lives after war, this is a reality shared by several of my participants that cannot be ignored in this research.

The rigors of the military as a total institution do require that sacrifices are made, yet unlike Goffman (1961) described, the same rigors also seem to leave a positive imprint upon members who leave. For example, student veterans are typically older, more mature, and have much different life experiences than most college students. They might also value their education to a greater degree as well, especially if they served in the military to afford college. Most student veterans are dedicated to their schoolwork and are engaged in class as well. Student veterans tend to respond to authority figures such as professors and are engaged as students,

although some may feel frustrated by what they perceive as negativities expressed about the wars from which they have just returned.

Chapter two is a literature review of socio-historical accounts of the GI Bill of Rights and of higher education in the U.S., as well as some of the demographic patterns of military enlistment before and after the inception of the all-volunteer-force (AVF) military in 1973. Then, the issues of making the transition to civilian life and into colleges that Vietnam and post-9/11 veterans have addressed through qualitative interview research are discussed, as well as the broad consensus discussed in the extant literature for creating “veteran-friendly” college campuses through survey research. Such campuses allocate funds and attention to remove barriers to veterans’ educational goals, and generally make special efforts to make veterans comfortable and welcomed. After discussing some of the secondary research that frames the subject of veterans’ transitions from being in the military, returning home and going to school, the data and analysis from interviews with the sample of UNR student veterans will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The GI Bill

After WWII, with hundreds of thousands of veterans returning from war, U.S. policymakers created the GI Bill, concerned about economic downturn and civil unrest (McMurray 2007). Policymakers feared a mass of unemployed veterans, so the GI Bill was created as a form of unemployment relief and a way to delay approximately 16 million veterans' entry into a crowded labor market (Clark 1998; Field, Hebel and Smallwood 2008). Although altered through legislation several times, the GI Bill was first signed by President Roosevelt in June of 1944, and it is still providing veterans with assistance to go to college 65 years later. While today it would be barely enough to cover the cost of books, the early GI Bill awarded WWII veterans \$500 per year, which generally was enough to cover the cost of tuition, books and living expenses (McMurray 2007). With one in eight WWII veterans going to college with their GI benefits, or approximately two million men, the total college enrollment in the country increased by 50%, and 70% of all males enrolled in the years after WWII were student veterans (Bound and Turner 2002; Clark 1998). According to many historians and scholars, the key significance of the G I Bill of Rights is that it gave the opportunity of higher education to a variety of individuals otherwise unable to go: men from lower socio-economic backgrounds, minorities, and first-generation Americans (Bound and Turner 2002). While the GI Bill may have been enacted as a form of unemployment relief, it has returned the funds spent by the U.S. government several times over in the form of income taxes from veterans' wages that were higher than would have otherwise been earned (McMurray 2007). In a report to President Eisenhower in 1956, he was informed that "veterans who used their GI Bill benefits had higher income levels than non-veterans of similar age, were more likely to be in professional and skilled occupations and were better educated" (Madaus and Miller 2009:11). Additionally, a study by the Joint Economic Committee of Congress estimated that military personnel who used their benefits

earned an average of \$10,000 to \$15,000 more annually than those who did not (Field et al. 2008; Herbold 1995:104).

Unlike today, prior to WWII “college-going was associated with the consumption of the upper-middle class,” and was an exclusive institution (Clark 1998:173). In fact, administrators from some of the top Ivy League schools feared admitting masses of unqualified, restless, and war-torn veterans onto their campuses due to the GI Bill (Field et al. 2008). However in retrospect, “the veteran generation established perhaps the most distinguished record in the history of higher education” (Olson 2002:604). The fact that approximately 20% of this first generation of student veterans would not have been able to go to college without the GI Bill, along with evidence of their success in higher education, indicates that a substantial portion of the nation’s youth had the ability but not the money to go to college (Olson 2002:607). Once U.S. colleges were flooded with veterans, a large number of whom were from lower socio-economic backgrounds, faculties had to accommodate veterans’ academic interests that tended to be courses that were pragmatic and career-oriented, or vocational in nature and “geared to real life or national and international issues” (Clark 1998:176; McMurray 2007; Olson 2002). At the same time that many scholars hail this piece of legislation as democratizing, others believe that the GI Bill privileged the already privileged, citing that while middle class veterans went to more elite, four year colleges and universities, working class veterans, many of whom had not graduated from high school, attended two-year colleges and vocational or technical schools (Field, et al. 2008; Olson 2002). Additionally, it is also true that many African Americans who were drafted and fought in WWII could never take advantage of their GI benefits, either because they may have been under-prepared for school, or because they had trouble receiving their benefits to attend over-crowded, historically African American colleges or universities in the South (Herbold 1995).

In the 1984 House/Senate conference on the Defense Authorization Bill, policymakers were arguing over whether or not funds should be reallocated into a massive Cold War military build-up, when Democratic Congressman and Vietnam veteran “Sonny” Montgomery criticized wasteful spending on weapons and diverted their attention toward the educational needs of soldiers (McMurray 2007). The following year, the Montgomery GI Bill was enacted, yet still after its revisions, the scope of its benefits is less than that of either the original GI Bill, or the Post/911 GI Bill (McMurray 2007). Compared to the original GI Bill which allowed veterans to attend any college in the nation that would admit them, the Montgomery GI Bill only funded 73% of the average cost of attending a four-year public institution, and the only institution that benefits paid for in full were community colleges (Field et al, 2008; McMurray 2007). It may be for this reason that until the passing of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, almost 40% of all veterans enlisted at community colleges compared to 35% of non-veteran students across the U.S. (Field et al. 2008). Furthermore, while community colleges were the only institutions that were paid in full, they, along with online universities, may also be more convenient to attend because they are more numerous and accessible than four-year colleges. Also, while higher education enrollments in the U.S. increased by 66% between 1970 and 1996, there was a disproportionate expansion in the two-year institution sector, which is concerning, as studies have also shown that these less selective institutions are linked with less income in the labor market (Karen 2002:194).

Refurbishing the GI Bill again after the turn of the millennium, the Post 9/11 GI Bill was enacted in August 2009. This version of the bill provides benefits to veterans at a level not known since WWII, which are also transferrable to their spouses and children (Grossman 2009). Democratic senator Jim Webb of Virginia who drafted the new version is himself a former Marine, who used his military benefits to gain his law degree from Georgetown Law School, and he believes it will increase access to higher education for thousands of veterans (Field et al. 2008). Maximum benefits can be reached after having served for a total of 36 months in active

duty since 9/11/2001, which will cover up to the full amount of tuition charged by the most expensive in-state public institution, a yearly stipend for fees of \$1000, \$500 for relocation expenses, and even reimbursement for certification tests (Grossman 2009). In addition, the passing of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, more student veterans can transfer from community colleges to four-year public institutions.

Higher Education in the United States

The U.S. government has long played a role in higher education, as was seen with the enactment of the GI Bill. The U.S. government also greatly energized higher education when Congress passed the 1862 Morrill Act granting each state land for agriculture colleges, as well as with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 providing grants for work-study programs, and with the Higher Education Act in 1972, authorizing direct financial aid to colleges and universities (Vago 2004). Nonetheless, compared to other advanced, industrialized nations, the U.S. government's involvement in higher education is low. In other developed nations, the central state typically subsidizes higher education and college admissions and occupational "tracks" are determined early on by a standardized test, essentially matching students to institutions. Access to higher education is more selective and not available to all young adults in these nations, yet these nations have much more extensive social welfare programs to mitigate unemployment. Unlike other industrialized nations, higher educational institutions in the U.S. exist independently of one another and are not part of any greater organization that systematically categorizes its students into specific occupational paths. While there may be greater possibilities for social mobility in the U.S. for that reason, at the same time, American students engage in more of an academic "free-for-all." Rather than spaces in the labor market systematically determining what the nation's future labor force should study to maximize employment, American college students study what they choose and then all compete for a limited number of jobs. Another consequence

of the lack of a unified higher educational system in the U.S. is that there are different kinds of institutions, with different degrees of selectivity, cost, and credentials conferred to their students.

In the United States, higher educational institutions have expanded across the nation in the past half century, increasing access to higher education. At the same time, this has caused the contemporary need for increasing educational credentials to secure employment in the labor market. Indeed, at the time of the original GI Bill, before the U.S. was de-industrialized and dominated by unstable, low-paying service-sector employment, people could support their families without necessarily having a college education (Vago 2004). However, according to Goyette and Mullen (2006:503), “as the system of higher education expanded post-WWII, drawing ever-larger numbers of particularly non-elite students, the rapidly increasing rate of bachelor’s degrees gave rise to a process of credential inflation.” They also describe that with the instatement of the GI Bill, the total college enrollment rate increased by 50% after WWII, and with comparatively lower socio-economic status (SES) veterans who were interested in more pragmatic curricula. In turn, this initiated an increasing trend toward vocational studies and community colleges, which are “designed explicitly to provide a student with the practical skills and job-related competencies necessary for entry into a specific occupation or profession” (Clark 2004; Goyette and Mullen 2006:498). Conversely, the liberal arts education includes the arts and humanities, social sciences, math, and the natural and physical sciences, and it was historically “designed to prepare elite students with the qualities needed to govern” (Goyette and Mullen 2006:498). Unlike vocational studies, the liberal arts education values breadth of knowledge over specialization and is historically and currently linked to individuals of higher SES backgrounds (Goyette and Mullen 2006). The liberal arts curriculum has steadily been on the decline in the Post WWII era, with a concomitant expansion in the two-year, community college sector, which offers more vocational training. In the 1996 academic year, 60% of all bachelor’s degrees were

in vocational, more immediately utilitarian degrees, such as in business, education, engineering, health professions and public administration (Goyette and Mullen 2006).

Another argument for the increasing requirements necessary for occupational entry has been the necessity of more skilled labor for more complex jobs, but today, the “deskilling of labor” due to mechanization and technological advances may in fact “leave education void of its true historical function” as an institution where workers can gain expertise for the labor market (Brown 2001:19). The United States already has one of the highest ages for compulsory education (17 years), and high school graduates in the U.S. have the highest rates of entering postsecondary schools in the world (Vago 2004). Increasingly, rather than entering the low-wage service sector of the labor market, young adults are opting to stay in school longer and longer (Brown 2001). Rather than simply providing skills and knowledge necessary to the future labor force, higher education in the U.S. today may be another way to stave off chronic unemployment, which is quite similar to why the GI Bill was originally enacted.

Today, a majority of high school graduates immediately attend college after high school. However, higher education is expensive and not everyone who cannot afford it wants to risk going into debt from college loans for something that cannot necessarily ensure them employment afterwards. Not everyone joins the military for educational incentives, but undoubtedly the GI Bill has increased both military enlistment rates and college and university enrollments. While the U.S. has one of the highest rates of college-going in the world, there is a portion of high school graduates who join the military and later use their benefits to go to college, or who attend school while in the Reserves or National Guard. These individuals are qualitatively different than the near 70% of their cohort that enters college immediately (Vago 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to better understand some of the basic demographic characteristics of enlisted personnel.

Who Joins the Military?

Socio-economic Status and Education

The popular American Civil War quote “it’s a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight,” is to a degree valid today. Of course this is a gross over-generalization about who fights our wars, but as stereotypes may point out some truth, this has been true throughout U.S. history. Historically, in the Civil War, wealthy conscripts could buy their way out of service or provide a replacement, and more recently in the Vietnam War, draftees could avoid going to war through their educational, occupational, medical status, or by applying for conscientious objector status (Segal and Segal 2004). Research shows that since the beginning of the all-volunteer force (AVF) military in 1973, individuals with “lower family incomes, larger family sizes, (more sharing of scarce resources) and less educated parents” have been more likely to join the military (Kleykamp 2005:8; Segal and Segal 2004). Additionally, studies have also shown that African Americans, southerners, youths from single-parent households, and youths with a parent that served in the military, have had the highest propensity for enlisting, and youths with a C average in high school are twice as likely to enlist in the military as students with an A average (Bachman 2000). For these individuals, enlisting in the military may seem like a more attractive option than entering the workforce or going to college. Military service also fosters a strong sense of self-efficacy and a more positive image of self through the influence of powerful male role models, assertiveness training, and group support (Elder 1986).

While a majority of youths enter college after high school others may enter the U.S. Armed Forces as a way to afford college through the military’s GI benefits (Kleykamp 2005). Ironically, privileged draftees in the Vietnam War could avoid the war by going to college, and today, some youths voluntarily enlist and go to war to be *able* to go to college. Although officers usually have more formal education, increasing numbers of enlisted personnel have some college education as well (Segal and Segal 2004). The military widely enlists youths with C averages,

however, enlistees typically have a high school diploma. In 2007, 70% of the Army had a high school diploma, and 30% had a general education degree (GED) (Thompson 2008). After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the military began seeing recruits who were more educated and from higher income families, presumably because these individuals have been enlisting for patriotic rather than economic reasons (Kane 2005).

Although there may be qualitative differences in the kinds of individuals who enlisted before and after the terrorist attacks in 2001, anyone who enlists in the military can expect this decision to re-shape the course of their lives, and a significant number may enlist specifically *to* re-shape the course of their lives. Citizens of the United States, the most economically unequal industrialized nation, must compete for scarce resources through participation in a labor market that is currently dominated by low-paying and unstable service sector employment. Instead of attempting to compete in the civilian labor market, where finding jobs requires increasing educational credentials, many people can be assured employment and financial security by enlisting in the military.

Race and Gender

Research also shows that African Americans have the highest propensity for enlisting, followed by Hispanics and then whites. In 2003, African Americans comprised 11.3 percent of the overall population, yet they accounted for 15% of the overall military, and in the eighties this number was around 30% (Kane 2005; Kleykamp 2005). According to Segal and Segal (2004), 83% of officers were white, while enlisted men were 64% white and enlisted women were only 49% white (p. 18-19). The same study also found that although Hispanic civilians slightly outnumbered African American civilians in 2002, male Hispanic enlistment rates were half the rate for African American enlistment rates, and female Hispanic enlistment rates were less than a third of their black counterparts. African Americans may be overrepresented in the military for several reasons, one being that they face fewer employment and educational opportunities than

whites, and secondly because the military is perceived to be an environment with less racial discrimination than the civilian labor market (Kleykamp 2005; Segal and Segal 2004).

Military service across the world has historically been dominated by males. In the U.S., women's participation in the military only significantly increased after the inception of the AVF military in 1973, increasing from 2% of the military forces, to 9% during the Gulf War, to 15% in the 21st century (Smith, Jacobson, Smith, Hooper, and Ryan 2007:278). While women in the military have traditionally held positions that distance them from combat, policy changes in the early 1990s eliminated many of the gender-based restrictions on assigning jobs to females in the military, placing them in relatively close proximity to combat and introducing a host of new, traumatic occupational exposures for women (Smith et al. 2007). Nonetheless, females are still legally barred from serving in approximately 20% of all military positions, including any positions with infantry, armor, or Special Forces units in the Army, or any positions on submarines, Special Forces (SEALS), or ships in the Navy that can't accommodate women because of a lack of separate berthing areas (Segal and Segal 2004: 27-28). The Air Force has the least amount of direct combat positions, and thus have the most possibilities open to women, while the Marine Corps has the most restrictions for females because it has the largest proportion of its forces in ground combat positions (Segal and Segal 2004:27-28).

According to previous research, individuals who decide to enlist in the AVF military have particular ascribed characteristics such as race, class, and gender, and it is these individuals that are disproportionately exposed to the stresses of warfare. Indeed, "while wars are traumatic and disruptive for a nation, they are often life-changing for those who participate in them" (DiRamio, Ackerman and Mitchell 2008:73). While combat is certainly transformative for individuals, veterans are also transformed by their experiences in the military as total institution.

The Military as a Total Institution

In the mid-twentieth century, social theorist Erving Goffman conceived of a category of institutions including but not limited to prisons, mental asylums, nursing homes, boarding schools, convents and the military. All of these are loosely associated with one another by the fact that large numbers of similar individuals live and work together in a formally administered environment, and are physically separated from the rest of society for an appreciable amount of time. According to Goffman, in a total institution, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same authority, where each phase of the member's daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large number of others; all phases of the day's activities are tightly scheduled, and where whole sequences of events are imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials (1961:6). Furthermore, the member is excluded from knowledge of the decisions taken regarding his or her fate (Goffman, 1961:9). In his study of sailors aboard a ship, Louis Zurcher (1965) describes how Goffman's criteria of a total institution apply to the naval vessel at sea. For example, a ship at sea is completely isolated from the rest of society. It carries out an instrumental purpose decided upon by the U.S. Department of the Navy, work is performed 24 hours of a day under the authority of the Captain of the ship, and sailors often do not know the destination of their ship until it is well out to sea (Zurcher 1965).

Thus, entering a total institution also entails experiencing a loss of self-determination, autonomy, and comforts. Goffman (1961) describes that at first, "the recruit comes into the establishment with a conception of himself made possible by certain stable social arrangements in his home world. Upon entrance, he is immediately stripped of the support provided by these arrangements," then, "the new arrival allows himself to be shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery or the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations (Goffman 1961:14-16). Like any new member of a total institution, during boot camp, new recruits are "penetrated by constant sanctioning interaction from above,

especially during the initial period of stay before they accept the regulations unthinkingly (Goffman 1961:38). Once out of basic training, the new recruit is eventually conferred a great amount of responsibility when they must perform activities such as “standing watch,” because the lives of the recruit’s fellow comrades or shipmates are dependent upon them (Zurcher 1965). This, in turn helps to form the sense of camaraderie, and this informal aspect of the total institution of the military helps to carry out the formal, instrumental goals of the institution (Zurcher1965). In everyday life, the failure to maintain required social standards typically leads to indirect consequences; however, breaking the rules and regulations of a total institution is typically met with specific, immediate punishment (Goffman 1961:51). At the same time, new members of the military may informally make secondary adjustments to the total institution by engaging in behaviors that evade the demands of the formal organization, such as meeting formal expectations in a more efficient way (Zurcher 1965:393).

Despite the relatively harsh reality of total institutions, some individuals choose to enter them voluntarily, including everyone that joins the United States AVF military. Interestingly, as Goffman (1961:15) points out, “when entrance is voluntary, the recruit has already partially withdrawn from his home world; what is cleanly severed by the institution is something that had already started the decay.” Being “partially withdrawn from one’s home world” could mean a number of different things, yet one meaning could be that someone who enters the military either rejects or feels they cannot reach the socially prescribed goals of individual success through the means and resources available to them. Unlike Ferdinand Tönnies’ conception of the close-knit *gemeinschaft*, or a traditional community predominately conditioned by shared values and norms, life today in the United States, is more so representative of his concept of *gesellschaft*, translated to “society,” in which individuals are guided by personal interests and utilitarian principles (Heinz and Marshall 2003:169). Although joining the military may in part be influenced by personal interest to change the course of one’s life, it may also be an attempt to be part of a larger

more integrated social group, in which one's individuality is obscured and personal autonomy is sacrificed in order to realize larger collective goals. Paradoxically, although the military may expect conformity and assert that "a soldier's a soldier's a soldier," an individual's time in a total institution such as the military oftentimes has a great impact on their sense of identity, perhaps even more so than any other time in their life. This is why for some, it can be difficult to leave the military and return to civilian life. Unlike many other total institutions, once military personnel have met the terms of their contract, just as they voluntarily entered, they can either reenlist, or choose to be discharged from the military and return to civilian life. As Goffman (1961) contended, "(r)elease is likely to come just when the member has finally learned the ropes on the inside and won privileges that he has painfully learned are very important. In brief, he may find that release means moving from the top of a small world to the bottom of a large one" (73). The AVF military may entail a greater degree of freedom than other total institutions, but its members may still experience anxiety at the thought of being released.

Enlisted and Deployed

While today's AVF military in the U.S. offers a number of attractive qualities and benefits to the country's young men and women, it also requires varying degrees of self-sacrifice of those who enlist. For whatever purpose(s) individuals decide to enlist in the military today, being called to duty can be considered a major life transition because it "disrupts existing relationships and routines, replacing them with uncertainty, new relationship and routines, in a context that is life-threatening" (DiRamio Ackerman and Mitchell 2008:77). With a major life transition such as enlisting in the military, an individual's status or position in the social structure is altered, as are the roles or behaviors expected of the status occupant (George 1993:254). To the extent that deployments disrupt relationships and routines, this is even more true for National Guard and Reserve personnel who are not fully immersed in military life, yet chronically face imminent demobilization (Doyle and Peterson 2005). Once deployed to a combat zone, soldiers

may experience on-going stress through constant vigilance to unpredictable outside threats and therefore experience little control over their surroundings. According to Borus (1975), this uncertainty and lack of environmental control causes the soldiers to increase their dependence upon each other, and as Falkner and McGaw (1977:311) explain, “the primacy of self-interest is combined with deep bonds to one’s closest friends in the military, with whom the soldier shares the meaning of the war experience.” In Iraq and Afghanistan, such camaraderie is challenged and the element of uncertainty is exacerbated by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which are essentially home-made bombs left on the side of the road or in the inside of building walls (Bowman 2009).

Returning Home

Just as joining the military and going to war entail life-altering transitions, returning to civilian life after a tour of duty is usually not a return to previous life before going to war. Certainly the people and surroundings from ‘home’ may change while the service member is deployed or at war, but, even more so, the experience of war changes the veteran. One veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from the National Guard interviewed by DiRamio et al. (2008:85) explained the experience like this: “you are going to come back changed. It’s not necessarily good or bad, but you will fundamentally be a different person.” Not only is everything different for the veteran upon returning home, but according to Borus (1975:17) “transitions, especially rapid ones, are often stressful periods when past adaptive mechanisms may be neither adequate nor appropriate.” Norms that once governed behavior in the war-zone are not only different but actively discouraged at home, including the use or threat of violence as a means to achieving an end (Borus 1975). Another norm of the combat zone that may be better off left in the combat zone is hyper-vigilance. During war, soldiers are conditioned to be extremely vigilant and prepared for anything to happen, but once in the civilian world, this can translate to “fearing every piece of trash as an IED or other drivers as potential suicide bombers”

(Doyle and Peterson 2005). This can even result in the veteran grabbing the wheel from the driver when in the passenger seat when they think they see a road-side bomb, as presented in a case study by Friedman (2006). The “war itself ha(s) such a central role in the life of the soldier,” and Faulkner and McGaw’s sample of interviewees stressed they would have liked more of a transition period to allow more time for readjusting their new status as civilian (1977:306). One participant is quoted: “Guys like me, they came back from Vietnam, bang! Here’s civilian life. Now, go out and make a go of it” (Faulkner 1977:310). One of the most common re-adjustment issues Borus (1975) and Faulkner and McGaw (1977) found in their samples of Vietnam veterans was that returning home did not meet up to what the soldiers had envisioned during their deployment. Finding that overall, forty percent of his sample of Vietnam veterans experienced “emotional difficulties” during their reentry transition, Borus (1975) also learned that they had a hard time discussing their experiences of war with family and friends, and would rather work through emotional issues related to the war with other veterans whom they could relate to better.

Veterans’ Physical and Mental Health

Due to medical advances and improved equipment and body armor, 85% of injured soldiers from the Global War on Terror (GWT) have survived (Church 2009). An estimated two million veterans returning from the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) conflicts are eligible to enroll in postsecondary institutions, and an estimated third of these individuals will have either Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI) or major depression (Madaus and Miller 2009; Vance 2009). Veterans who have had high levels of combat exposure are more likely to suffer from both physical and psychological afflictions (Grieger, Cozza, Ursano, Hoge, Martinez, Engel, and Wain 2006). PTSD is today formally recognized as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. An estimated 15-50% of Vietnam veterans returned home with what professionals thought at the time were “emotional difficulties,” and “obtrusive thoughts from the Vietnam experience” (Borus

1975:108). Today, 14% of veterans of the OEF/OIF conflicts are diagnosed with this condition and experience a range of symptoms including, nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, detachment from others, restricted affect, hyper-vigilance, excessive startle reactions, difficulty concentrating, and sleep disturbances (Gershuny and Thayer 1999:636). Although a specific traumatic event or events is required for the diagnosis of PTSD, research also shows that two post-war factors that can lead to the development of PTSD are lack of social support and being unmarried (Amir, Kaplan, Efroni, Levine, and Kotler 1997). The most common cause of the high suicide rate in the Army- with a total of 164 suicides in the year 2005 (Thompson, 2008)- is strained relationships, and legal, financial, and/or occupational reasons are secondary (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, and Strong 2009). These high numbers point to the reality that many veterans are haunted by the violence of combat, are experiencing survivor's guilt, and are greatly in need of social support (Tanielian and Jaycox 2008). Perhaps the numbers are so high because ordinarily, family or close others would recognize the early warning signs of mental health disorders of the veteran; but since the leading cause of suicide in the Army is strained relationships, communication breakdown may lead to not seeing these signs. That depression or PTSD can lead to social withdrawal is concerning because it is not just 'surface-level' interactions that can buffer the negative consequences of stress, but others' involvement and concern as well (Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, Mullan 1981).

Along with the Post 9-11 GI Bill, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act (ADAAA) passed in 2008 as well. It covers more individuals than it ever has before, including those who were once denied coverage for problems treatable with medication (Grossman 2009). Nonetheless, research suggests that some veterans may not come forward to disclose their disability because of stigmatization and the learned military norm to not discuss personal problems or vulnerabilities with either peers or superiors (Shackelford 2009). On top of the everyday stressors of average students, such as academic progress, relationships and financial

stability, for the estimated one-third of student veterans with psychological or physical issues, their unique and stressful past experiences and their perspectives may make the transition of going to college complicated.

Going to School

Returning from combat may be difficult, but the transition from combat to college may be another radical shift for some veterans, and can be conceived of as a “clash of cultures” (Glasser, Powers, and Zywiak 2009:33). Student veterans are typically a little older and more mature than the average college student, and have a set of experiences that many feel other students cannot understand. Glasser et al. (2009) learned from their interviews with student veterans, some of whom began their freshman classes directly after returning from war, that many were shocked at other students’ lack of attention, text-messaging during class, and complaining about school work. Student veterans who decide to enlist in the military specifically as a way to fund their education and avoid debt for college loans might interpret such behavior as a disregard for authority and the value of learning. Moving to a college campus of oftentimes younger and immature students from an integrated military unit could be a difficult transition. In other respects, some student veterans expressed that their study and time management skills had diminished, and that they felt unfocused (DiRamio et al. 2008).

DiRamio et al. (2008:89) also describe how the student veterans they interviewed felt uncomfortable by being singled out as veterans by their professors in the stereotypical “conservative veteran and liberal professor” scenario, as well as being asked awkward and personal questions about combat and killing by peers. In fact, Derek Blumke, the president of the Student Veterans of America organization, actually formed the group after a difficult transition from a community college to the University of Michigan, where his classmates did not understand his military experiences and asked him inappropriate questions about being in war (Field et al. 2008).

Creating Veteran-Friendly Campuses

Throughout the literature, there is wide-spread consensus for creating what can be considered “veteran-friendly” campuses across the U.S., which can be defined as “individual campuses that have made concerted efforts to remove barriers to veterans’ educational goals, to create smooth transitions from military life of campus life, and to provide information about available benefits and services” (Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley and Strong 2009:45). However, this is an initiative that has been taken at the state-wide level as well. For example, democratic governor Ted Strickland of Ohio declared veterans, their spouses, and children eligible to attend the state’s public schools at in-state rates, and Minnesota has taken a state-wide approach to support this cause through legislation encouraging universities to provide a space for veterans’ service offices (Lokken et al. 2009; Segal and Segal 2004). Also under the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the government will match, dollar for dollar, any aid that private colleges want to provide for student veterans that is above the most expensive public institution in the state (Field et al. 2008). Nonetheless, 20% of all college students in the U.S. compared with only 6% of GI beneficiaries attend the top 500 ranked postsecondary schools (Field et al. 2008).

According to a report in 2009 by the American Council on Education (ACE), a little over half of their sample of 723 public and private postsecondary educational institutions in the U.S. offered programs and services specifically designed for veterans, and since 9/11/2001, 65% of these institutions have increased their efforts to meet the needs of their student veteran populations (Cook and Kim 2009). Certain schools are more accommodating to veterans than others. Private, four-year schools, whose tuition is not covered by the GI Bill, have the least amount of services available for veterans. Examples of such positive efforts include but are not limited to having a specific office where active duty service members and student veterans can seek consultation from campus staff familiar with veterans’ issues; VA benefits counseling; financial assistance to veterans in the form of scholarships or discounts; and credit for military

training. Usually, campuses will provide services for veterans depending on how many veterans are enrolled, but according to ACE's classification, institutions with 320 student-veterans or more are considered high-enrollment institutions, and will have, or should have a greater amount of services than a low-enrollment institution of only 44 veterans (Cook and Kim 2009).

Attending community and four-year colleges around military bases is a popular choice for veterans, as they tend to accommodate veterans, and a portion of faculty members may themselves be veterans as well (Field et al. 2008). Although the department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) does not keep records of how many student veterans transfer from two- to four-year institutions, it is logical that these numbers would increase after the inception of the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Field et al. 2008). While this is a possibility, because student veterans are older and may be married with children, and sometimes working part or full time, attending a two-year community college, or even taking classes from an accredited online university may allow for greater flexibility.

According to ACE's study, only 30% of these 'veteran-friendly' institutions offer a student veteran organization or club, although their focus groups indicate that having access to such supportive organizations is a high priority for students (Cook and Kim 2009). According to Grossman (2009) and DiRamio et al. (2008:7), many student veterans have "expressed that they want and need the opportunity to continue in camaraderie with other veterans" and "to this end, veteran-centered on-campus organizations (centers, clubs, fraternities/sororities, support groups) must be developed." At the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), which can be considered a high-enrollment institution, student veterans can participate in the Wolf Pack Veterans, an on-campus student group (Robbins 2009). Although student veterans have reported they can usually identify other veterans on campus, such an organization, even without a delineated space, facilitates the acquaintance and interaction of veterans on a larger, organized scale (DiRamio et al. 2008). Similar to when higher education faculties adapted their curriculums to WWII veterans' needs,

college administrators today, especially at high-enrollment institutions, may not need to alter the school's curriculum per se, but may consider allocating resources such as space, finances, and attention toward veterans' services.

Throughout the ongoing GWT, with waves of soldiers transitioning into veterans and civilians, researchers have extensively documented the wars' impact on veterans' mental and physical health, while the well-being of veterans returning to the U.S. and going to college has been largely disregarded. Some colleges and universities have prepared themselves for veterans by organizing services to meet their needs, but one reason colleges may not have followed suit is because they are not aware of what veterans' needs are, or what they are experiencing, or are likely to experience, in college. The existing research on this topic reveals that veterans are qualitatively different than most college students, in their histories, values, and beliefs. This research is intended to help fill some of the chasms in what is known about veterans' experiences transitioning back to civilian life and then on to college, by compiling, organizing, and analyzing student veterans' narratives about these such experiences.

CHAPTER 3

Methods and Data

Methodology

To better understand and student-veterans' transition processes from combat to college, this exploratory research employed qualitative research methods. The research's study population included student veterans who have been deployed since 9/11/2001, regardless of whether they were deployed to combat in Iraq or Afghanistan, or on a non-combat deployment elsewhere. Another stipulation was that they had either recently graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), were enrolled in, or were soon transferring to UNR from a community college. After obtaining the internal review board (IRB) approval and IRB number, SB09/10-114, from the University of Nevada, Reno, a non-random sample of participants was recruited by the principal investigator by attending Wolf-Pack Veterans club meetings, UNR's student veterans' organization. Once there, she described the purpose and nature of the study and recruited six individuals to participate in the study. One of those individuals acquainted her with another five student veterans who were willing to be interviewed as well, resulting in a total of 11 interviews.

Each recruited student veteran participated in a recorded, in-depth, and informal interview that lasted anywhere from half an hour to an hour. During each interview the participant was asked a series of open-ended questions in which they could describe their experiences in their own words. They were asked why they decided to join the military, about their experiences in the military and during their overseas deployments, and finally about their transitions to civilian life and college. The interview questions were pre-tested and approved by the first participant, who was an officer of the Wolf Pack Veterans. See Appendix A for further delineation of the interview questions. The interviews were conducted in private yet comfortable locations at a time and place mutually decided upon by the investigator and the participant prior to the meeting. Before each interview, the participants were asked to sign an informed consent

form, explaining what would be explored in the study and asking for their voluntary agreement to participate beforehand, also explaining that they could opt to not respond to any questions they felt uncomfortable answering. They were also informed that their responses would be presented anonymously addressed in the final research paper by replacing their names with random pseudonyms.

After each interview was conducted, it was transcribed onto a computer and the audio-recording of the interview was erased. The participants' stories were thematically analyzed by carefully reading through the electronic versions of each transcription and identifying reoccurring themes by coding themes with different colors and combining them into separate categories. Most of the themes that will be discussed were themes that were repeatedly mentioned by multiple participants. Through this process of systematic coding, both similarities and differences emerged from the participants' narratives about their transitions from combat to college. For example, as will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 6, most student veterans reported that college was relatively easier than being in the military, whereas a couple of student veterans experienced serious challenges making the transition to college.

Because this was a small sample from a specific school, the findings cannot be generalized to veterans who attend UNR or to student veterans who do not attend UNR, nor can the findings be generalized to all student veterans in the U.S., or veterans who did not attend college at all after their military service. Nonetheless, this sample has provided data rich in details that would otherwise have been unattainable via methods such as standardized survey interviews. For the purposes of this research and possibly for galvanizing support for creating veteran friendly campuses, a small number of individual and personalized stories may be more compelling than a larger number of faceless statistics.

The Data: Student Veterans' Narratives

The data for this project are the words of student veterans themselves about their transitions from serving in our country's war(s) to returning home and going to college several years later. The participants in this study have a great deal in common, having decided to go to college after having dedicated a segment of their lives to military service, but I will also spend a good deal of time describing how their paths diverged as well. For after all, not only did they arrive at their recruiters' doors coming from different life histories, but they also joined different branches of the military and were stationed and deployed to bases around the world, performing sometimes drastically different jobs, and for differing amounts of time.

The issues that emerged from the gathered stories reflect many of the issues featured in the literature review, and are presented in a similar manner as well. As a way of introducing the student veterans whose stories form the basis of this research, I first describe the overall sample of the individuals that I interviewed, specifically mentioning each of their jobs in the military and their academic interests. I then discuss some of their motivations for joining the military service, and describe their experiences as new recruits in boot camp and within the general atmosphere of the military as a total institution. From there I relay what the participants described to me as the kinds of relationships or camaraderie that forms among individuals in the military. Then, I describe some of the general transitional and behavioral issues of leaving the military and returning to civilian life for my participants, as well as an example of a more severe case of coping with combat trauma while transitioning to civilian life. Finally, I present how the student veterans I interviewed are currently faring in college both academically and socially, and how the University of Nevada, Reno, could apply these findings towards making the institution more conducive to veterans' academic goals.

Brief Description of Sample

The final sample for this project included two females and nine males that had been on an overseas deployment since 9/11/2001, ranging from 25 to 34 years old, who are or will be

enrolled in, or have already graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno. They were all given pseudonyms to protect their identities, which appear in the parentheses below. Overall, I interviewed two former Marines, (Will and Hank), five Army veterans (Adam, Rachel, Sam, Chris, and Dennis), two Navy veterans (Laura and Steve), and two individuals that are currently in the Army National Guard, (Camden), and the Air Force Reserves (Tom). These numbers are logical, as women make up about 15% of the military and comprise less than 20% of the final sample; as a majority of my subjects are veterans of the Army, which is the largest branch in the military; and there were only two subjects in the Marine Corps, the smallest branch. A slight majority of the sample joined the military before 9/11/2001, (six out of eleven subjects) and about half of the sample joined the military immediately after graduating from high school, while the other half enlisted in their early twenties. Most of the participants served for anywhere from three to five years, although one of the males (Sam) served for approximately 7 years and another male (Camden), has been in the National Guard for 11 years. A majority of the males, and one of the females were deployed to either Afghanistan or Iraq, or both, working in combative environments either engaging the enemy or in semi-hostile support positions.

Although most people may immediately think of infantrymen when they think of military personnel, the truth is that those on the forefront of the war are supported by innumerable “behind-the-scenes” personnel as well. To be able to operate like a machine, the military places each of its members in specialized positions, or their “military occupations specialty” (MOS), and everyone plays some type of role in the institution’s larger objectives. As my sample specifically included veterans who were deployed during the GWT, there were only two veterans in the sample who were in relative safety during their service, and they were both in the Navy. Laura worked in intelligence and was deployed to Japan for two years, and Steve, who was also in the Navy, worked in the engine room of an aircraft carrier that he was stationed on for three years in the Persian Gulf.

During times of war, the military obviously cannot place all of its members in relative safety, and according to U.S. law, males face the brunt of combat. Will served three tours to Iraq in the Marines as a “ground intelligence analyst,” as he described it, running around with a laptop and shotgun on the battle ground, “typing up reports, taking the pictures, tagging and bagging prisoners, searching bodies, (and) stuff like that.” Hank was also in the Marines, in another active unit, serving two tours to Iraq, and one to Afghanistan, working in a reconnaissance unit.

Sam, who was in the Army for nearly seven years and was deployed to Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, was first a radio operator and later an infantry squad leader. Adam served in the Army for three years and was deployed to both Afghanistan and Iraq, and his job was in an anti-armor unit that accompanied infantry units to help them blow up tanks and even buildings that needed to be decimated. Chris served in the Army for three years as a mechanic, and he also accompanied infantry units on convoys when he was deployed to Afghanistan. Dennis served in the Army for four years, training as a medic his first year and then stationed in Korea and Iraq, deploying with an infantry unit. Rachel also served for four years in the Army and she was deployed to Korea, Germany, and then Iraq, working as a truck driver. While women are not usually placed in combat units, they are given jobs in support positions that are adjacent to combat, such as transportation units, which can still be attacked by insurgents, as was Rachel’s unit.

The last two student veterans that I interviewed, Tom and Camden, have stories that are slightly different than the rest of the sample. While they have both been on an overseas deployment, they are currently in the Air Force Reserves and the Army National Guard, respectively, and are simultaneously working their way through college. Tom’s original MOS, when he was in the Nevada Air Guard and deployed to Kyrgyzstan, was in Security Forces. He has recently transferred to the Air Force Reserves, with a new MOS in pest control. Camden works in communications, and when he was deployed to Iraq at the beginning of the war, he

traveled from base to base setting up and repairing computer networks. Unlike any of the other subjects in the sample, they are both expecting imminent deployments to Afghanistan within the next year.

CHAPTER 4
Enlisted and Deployed
Joining the Military

Based on my eleven interviews, several important factors stand out as to why individuals join the military, aside from patriotic reasons. As a slight majority of the veterans I interviewed (6 of 11) enlisted in the military before 9/11/2001, none of them cited joining the military out of a sense of patriotic duty. Some of the reasons they cited for joining the military were to honor a family tradition of service, to fulfill a life-long dream, and to travel and escape small town life, but one of the more universal and relevant reasons that I will focus on in greater detail was to gain financial assistance for college. I will then expound upon another striking purpose for enlistment that a few of the individuals in my sample revealed - to escape negative life circumstances and change the course of their lives through the tabula rasa promised by military service.

While there are a number of incentives for anyone to join the military, what all of this later translates into for the individuals I interviewed is an exchange relationship made possible by the GI Bill in which educational benefits are earned through service-time. Some of my participants had planned on attending college all along, while a handful of others had attended but not completed college before joining the military. For others, military service was a pleasantly surprising stepping-stone to college. Interestingly, the two people who emphasized the GI Bill's educational benefits as their motive for joining the military were Tom and Camden, who are currently both in school and working for the Reserves and the National Guard, respectively. Camden joined the military almost eleven years ago specifically because it was a way that he could be able to pay for college and not have to rely on his parents. As he explained, he had absolutely no desire to go to war, and he ended up joining the National Guard because they pay for college tuition and books in full:

I actually joined for college. Um, I didn't have scholarships, I didn't plan, um...I didn't want my parents to pay for it, it was...I was going to do my thing and I was gonna do it on my own...I didn't need their help. Being the stubborn-headed eighteen-year old. Uh...I ran across the Guard and it was just like, it would give me a bonus to join, it'll give me free college, it'll get me my books paid for...I didn't join to go to war. I didn't think I was gonna stay in past my six. And I love it now. There's no way I'm leaving.

Thus, although his original reason for joining the military was to earn money for college, ten years later, and having used up his GI Bill benefits, he is staying in for the camaraderie.

Tom frankly admitted to joining the military to escape his rat-infested house, and “living like a poor person.” Joining the military was a way for him to pull himself up by military bootstraps and be able to go to college independently from his parents without worrying about debt for student loans. While both of his younger sisters went to college right after high school and are now both about to finish their degrees, he explained, “they have all this debt going to school...my sister just graduated from going to college and she's got like \$50,000 worth of debt. And I get paid to go to school.” Although he will be re-deployed again in the near future, he doesn't mind that his education is interrupted by his military duties because it is stable employment in a time where many young college graduates are currently struggling to find jobs in the civilian labor market, and may even end up settling in jobs unrelated to their degree. Asking, “what does a degree get you, you know, right now?” and describing his sister's current situation, he explained, “she's got her bachelor's degree, and she's working at my like mom's company as a receptionist. She's not using her degree for anything. At least not right now.” With two years left to graduate from college, but expecting to be deployed to Afghanistan sometime in the next year, he is steadily multi-tasking, and hoping in the long run it will give him a comparative advantage over others in civilian life.

Most often, people join the military for a multitude of reasons. Similar to both Camden and Tom's desire to become financially independent from their parents after high school, Will, joined the military because he “wanted to get out of Reno,” “wanted money for school,” “wanted to go off on (his) own” and to “become independent from (his) parents.” Rachel joined the Army

when she was 22 after getting a divorce and wanting to escape her current life circumstances: "(I) (g)ot married really young, and I was like, 'I'm tired of living in this small town, and I'm tired of working, and I want to see the world.'" Dennis explained that he joined the military "to get out and do something" when college was not going well. Along with this sense of wanting to escape from a small town and see the world, Laura, who joined the Navy and was stationed in northern Japan for two years, stated with a sense of accomplishment: "I wanted to see how far I could get. I mean, if I could've I would've gone to the moon...just to see how far I can make it. And Japan's pretty far. It's on the other side of the world. So...I made it pretty far." Yet as she explains, she also joined the military not just to travel, but in order to escape her current life circumstances:

For a lot of people, it's because they just don't have anywhere else to go. They reach a cross-road in their life, well it's like, either stay where you are and be miserable, or, just start over some place. It's kind of like a blank slate. You meet all these new people, you move someplace else, you know, you have a new job, and it's just like, you know...a whole new, a whole new world. So I think in a lot of people it's just they're in a way trying to escape something. I was in a place where after my father died, and I had left school the first time, I was completely lost, and I just had like, I didn't know what to do, I didn't see a future. And that's the worst thing in life, to not have goals. So when you join the military, they give you goals, even if it's something small like, fold your skivvies in a certain way. Or you know, march in a certain way, you know, do this do that. It helps to get you back in the rhythm of having goals in the short term, and then after a while you start, you know, choosing your own goals, and you start building from yourself. So in a way for me, it was kind of like re-programming myself. You just don't want to get into the real reason why. Or you just say like, oh it's travel, and yeah it's school, and yeah it is all these things, but it's usually something deeper, I think.

Laura's account of how, as she told me non-dramatically, the military "saved her life," is a seamless example of how military service can reform individuals' lives, and give them direction when they are lost. Not only that, but she explains that being in the military was a way to break away from her past, and focus on the future. Her desire to start anew is as Elder (1998) states:

“(m)ilitary mobilization tends to pull young people from their past, however privileged or deprived, and in doing so creates new beginnings that favor developmental change” (p. 8).

Before Sam joined the military he was also at a sort of “crossroads” in his life, unhappy, and in a crumbling relationship due to his girlfriend's disapproval of his excessive “partying”:

I was scared. And, I didn't really know what to do, so I guess I had...uh, read too many Hemingway novels, or watched *Platoon* too many times, or a combination of the two...but I decided to look into the military. And I wanted to get out of my situation I was in as quickly as possible, so I talked to the Marine recruiters and the Army recruiters, and the Army recruiters got me in right away. So, I joined the Army. And that was it. I thought I would get a little bit of money for school, and out-run a bad situation.

As this quote demonstrates, there may have been multiple reasons for Sam to enlist in the military as well. He states he wanted to escape from his current situation as quickly as possible, even joining the branch of the military that would get him in the quickest, while also earning some money for school.

Although people used to enter the military mandatorily, after the end of the draft in 1973 the military has used a series of incentives to attract people into joining voluntarily. Aside from those who enlist due to incentives such as the GI Bill or for a patriotic cause, others might join like Laura and Sam explained, to escape negative life circumstances or “because they have nowhere else to go,” or are scared, alone, and do not know what to do. Aside from individuals who voluntarily enter convents or commit themselves into mental institutions, most people do not enter total institutions voluntarily, and when they do so, they enter in different spirits than they would if they were forced into entering one. Understanding why my participants joined the military is a necessary question to ask, because as Goffman (1961) pointed out, “when entrance is voluntary, the recruit has already partially withdrawn from his home world; what is cleanly severed by the institution is something that had already started the decay...in such cases, conversion seems already to have taken place” (p. 15; p. 118). Perhaps for some of my participants, what had started to decay was their faith in their ability to succeed in an environment where they were expected to work against the people around them in some kind of competitive instinct for their individual survival. By joining the military, they would become a part of a vast organization where they would work together with others for a collective purpose. None of my participants actually cited joining the military ‘to be part of something bigger,’ but as I explain

later, most of them valued the camaraderie they experienced in the military more than anything else. Thus, while leaving the camaraderie of the military seemed to be one of the most difficult aspects of their release, most of their original motivations for joining the military were for personal development. Their reasons for enlisting reiterate a desire for personal freedom—whether it was financial freedom and independence from one’s parents, or to escape from negative life circumstances. Ironically, as I will explain next, they were only able to realize such independence at the expense of their autonomy and personal freedoms within the total institution of the military.

Entering the Total Institution of the Military

Everything that the participants described regarding their time in the military re-confirms that it is what Goffman described as total institution. However, the military is unlike other total institutions in that autonomy and self-determinism are voluntarily sacrificed for a larger, collective purpose. Once in basic training or “boot-camp,” which is the first phase of military life for any new recruit, the individual is immediately stripped of the comforts of home, and expected to behave in a completely different manner. Steve described that in boot camp, to physically and psychologically prepare them for military life “they basically break you down and then rebuild you into what they need. Boot-camp can best be described as hell on Earth.” As Elder (1998:8) explains, “(i)ndividual differences are minimized in life transitions when the new circumstances resemble a total institution that presses from all angles toward a particular behavior.” Almost similar to a prison environment where inmates are assigned numbers to replace their names, Will described that “...in boot camp, they take away all your individuality. They literally take everything away. I was recruit #32. Platoon 2077, Fox Company, Second Battalion.” Until he earned the respect from his superiors, he was not identified by his individual name but rather by his position within his unit, because in the meantime, “you were a recruit, you were a piece of shit. You were a scumbag.” Of course, according to Steve, they were not doing this to degrade

them- it was to toughen them up. Also, according to Goffman (1961), these stripping and leveling procedures also serve an incredibly egalitarian purpose, to “cut across social distinctions with which the recruits enter” (p. 119). Furthermore, Will described, obscuring individuality actually served to build camaraderie:

it's the idea that there's no individualism when you're going for these objectives, when you're going for the mission-that it's a team effort. But the thing that was hard for me in boot camp was I got punished for other peoples' mistakes. So, if my rack-mate got fucked up, he didn't get punished. After a while, they punished me for failure to train him...so it creates the idea that everyone is in it together. And it creates that brotherhood.

Indeed, in the military, each phase of the member's daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of “a large batch of others,” where, as Tom described, “you're all doin' the same thing. You're all, like, kinda stuck there.” Dennis also explained that military training fostered the notion of team-work and collaboration stating: “You do all of your training together, you know, when you go to the field you're around each other 24/7. And you know, basically everyone gets to know each other real well, and then, during your training, you depend on each other during the training. It's really team-work oriented; everything you do you do in a team.” Goffman (1961:38) also described that any new recruit would encounter constant sanctioning interaction from above, yet he did not elaborate that in the military, “especially during the initial period of stay before they accept the regulations unthinkingly,” individuals aren't punished but rather the entire group is. Like Will said, it creates the idea that everyone is in it together. In his MOS training, right after boot-camp, Tom described, “it was just like super-strict, like you'd have to like...stand at attention at your desk, and like you'd have to like all sit down as a group, and like be like, just like fully awake, and there was people that were falling asleep in class, and everybody would get yelled at and all this stuff...” Supporting Goffman's claim that this sanctioning is especially frequent during the “initial period of stay,” one of my participants, Rachel, stated, “I mean in basic training it works... and you're all, ‘Grrr Army chu chuc chuc,’ and you're all super-duper. That kinda fades out, like a year in...you're like, ‘Okay, I don't have to

be all crazy and shine my boots and not'...you know, some days you'll come to formation with not-shined boots, and you're like, 'ehhh I don't care.'" Thus, as she describes, she actually does not accept the rules and regulations 'unthinkingly' after boot-camp, as Goffman argued; however, it would appear that the constant sanctioning becomes a little more relaxed after some time.

While Rachel may not have been sanctioned for failing to shine her boots every day, more serious infractions are typically met with specific, immediate punishment, and usually it is just the individual perpetrator that is punished (Goffman 1961:51). In the military, leaving the premises of one's military base without an official leave of absence is treated similarly to an inmate escaping the confinement of prison. For example, Sam, still in the military after his final deployment, was coping with PTSD, self-medicating with alcohol, and "going crazy" over getting into trouble over some alcohol-related offenses. He went AWOL for nearly two months, surfing a while, and even checking himself into a mental health clinic where they confirmed he had PTSD. Although he was eventually exonerated, he had to spend four months awaiting Court Marshal in the Fort Knox Regional Confinement Facility.

In the military, the loss of individuality characteristic of total institutions exists in order to realize larger collective goals, but there is also a loss of autonomy and knowledge over the decisions taken regarding one's fate. One example of this is the stop-loss, or an involuntary extension, where, as Sam explained, "Like, I was supposed to get out, but because there were shortages and they needed troops to fight.... they uh, they, don't let you go." Therefore, although it is an AVF military, sometimes service is mandatory, whether the person wants to do it or not. This is especially true during war, when the military needs to shift people around. While Sam, a combat veteran, was told to serve for another year, Laura, a Russian linguist living in Japan, was told the opposite: "yeah, I was supposed to be there 3 years, but they ended up short-touring me. They just didn't have a job for me anymore." While she had been planning on being discharged at the same time as her fiancé, who she also met in the Navy, she had to leave a year early.

Although no one complained about it, this loss of control was one of the things that Rachel objected to the most about the military, including what she described as being on a “need to know basis.” Here, she describes how at the end of her second tour, where she was stationed in Germany, her entire unit had finally become aggravated with their superiors for withholding information about their imminent future:

They knew, like the higher-up people knew....and um, they were just making us like fix all our trucks, like every single thing, we were getting all these inspections of our gear...and we're like ‘What's going on?’ You know, ‘What's happening?’ And, and they're like, ‘Oh nothing...we're just preparing you guys...’ Then...one day, it was like 3 in the morning, and they had us working like non-stop...and we were like, ‘This is crap! This is bullshit!’ You know, everyone complains, and um, they just like had us in a formation and they said you know, ‘Okay, well we're going to Kuwait. We're going to war.’

This quote not only shows how she and the others in her unit were refused direct information about their fates, but also how in the meantime, the ‘higher-ups’ preoccupied them with “fatigue details,” or as Rachel described, making them detail “like every single thing.” She also discussed how she and the others in her unit were, in Goffman’s words, “obliged to take oral medication” (1961:26):

They were like ‘No, you can't ask questions.’ Or they make you take these orange pills everyday, which they weren't telling us what they were. They make you take like these orange pills every day. You line up, and you were supposed to take them in front of people, and like, you get your mouth checked and everything. And I don't know what they were....but I used to like, throw them over my shoulder real quick and then drink my water like, ‘oh, I took my pill.’ I never took one. Um, and still to this day we don't know what they were.

Although it’s highly unlikely that the pills would contain anything dangerous, Rachel felt this somehow crossed the line of her independence; of the ability to control what entered her body. Perhaps one of the more rebellious people in the military, she actually did not ‘unthinkingly’ accept all of the military’s rules and regulations. She elaborated:

You don't think when you join the Army...like how much you're really giving up. You're not allowed to say things to the media. You have to get shots. You have to take pills. You have to do what they say. You know, you don't think about that. Yeah so...I just kinda got tired of not having very much control over my life...so I was ready to get out when I got out.

The military is also unlike other total institutions in that upward mobility, and greater control within the system is possible, as promotions are given to those as a factor of the time they have

served and their level of performance as well as their experience and knowledge gained within that time. According to Camden, who's been in the National Guard for nearly eleven years and is now a non-commissioned officer (NCO), the higher a person is in rank, the more information they are given. From his point of view of someone that actually has to withhold information from others, information is something that must be shared with discretion. As he explained, if it leaked out when and where a unit was to mobilize and deploy to, their safety would no longer be secure. "cause it's operation security. If you tell that kind of stuff like, you could say what time and date and everything...they could blow up the plane. They'd know where we were." Camden explained that, as is typical of a total institution, a person has to learn how to interact and behave within the institution before they are conferred privileges such as in this case, information:

When you first come in...you don't know all the in's and out's, and you don't know what each other...like, people don't know what you can handle. And what you can't...they don't know your strengths...they're not going to tell you anything until they know you. When you get to higher...like specialist...which is an E4, um, you kind of have to...you know your job, you know, what you're expected to do, you learn a little more...and once you get to NCO ranks...you have people that you have to give information to...and...like, I have soldiers I don't tell things to that have been in a long time, 'cause I know what they need to know, and how they'll react.

What Camden says here, that he has to get to know his new privates before he decides whether or not he should tell them certain pieces of information that affect their lives, is precisely related to what Goffman states in his first few lines of *The Presentation of Self*:

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him...Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what...they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him (Goffman1997:21).

Of course, the retention rate of the military is so low, with most people leaving after 10 years, that most people do not make it to a rank where they can gain such privileges, and it may even be this lack of freedom that causes people to not reenlist, like Rachel (Segal and Segal 2004). One way to still have some of the freedoms of a civilian while still in the military is to join the National Guard or the Reserves, as Tom described: "cause I just kinda knew I'd have more freedom, as a civilian, you know? And then I could still go and do my military stuff. At the same time, while in

the active duty branches of the military it is forbidden to leave the premises, National Guard and Reserve personnel are constantly moving between military and civilians realms until they are activated and deployed, which may be stressful for some that join.

Camaraderie

Within total institutions, “the inmate is never fully alone; he is always within sight and often earshot of someone” (Goffman 1961:25). Unlike most other total institutions where “solidarizing tendencies” or “clique formations” are discouraged if not prohibited, for fear of an uprising, camaraderie is something that naturally develops among enlisted personnel and is also strongly encouraged, because comrades do a better job of protecting one another than would complete strangers (Goffman 1961:60). In part due to the military’s emphasis on the idea that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” the relationships that form within a military setting and especially within a combat environment are unlike those typically formed in civilian life. Sam told me “it’s a different type of relationship...so it's impossible to make the experience translate, but, most people can understand the concept of going through something extremely difficult with somebody, and there being a bond created.” Naturally, the people that any soldier becomes closest with are those that are constantly around them in their platoon, which Sam informed me can include anywhere from twenty to sixty people. However, according to Adam, individuals are not immediately accepted into the group, and like a college fraternity’s unsanctioned hazing that nonetheless occurs, male infantry units in the military also tend to engage in such behaviors as some sort of rite of passage for new recruits in the unit to earn their place in that group. He told me,

We torture the shit out of people, I mean we really do. It's very fun, you know. Have you ever seen the movie like *Jar Head* or whatever, when they're like branding him or whatever? You know...things like that, where's it's like...there's a hazing process.” He explains, “You can't just come in there and be like ‘Hey guys! I'm trained!’ You know, and they're like, ‘Oh, cool, come on in!’ It doesn't work that way man. There is a process to joining the unit. It's that, they want to make sure that, you know, that you can add something, you know, or that you won't quit.

Along with earning the privilege to be called by one's own name, newly trained recruits also have to earn their place in their platoon. The consequences of not ensuring that each individual can functionally contribute to the group is something demonstrated in the film *Platoon*, mentioned earlier. This film portrays how each individual in a military platoon must function cooperatively and have the same agenda as everyone else, or the unit may become fractioned and dysfunctional, creating a war within a war. According to Rachel, who drove fuel tankers in Iraq in 2003, not having that camaraderie actually seems to increase casualties and impede a unit's mission. Although her transportation unit was technically a support unit to the infantry, they were frequently attacked on the road. According to her, "...we're not infantry or anything, but we were on top of it. Like, when stuff went down, like everyone did what they were supposed to. People were protecting people and everyone looked out for each other." She went on to explain how a National Guard unit replaced hers and lost twelve people, while everyone in her active duty unit had survived the deployment: "the National Guard doesn't have like, that camaraderie. Like, they don't even know each other." As she continued to explain, until they are on active duty and deployed, individuals in the Reserves and National Guard only meet one weekend a month, while active duty members all know one another from living and training together, and they therefore want to protect each other. Thus, from what she could tell, the National Guard troops had less training together and lacked the camaraderie that is needed to function correctly and protect one another in more combative situations.

As Camden explained, it is true that, "in the Guard, you learn your job in one weekend, a month, and two weeks over the summer. And you have to be just as proficient as active duty." This may be one reason why the National Guard unit replacing Rachel's suffered so many casualties. However, Camden, who has been in the Guard for nearly eleven years, described the camaraderie in his unit as "like family," explaining that unlike active duty military units which are reconfigured every few years, members of National Guard units stay together indefinitely:

It's um...the Guard is way different. Um, we are very much like family. Um, I've been with the same people for the past ten years. And...people who have gone out are coming back in just to deploy with us. My best friend is...I met him in the Guard...so it's different like...um, when my wife got pregnant, the first person I called was my platoon sergeant, 'cause she's more of a mother to me than my own parents.

In fact, as he describes here, the people he has come to know in the military seem more like family than his own nuclear family. Indeed, this notion of camaraderie as a form of created kinship is echoed by many of the other participants as well. Growing up, people endure and overcome life's difficulties with the support and empathy of those closest to them, their family members. In the military, a similar sort of familial kinship, or for male combat units a brotherhood, develops over time. Tom feels the same way about the people he was deployed with in Kyrgyzstan on an Air Force base where troops transition into Afghanistan: "I try to keep in touch with people that I met over there, and just check up on them- 'cause they're like family, you know...the military's kinda like that. That's one of the good things about the military, I think, is like, you got this whole like, really good bond with people." Dennis described, "Everybody's pretty close, it's close like you're close to family. Everyone shares what they have, you know, you live together." Adam, who spoke extensively on this topic, jokingly described his relationship with some of the others in his platoon as a platonic marriage, having seen them at their best and worst times:

One of the things people say is, 'Oh...you know, everything's simple in the military.' You know, you're told what to do; everything's simple. And they're right in a way, but what they're wrong about is what's really simple in the military is your relationships with other people. It's like you have a real, true connection with other people- you know, the people in your unit. It's like... there's so much going on that's unspoken. You know what I mean? Like, and you come back here and there's...everybody else sort of, they're ambiguous. You don't really know where they stand, you don't really know what they believe... You don't really know what they've been through, and that's- for me that was the hardest part. It's like I had a bunch of people...I still see my friend that served that I just talked about the other day, 'cause we're still, you know, good friends and we hang out. And it's like, I know that guy. You know what I mean? Beyond, like, beyond anyone else in my life I know him more than anyone. I know...I've seen him at his worst and I've seen him at his best. You know?...And I think that's what makes it hard is you go from being around, you know, however many people were in your unit, like that sixteen to thirty people depending on what kind of a unit you're in. You have that type of relationship with them. You know exactly who they are. They can't bullshit you, they can't lie, they can't, you know, it's like you know exactly who they are. You know what I mean, like, there will never, there will never be any ambiguity at all. You

know, there's...and when you come back here. It's hard, it's hard to look at people. That's the way I see it.”

As he also explained, although there may have been a lot of unspoken communication going on, one of the reasons that Adam knew exactly who the other men in his unit were, was because at the same time it was an environment of open verbal communication, of holding nothing back. He told me “You know, anything was fair game. That was the other thing. I mean, you could talk about anything.” There were no taboo subjects, and spending time talking about anything and everything gave the people in his unit complete and honest versions of each other. Adam, describing his aforementioned friend, said: “It's like, I love that dude. You know what I mean? And he is a good guy, and I know everything....I know the core of him. Everything else has been stripped away.” While in civilian life people usually have to alter how they present themselves around different groups of people, Adam describes that members of the military are constantly around the same people, and they therefore come to know every aspect each other, de-shrouding them of their outer layers, revealing their least contrived selves. To put it another way, spending nearly all of their time with one another allows them to know each other like they would a family member, or as Adam expressed, better than anyone he has ever known.

In fact, a soldier transitioning from a deployed infantry unit back home may feel like the military has a more community-based atmosphere than the “United” States. As Adam implied, relationships in the civilian world are much more complicated than those formed in the military. After three or more years of military sojourn, even returning to friends and family can be difficult, because of not knowing who anyone is anymore. Hank explained that one of the hardest things about transitioning to civilian life was leaving the group of Marines that he served with for several years, then having to come back home and feel like he did not truly know anyone anymore:

Well, anyone in the military, when you come home, you bring a lot of it with you I guess, you know? Um, and yeah, there's a lot of things you have to let go of that was really hard. I mean, you come from an area where you've got guys that you trust, literally with your...you trust them with

your life, you know? You trust them with your life. And never once, stopped into an area where, you don't know anyone or, you haven't seen anyone for years, you don't know how they are. And uh, I don't know, it's kind of hard to let go of that, 'cause you want that, you know, that camaraderie, that true brotherhood, I guess. I don't know, I guess I was more scared to come home than anything else. I mean I was happy to see my family but, I don't know, it was just different.

Like Camden described, although military camaraderie is a created kinship, Hank felt that it had become more authentic than his relationship with his blood relatives. While he could trust everyone in his unit with his life, this was not the case when he returned to civilian life surrounded by strangers that he did not know. Dennis told me being released from the military “feels like a big part of you is missing, you know. ‘Cause it’s like it’s not just part of your life; it’s who you are. It’s not just your occupation. So when you get out it, it’s like a big shock being on your own all of a sudden again.” In fact, some veterans find that they miss the kind of camaraderie they knew in the military and join the Reserves or National Guard, like Laura, who was not in combat and did not trust people with her life: “I joined the Reserves pretty much right when I got back from duty... ‘cause when I got back from duty I came here and was just like...I don’t know what to do with myself. And I kind of missed that camaraderie, and missed the connection...you know...to it. It had become part of my identity.” Although each participant experienced their transition back to civilian life in different ways, some of the patterns in transitional issues that the sample faced will now be presented.

CHAPTER 5

Returning Home

Transition Back to Civilian Life

Although some individuals look forward to leaving the military and then have little to no trouble readjusting to civilian life, others may experience what Goffman called “release anxiety,” as shown by the previous statement in the last chapter by Hank. There are still others that experience great difficulties in readjusting to the life they once abandoned. As both Hank and Adam described, one of the most difficult aspects of their discharges was leaving the virtual family of their military units and entering a much larger world where relationships with others are more ambiguous and complicated. However, this is just one of a number of transitional issues that leaving the military presents, and the issues each veteran faces depends on a number of factors. First, what veterans who have been on an overseas deployment are more likely to experience upon their release from the military and return to Western society. In transitioning from an environment where personal freedoms are greatly restricted and where there are not a lot of choices, some of the participants felt overwhelmed at the abundance of options in everyday civilian life. Others described experiencing culture shock, from both leaving military life and leaving a foreign country where they were stationed, whose culture was drastically different from that of the U.S. Some veterans, especially combat veterans, may encounter what Adam appropriately referred to as “grey areas,” which can basically be understood as dramatic shifts in behavioral norms that occur after leaving a total institution. Many veterans also had to readjust how they communicated with people, in being more sensitive, and also having to closely watch or censor what they said around civilians. Finally, the participants confirmed that leaving the military may feel like downgrading from ‘being a big fish in a little pond to a little fish in a big pond.’”

As the military tells its members what to do at what time, has control over where they live, how they take care of their bodies physically, how they dress, and even what they eat, returning to civilian life and the freedom of choosing what to do with oneself, while liberating, can be overwhelming at the same time. When Adam was discharged from the Army, he felt slightly disoriented in that there was nothing specifically designated for him to do, which he explains in the following quote:

I was ready to go. You know, I was ready to move on. But it...but I wasn't ready to move on to anything specifically- that was the problem, I was like, I was just ready to go to something- the next thing...so I didn't really care what it was. But I didn't feel like- at that time- I didn't feel like um... I was entering this unstructured world where I didn't know how to get along or anything, you know. I really just felt like I could take advantage of doing whatever I wanted to do. You know, it was like...if I wanted to sleep until 12, or whatever.

At the time he may not have identified this as an issue, but in retrospect, he recognized that shifting from the military's structure of schedules, regulations, and boundaries into civilian life really was like entering an unstructured world. At this point in the interview he agreed that it was as if there were so many choices of things to do that he was overwhelmed and did not know where to begin. As Goffman (1961:71) described, "immediately upon release the inmate is likely to be marvelously alive to the liberties and pleasure of civil status that civilians ordinarily do not see as events at all." For example, Adam was able to sleep in longer if he wanted, which is something a lot of civilians do not think twice about. Dennis also described "It was kind of fun at first, you know, just being on my own and like, uh, you know, getting to do what I want...like not...not having to worry about getting up in the morning for P.T., (physical training) like, I can go more than one day in my life without shaving....or I don't know...sleep in for once. There's a lot of nice stuff about not being in the Army..." However, in Adam's case, finally being able to take advantage of whatever he wanted to, or in other words being able to do what he was restricted from doing in the military, also meant regressing from the kind of disciplined lifestyle he was forced to live while he was in the military. Since self-discipline is much more difficult to maintain than forced discipline, a number of veterans may become less physically conditioned

once out of the military. Additionally, without the boundaries and sanctions set by the military to curtail negative behaviors, some other things that Adam took advantage of doing once he was back at home were risky behaviors. For example he described, “I was like drinking a lot, and I had a motorcycle...” After he returned home, Adam may have been trying to fill a metaphoric hole in his life for loss of his occupation and lifestyle in the Army, with escapist activities. Also, while in Adam’s case the unstructured freedom of civilian life may have made him both apathetic and hedonistic, it was a slightly different experience for Sam. Having a comparative over-abundance of choices and decisions to make in the civilian world may seem to make life unnecessarily complicated, and he expresses a yearning for the simplicity of “life over there” as Sam describes in the following quote:

...it’s all so very black and white, and there's a, there's a sense of clarity to life over there that you don't get in this world...there's not four-hundred thousand choices of fucking toothpaste over there, you know what I mean? Your job, and your mission is very simple. You know, it's very, very simple, it's take care of the guy to the left and right of you. Uh, don't let anyone down under any circumstances whatsoever, ever. And get home alive. I mean, that's it. And then you come back, and try to negotiate this terrain, and uh.... it doesn't make sense.

That he said “four-hundred-thousand choices of fucking toothpaste” implies anger at the excessiveness and purposelessness of such variety for something with a single purpose. For Sam, even once home, everything seemed to remind him of, and contrast with war. Even the grocery store, a mundane place for civilians to go, is a completely different experience for veterans like Sam:

You, you go to the check-out line when you're going to buy groceries and you were just in an environment where people were dying, you know, in horrible, horrible deaths. And you look, and you look at the magazine racks, and it's... it's... Brittany Spears, shaves her head. And...Jennifer Lopez, and, and you know... Ben Affleck, and what's going on in their relationship, and that's what people are paying attention to.

Although a grocery store check-out line is not exactly a news stand, it nonetheless communicates what the public is consciously aware of, and what they prefer to place out of their sight and minds. At any rate, this example of going from a place where people are chaotically dying to a

place where there is an abundance of food and tabloid journalism is a perfect illustration of the kind of extreme environmental transition that combat veterans experience when they return home. Interestingly enough, Rachel also mentioned that the grocery store was a foreign place to visit once she got home:

Just going into a grocery store was really weird. I just, just weird stuff...like turning on the faucet and getting cold water. I would just stare at the water, I'm like, "wow." I'm like, 'This is amazing.' Like, look at this, we just live in this box, and then we go to this spot in it, and you turn on the faucet and clean, cold water comes out. So it was just, really like sorta surreal moments like that-getting showers, getting cold water, going to the grocery store and looking at all the food. Like, I couldn't even pick anything. I was like, I was like, the lights, and I was like, 'wow....' I just was sort of walking around in this daze of amazement of everything.

For someone that had lived off of the same Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) for the past several years, she also became “marvelously alive to the liberties and pleasures of civilian life,” when she walked into a super-market. While “going to the grocery store and looking at all the food” may not seem like a big “to-do” for most American civilians, it was surreal for Rachel. While this may be true, the fact that Rachel couldn't even decide on anything is perhaps saying something about American consumerism, and supports the fact that veterans may sometimes become overwhelmed at the over-abundance in American society. Rachel even mentions Western water, one of the world's scarcest resources and something questionable overseas for its lack of purification. When Rachel saw it in Germany, coming back from Iraq, it was surreal, like a mirage. Even veterans like Laura who were not in combat, but who were deployed overseas, found the U.S. hard to readjust to:

It was weird because I had like a reverse-culture shock when I came back to the states. Because, everything's so big. And like, my favorite restaurant would probably be about as big as this room, in Japan. I mean, everything's smaller, and quiet. It's peaceful. People are very respectful. And I remember landing in O'Hare coming, back, in Chicago, and it was just like...people were so loud, and it's just, busy, and pushing people out of their way, and just, it was a completely different environment, you know? Like, I felt more at home there than when I came back to the States. I felt like I was in a foreign country when I came back to the states. It was really strange.

Thus, returning from both being a total institution where she was learned to be aware of her surroundings, as well as from a culture very different from that of the U.S., it was unnerving

being in crowds of rude and boisterous American civilians. It also seems to be irritating to return to an environment that is not only entirely different from a combat or overseas deployment, but that also appears completely unconscious to the fact that wars are even going on. Sam, continuing his observation of the civilian world, describing “(and) some woman is, you know, on her cell phone in her ear, talking about something ridiculous... talking about the next episode of Desperate Housewives. You know? And everybody's in their SUV's...” To him, women on cell phones talking about suburban housewives from a TV show, while driving their SUV's, are oblivious to anything meaningful going on in the world, and are extremely unsettling. Overall, returning home is absurd and surreal as both Sam and Rachel respectively described it. While something was different, everything else stayed the same, and they were the ones that had changed. According to Sam, “...it's changed, and it hasn't. It's more like you've changed, and people have stayed the same...this place, this, this country, is so absurd too, when you come back from an experience like that. You know?” Although Rachel returned to Germany, another Western country, after being in Iraq, she described almost exactly the same sensation as Sam: “Nothing had changed. You know, everyone was just living in Germany like nothing was happening. It's not the same - it's really weird.” The way they describe it is almost as if everyone was oblivious to what was going on in the rest of the world, living their lives in blissful ignorance. This makes sense, and confirms that military service is oftentimes a turning point in young people's lives, changing who they are and the way they see the world.

Re-socialization: Moving out of the “Grey Areas”

Veterans returning from both overseas duties and combat deployments may find it difficult departing from their comrades, feel overwhelmed at cornucopian civil life, and experience culture shock, but when they first return home, they may also carry back with them behaviors that are not appropriate for civilian life. To give a few examples when Rachel returned to Germany after being in Iraq, she dove to the floor during fire-works at a festival, and she and

her friends were accustomed to relieving themselves anywhere they pleased in public. The day after Camden returned home after a fifteen month deployment to Iraq in 2003, he was pulled over by a police officer for speeding, and he explained that:

overseas for example, we drive really fast, like you don't slow down at all, and you don't stop. Well, I got in a car and just did the natural reaction, and just started going... I couldn't stop. I was just like... gotta get to point A. From point A to point B. Go. And I was just hauling it, and didn't even realize that I was doing it. It was just natural.

Chris also confirmed that the following habits deemed distasteful in the civilian world are meanwhile shared throughout the institution: "In the Army, everybody swears, and everyone uses tobacco, and everybody drinks a lot." While these vices might be appropriate for military life, as perhaps they are all used to cope with stress, they are considered less than desirable habits by many civilians. Dennis, who, like Sam was also diagnosed with PTSD, described abusing alcohol every night after he was first discharged to lessen the sleep disturbances he was experiencing, and although he was drinking by himself instead of with his military friends, he did not immediately realize it was problematic: "I was drinking like every night, but I kinda thought that was normal still, because we drank a lot in the Army too, so. We partied all the time in the Army, so I didn't think much of it. But I guess it was a problem."

For Steve, who was on the air-craft carrier for three years, coming home meant getting used to natural sunlight, getting his "land legs" back, and "not having to down a gallon of coffee every day, just to keep regular anymore," and since he was on an aircraft carrier, "it took a while for food to taste right again without the sweet tang of jet fuel in everything." Thus, when returning to civilian life, some adjustments are not as difficult to make as others. The amount of adjustment that takes place during the re-socialization process depends on how deeply embedded the veteran was in the military system, what kind of environment they spent their military service in, and what their job was. While some veterans need to only make slight behavioral adjustments, others are enormously transformed by their experiences in the military and do not return to civilian life as easily. According to Sam, the right word for it was not even a transition:

“it wasn't so much of a transition as it was a, you know, a hundred-and-seventeen-mile-an-hour-impact into a wall...you know. It really was.” According to him, “you have to recreate yourself socially. Either that, or you have to write off having any sort of social life outside of you know, a small group of people who'd be able to tolerate you, you know?...”

While in combat, soldiers are trained and ordered to use aggression and force as a means to an end, this is something that is discouraged in most contexts of civilian life and can even be considered criminal. However, along with a plethora of other psychological/behavioral habits, this is something that can also easily be carried over to the U.S. Adam, who now works for the Department of Veteran's Affairs, was able to relay to me what he has noticed in a lot of combat veterans that need critical help readjusting to civilian life. It basically comes down to something quite simple. He explained that one of the reasons he decided to enlist in the military was that he would be able to do things he would ordinarily be unable to do in civilian life, such as flying helicopters, shooting things, and blowing things up. Here, he describes what sometimes ensues for combat veterans returning to civil life:

It's that idea that, you are doing something that you cannot do in any other capacity. You know what I mean, you cannot go out and do something like that...unless you want to be a criminal. I mean...that's really the only way, because that's really what it's like...it's like being a sanctioned criminal. You know, pretty much. I know that sounds crazy, and I don't really mean it that way but...if you did what we were trained to do...you'd be a criminal. You know, if you did the things we did...You know...it's perspective. You know, and of course, you know...I think that's what happens to a lot of veterans...things get real grey. You know, it's kinda like, 'well that's weird...I can do that over there, I can't do it here.' You know, it's sorta strange.

When Adam explains that “things get grey” when veterans return to civilian life, he is referring to the fact that although military personnel are expected to adapt their behaviors to the environments they are in, shifting from such extremely different sets of behavioral norms is difficult. Where certain behaviors may be appropriate or even encouraged in one setting, they will be inappropriate or even criminal in the other. The notion of “thou shalt not kill” may be a near universal creed across all cultures and religions, but is seemingly waived for times of war. Chris

described how even after he returned to the U.S. after his deployment to Afghanistan, *not* carrying around an armed weapon made him feel vulnerable and unprotected:

When you're overseas, you're always like carrying around a gun, so you're always on your guard. That feeling of like...one, you kind of have some security and safety because you're always carrying around a loaded gun...but at the same time you're in a country where there's somebody that, if they saw you, they'd shoot at you to kill you. So that's kind of like...you feel safe but at the same time you feel there's...a little bit like...being on your guard at all times. And then you come back to the civilian world, and it's like...I don't need to be on my guard, but at the same time you don't carry around a loaded gun, so you're kinda like...you feel a little vulnerable at the same time, but you know you're safe because you're in America. So it's okay.

To recapitulate, he had become accustomed to feeling safe with a gun for protection, but in the United States, although he did not necessarily have to protect himself, he still felt vigilant, or 'on his guard.' This could be expected from anyone returning from either combat or support mission, as Camden described that even years after his deployment to Iraq he also described being easily startled by sudden loud noises, not liking big groups of people, and being what he called "overly aware" in social settings:

Um...I'll look at a person, and I'll see like tattoos...and stuff and I'll be like, okay that guy used to be military, or...that guy, you know, I gotta watch out for, he's doing this...little things, like...just like their body movements...I'm kinda like, okay what's going on? And I, I might just be paranoid, but it's just...some weird stuff.

This type of situational awareness is something a lot of the other participants felt the military, and especially their deployments, imparted to them. While Chris and Camden were working on trucks or computers within a hostile environment, their jobs were not to directly engage the enemy; that job was for infantrymen like Sam. Here, Sam describes being *hyper-vigilant* after he returned home, which is a residual effect of combat and also one of the symptoms of PTSD:

...every time you leave the wire, and least every time I left the wire, and you leave every day in the infantry units, and you're leaving the relative safety of your fire base, or the FOB, or whatever you're on, and you roll out, uh I was always, like, I was trying to will my environment into you know...being able to control it through sheer will...and so I was constantly trying to focus on everything so much... Trying so hard to bend, the physical circumstances to my will, that it...you know. The more I learned about PTSD is that I, I... physically re-wired myself. And by being in that frame of mind for so long...you know, that oftentimes, the normal person who doesn't have those same kinds of experiences, they will process stimulus so much differently than what I will...

While most members of total institutions are excluded from knowing information about the decisions taken that impact their fate and are also not allowed to leave the confines of the institution's premises, it is infantrymen's jobs to leave the wire or Forward Operating Base (FOB), and those decisions taken regarding their fate are purposeless because they are already living in a constantly uncertain world, even when they are in the 'relative safety of their fire base.' Imaginably, any individual in a foreign and combative environment will feel like they have very little control over their environment, and this naturally leads to increased vigilance or awareness. Here, Sam's description of being in combat zones after "leaving the wire" illustrates how his expenditure of mental agency to control structural reality or "the physical circumstances," later became a new and interdependent factor leading to a diagnosis as an alcoholic with PTSD. Back in the U.S. and physically and psychologically "re-wired," he rationally knew that he didn't need to be vigilant, but he continued to perceive certain things as dangerous when they were not at all, perhaps confusing the contexts from having been "in that frame of mind for so long." Like Adam was saying, perhaps one reason combat veterans find life after the military difficult is the simple fact that certain acts (aggressiveness, carrying weapons, violence, fighting, etc.) are positively sanctioned in the military and are used to protect one's life and the lives of their comrades. Yet in civilian life these actions are neither typically necessary, nor positively sanctioned. While vigilance is not in any way unlawful, it may lead to aggressive and negatively sanctioned behaviors in civilian life.

Due to the way that Sam's mind was re-conditioned to process stimuli, he experienced an extreme shift in behavioral expectations when he returned to civilian life. As he explains in the following excerpt from our interview, his hyper-vigilance also caused him to perceive things in more threatening ways, and just as he was trained by the military and learned from combat to be aware at all times as a matter of life and death, he carried this with him even when he was back

home. What Sam says here is probably true for a number of others who carry behavioral norms more suitable for combat back into civilian life with them:

The thing you learn in combat, especially in infantry units, is you learn to react to situations immediately. What it boils down to is when there's a threat, you learn to...to uh, identify and deal with threats as quickly as possible and uh...for instance, when I got back, one of the big problems I had was I carried that out on the street with me. I'm very aggressive and I got into a lot of fights....And what I found out is that what my mind was picking up on as threats weren't necessarily threats- they were situations that I could definitely avoid, you know? And so, I got into a handful of really, you know, really good scrapes...

Thus, Sam, an aggressive person to begin with, was conditioned over time to be hyper-vigilant and to immediately react to situations, and when he returned home seven years later, this, along his proclivity towards drugs and alcohol, and one of the later, more pronounced symptoms of his PTSD, night-terrors, all compounded into what he related to a high-speed impact into a wall:

I self-medicated. I smoked pot every day and drank, and that's what I did. And, I... could function fairly well on that level so I thought that it wasn't anything to... you know, I thought I could take care of these things myself, and that, that's the path that I attempted to take, and I did fairly well, uh, for a while, until I started getting into hard drugs which was something I'd never done before. And uh, one of the things that I, one of the symptoms that was most pronounced was nightmares. So I found out if I didn't have to go to sleep, then I wasn't going to have nightmares, so, I made staying up for days on end a habit. And then I ended up here, and I got introduced to speed for the first time. And after a month of doing speed I was in jail again, you know, for the second time. But um... yeah, it wasn't a lot of fun, at all.

Although he had not gotten into any legal trouble due to drugs and alcohol before he joined the military, his experiences in combat influenced his level of substance abuse during and after his military service. Getting into a bar fight one night in downtown Reno and ending up in jail, he was forced to become sober, and later sought help at the VA. Like Goffman described, individuals in military total institutions must oftentimes engage in activities whose “symbolic implications are incompatible their conceptions of self,” but it seems to also be true for some combat veterans after their military service (1961:23). Sam added, “I'm embarrassed by a lot of it to be honest...” and explicated:

and that's.... that's not appropriate behavior for the civilian world. Especially when you have the kind of goals that I have...You know. My goal is not to be the toughest guy on the block. My goal is to... you know, my goals are...are, uh, more socially and educationally appropriate than that. And so, it's, it was uh, it sucked, it wasn't something I was happy about...it's something I've

gotten a handle on, but it took a long time, definitely. And there, there's other things, you know... just uh, just learning to lighten up.

Today, he is involved in an AA chapter for veterans in Reno, and with the veteran's communities in the city of Reno and at the University of Nevada, Reno. He is living with his girlfriend, working as a river guide, going to college, and enjoying life. At the end of our interview he described how even being able to do an interview with me was incredible, saying, "you know, I shouldn't be here, you know? I should either be in prison, or I should've died over there...um...the life that I get to live now is absolutely incredible, you know, it really is." But, as Sam also reminded me, "guys are still doing 4-5 deployments, which is absolutely absurd. You know, absolutely absurd so..." and as amount of combat exposure is positively correlated with the likelihood of developing PTSD, it is a terrifying reality for veterans returning home.

In my interview with Rachel, she told me how unprepared she thought the military was in helping veterans transition to civilian life back in the beginning of the war. Although everyone in her unit returned safely from their deployment to Iraq, their transition to civilian life was tumultuous in many respects:

The first three months we had like, a sergeant in my platoon killed himself because his girlfriend within that year didn't want to be with him anymore...Lot of people's found out their wives were unfaithful to them, um, so that happened. And then there was a lot of - there was some domestic violence happening...one guy tried to kill his wife. One guy tried to kill himself...there was a lot of drinking...DUI's, and um, 12 people came up like- they do a lot of drug tests in the Army- um, positive for cocaine use. So there was just like havoc. Like, people, like 15 people getting divorced, and everyone was being crazy, and people were killing themselves and doing drugs and drinking and....it was just like chaos. People were having panic attacks.

In fact, the aftermath had worse consequences than the war itself, as was manifest in the problems that these veterans encountered with relationships, anger, mental health problems, and drugs and alcohol, and it was in fact Rachel herself who was having panic attacks. In Rachel's unit, while a lot of people had relationship troubles when they returned from service, this same difficulty set people on different trajectories - whether it was drug use, domestic violence, successful or attempted suicide or even attempted murder in the case of one of the members of Rachel's unit.

Re-adapting to Communication in Civilian Life

Not only do veterans have to adjust some of their behaviors after returning from a deployment, but they may also have to become accustomed to different ways of communicating and modify how they interact with people in civilian life. Although certain aspects of civilian life have a fast pace, according to Rachel, things are completed more expediently in the military, and from what she has seen, this slower pace of civilian life is irritating to veterans returning home:

They can't deal with like regular...the slow pace- civilian, civilian life is very slow compared to the Army or any type of military experience, and certainly compared to war it's very slow. Every day in Iraq it's like, 'Boom boom boom boom.' You gotta be on it; you got to be on it. Like you have to be aware all the time. And here it's like 'oooowwwa'- it's slowed way down. So it's really weird to sort of slow way down, and then have to live in this slow...everybody moves slow. People like don't get back to you quickly and so I think um, maybe some veterans have problems with that. Like, 'come on. (clap, clap).' Like, 'Let's get the solution right now.' Like, 'let's not talk about it. We need a decision right now.'

Just like Sam described how he learned to react to situations quickly in combat, it also seems like delayed response times are frowned at altogether in the military, and returning from combat makes the civilian workplace irritatingly disorganized. Chris described working in the civilian workplace to be frustrating because of how inefficiently civilians communicated and worked together:

...So like, it's just like, any time there's any issue or any problem, like it gets resolved immediately (snaps). Like, you tell somebody about it, problem gets fixed...any time anything happens. Like, instant, on the spot correction. So like, you know...I had three years of that crap...So...I come back to work and I got to work and stuff goes on constantly, with people being lazy or stupid...then like, you know it screws up somebody else. I would try to tell people about stuff that's happening, and they would just do nothing about it ever. It was so frustrating. And I would get like really upset about it. Like, look, this guy is doing this- obviously, it's making the job harder for like four other people...so why not just fix it? And they'd be like, oh, we'll take care of it, we'll take care of it...and just do nothing. So it was hard to come back to that lifestyle of like...oh yeah there's a problem that could be easily fixed, but I'll just look the other way.

The way that Chris describes it, he felt that there was an overall lack of training and that protocol and the company's expectations were not formally addressed. Instead of immediately isolating problems and devising solutions that facilitate productivity, his superiors are 'looking the other way,' as if his managers do not really care about their jobs. Thus, he finds his current job poorly

managed and frustratingly more dysfunctional than his job in the military. As a mechanic in the Army, Chris was trained to do things like change tires quickly, and he has a natural inclination towards efficiently completing tasks. Therefore he feels irritated at such incompetence due to laziness, a sentiment felt by other veterans about civilians as well.

At the same time that veterans may become irritated with how civilians communicate and function more slowly than in the military, veterans probably learn that they must also literally change how they interact with people, especially in the work place, in trying to motivate others to act in a certain way. Rachel brought up the very good point that veterans are coming from a total institution where behaviors and attitudes are modeled by constant sanctioning from above. In other words, military personnel become accustomed to being screamed at until they modify their behavior, and if they were in the service long enough to scream at other people as well, politely confronting one's co-workers in the civilian world to work more cooperatively may be awkward, as if it is none of their business. To recall, in the military, one person's mistakes are ordinarily amplified as the group gets punished and it reflects back on the entire group, while in civilian life this is not ordinarily the case, and problems may be ignored altogether as Chris described. Also, Rachel described that in civilian life, she had to become more sensitive in interacting with people:

As far as going back into the regular world, like civilian world, um, uh, I mean being a social worker now, and learning so much about communicating, and how to motivate people and talk to people who are, you know, helpless, and certainly like "err err err," being stern is not, doesn't really work in the regular world. People are sensitive. In the Army you do something wrong, someone yells at you. You don't take it personally- you get used to people just....correcting you by screaming at you- and it's not personal, but they still like you; you're still in their squad...you don't cry...there's no - none of that.

In this case, direct communication is the quickest means to an end, but people tend to 'beat around the bush' in civilian life, or ignore the real issues. Being stern and direct almost seems unsettling for civilians, and while it is not taken personally in the military, it is back in the civilian world.

Along with the military's more brazen and to-the-point principles of communication, a lot of veterans also return home and find themselves over-using expletives. For instance, Laura told me: "It becomes like second nature. And then I went home, my mom was like, 'you cannot talk like this. It is so un-lady-like, I'm not going to let you see your grandparents.'" Interestingly enough, Rachel, who described to me trying to penetrate the "boy's club," found that, although it did go against her 'sense of self,' she received more respect in the Army when she cursed and communicated by yelling: "I just am like, 'really? You're going to like me 'cause I cussed you out?' Like, very strange. I was like, 'I don't really want to do this...but you seem to respect me when I like yell at you.' You know?" Even though Rachel was excited to be leaving the Army and regain some of her independence, she also reminisces about life in the military total institution:

for a long time I wished I could be in an environment again where people were just direct. Um, you know, the civilian world is not direct, you know and someone...even bosses are not very direct sometimes...Like, to correct you, they don't want to hurt your feelings....or 'oh, we really want you to do this...or that.' It's like, 'just tell me what you want me to do...and I'll do it, and if you don't do it have punishment laid out.' It's very simple to me.

While she did not appreciate the lack of information from her superiors on questions she had in Iraq, she also did not like the ambiguous sorts of communication that occurred back home, where had to guess about the truth behind things, and just wanted direct instructions about it about what she is supposed to do. The military simply sets out their desired parameters of proper conduct ahead of time through an official body of rules, regulations, and consequences for failure to abide by them, and this makes things run smoothly. Thus for veterans that are used to receiving directives, communication in the civilian world is more open to various interpretations, making them feel uncertain as to how they should respond.

While veterans may prefer direct communication, at the same time, too much honest communication may be considered distasteful by civilians. For example, supporting his admission that there were no taboo subjects in his unit, Adam said, "you know, we used to joke

about things that were beyond inappropriate.” Talking with Rachel on the matter, we agreed that people may have dark thoughts, but that it’s socially unacceptable to voice them. As a case in point, when Dennis was speaking about some of the anti-war liberal professors he has encountered at UNR, he stated: “I’d like to just bomb their car, or wipe them off the face of the planet, but I can’t ‘cause it’s not legal. They can move to Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan and get fucking stoned to death for all I care.” While these kinds of thoughts may be acceptable to voice to a platoon of infantry soldiers, being this frank may come across as more threatening to civilians. Will described that this gallows or dark humor that was typical in his unit, joking about ordinarily sensitive topics, was one behavioral norm he had to abandon. For example, here he explains how being around death all the time caused him to develop an interesting attitude about it:

It’s kind of like dark humor. That’s that kind of gallows sense of humor. ‘Cause if you’re surrounded by it all day, it’s, it’s like, it’s like taxes - no one likes them, but everyone does them so you can laugh about them. Same way with death. If you’re surrounded by it all the time. It’s really interesting. You can joke about your own death, and you can joke about others’ deaths, but not someone you know that died.

Back in the U.S., where people are more sensitive about such topics, joking about death would be considered inappropriate, but while he was in combat, this kind of joking was also a mechanism of camaraderie, and not having that mutual understanding of the shared events was also difficult for Will: “The difference between being in the military and talking to my friends back home, is that if I ever wanted to talk about something, or just, not even quite talk about it, but joke, you have a lot of gallows humor in the military.” For Will, this was a grey area of what he could and could not say around civilians. Like Adam had said, it is strange when the same kind of behavior does not get the same kinds of reactions from others while in the military and while at home, Will admitted: “At first you even get a little freaked out at yourself. Like, okay, why aren’t you reacting to this to the way that I told it before? And I realized that people just don’t know what to say.” Therefore, sometimes, too much information can stifle communication rather than have a

positive impact. Talking about a combat veteran she knows, Rachel describes how she actually has to point out that he needs to be more sensitive and censor his thoughts before announcing them: “I’m like, ‘John, you can’t say that.’ Like, I correct him sometimes like, ‘Yeah, don’t laugh about people dying, or let’s not talk about how you want to punch someone in the face, you know?’ He’s like, ‘Oh, yeah, maybe, maybe I shouldn’t talk about that.’” Thus, while veterans have a sense of directness and openness in communicating with their primary group of comrades, they may have to re-learn the boundaries of freedom of expression back in the civilian world.

Becoming Little Fish in a Big Pond

Unlike other total institutions, like prisons or mental institutions that are primarily focused on reforming or rehabilitating their inmates, individuals in the military engage in activities with direct consequences for society. They are conferred responsibilities, and they are therefore typically proud of their time in the service. As illustrated in Laura’s aforementioned account of “not knowing what to do with herself” once she left the Navy, several of the other veterans I spoke with also asked themselves “what can I do that will be better than what I have been doing?” when they were discharged. While transitioning from an environment of camaraderie may be one aspect of military release that is difficult, an individual’s time in a total institution such as the military oftentimes has a great impact on their sense of identity, perhaps even more so than any other time in their life. The last thing in that Sam told me in his interview was:

You know, you can’t um... and I don’t think there’s any veteran or anyone who’s had combat experience who uh... who... that is the definitive moment in your life, and everything from that point in time, you know, will never be as intense or as...shaping...you know, and have that much influence over who you are. You learn more about yourself and about your fellow man than you probably ever will.

Although Sam experienced psychological trauma from the war after-the-fact, he was the only active duty veteran in the study that reenlisted, and here Sam explains that his time in combat

both showed him what kind of a person he was, and forever changed him as well. In the words of another combat veteran, Adam, life after the military would simply be dull:

It's like, what else can I do now that would be better than that? It's like, 'what is left?' You know? What do you do? You know, it's like, 'Oh...I'm going to go work in an office like I do now.' It's like...you know...it's like, 'wow, that'll be fun.'

Similar to the kind of bleakness that Sam and Adam felt life after combat presented, veterans may become demoralized if they find that returning home means going from being “a big fish in a little pond,” with relative power and importance, to being a more vulnerable and powerless “little fish in a big pond.” Obviously, none of my participants were at the top of the military world, as that takes a lifetime of dedication, but even still, as Adam explained: “What you're doing in the military seems so important and it is important. I mean, anybody can invest any amount of importance in anything but...that, you know...people depend on you in a way that's, that's really not typical of out here and um...your job is really big.” While his comrades had depended on him in a way that is atypical of civilian life, he may in fact feel that he is not as depended on, and therefore feel less valued. For Sam, an NCO, having others depend on him increased his self-esteem and gave him purpose: “I was responsible for people's lives. So I had an enormous amount of responsibility and with that comes, you know, I was proud of what I did.”

For Laura, although she joined the military wanting to completely start over, once she had made accomplishments in the military it was dismaying to see when she left that she had to start over in ways she did not want to. Here, she discusses how her achievements vanished when she returned to the U.S.:

Like when I first got out I was like, what do I do now? 'Cause your identity is so much in it, like you can be in the military and work your way up through years up in rank, and say, oh you're a second class or a first class petty officer, even if you're make chief or something while you're enlisted, that's a pretty big accomplishment. I mean, you've been in a while, you have subordinates, you have responsibilities, you've stayed out of trouble. You know, you've done, you've accomplished a lot. But, I mean, you move back to civilian life it's like all that's gone. So you kind of start over...

In other words, she had to start over some place new again, losing things like rank, responsibilities and subordinates, all of which increase self-esteem. This, in and of itself, may be a difficult transitional issue for some veterans.

Another thing that is irritating for people that chose or were assigned jobs whose skills can be used back in the U.S., is that sometimes their knowledge and skills learned in the military are not formally recognized by civilian institutions. As a front-line combat medic, Dennis was responsible for treating combat injuries and literally saving lives, and, as he described, “You get put in...you get a lot of responsibility at a really young age...and you kinda get used to it. And then you get out and no one trusts you with anything, so...that’s kind of difficult.” What he is referring to here is the fact that regardless of whether he had a passion and talent for providing emergency medical care, one year of military training is insufficient proof of competence for entry into this field in the civilian world, which is a very competitive occupational field, requiring years of postsecondary education. Although the reason he joined the Army was because “college was not going well,” and then the military generated his interest in medicine, Dennis described that when he was discharged and back in college, this was not a feasible option for him, as college was not going well again: “I wanted to be a doctor, because of the medic thing, but my grades aren’t that good, so...I guess uh...I can’t do that.” This was an incredible frustration for Dennis, who ironically has resigned to getting a degree in Mechanical Engineering to perhaps build weapons.

Steve actually spent even longer than a year in the military training for his job, and was then responsible for taking care of an extremely expensive and important part of the aircraft carrier he was on, a billion dollar nuclear power plant. These examples suggest how the military confers its members great amounts of responsibility while they are in the service, which may later be revoked upon their discharge. The following excerpt was one thing he mentioned in our interview:

My biggest complaint, which is really my only one, is that there aren't near enough colleges in this country that offer credit for military training and experience. When I was discharged, I was a fully certified electronics technician, specializing in the operations of nuclear power plants. None of that applied here. There's only a small handful of them in the country, and they're back East, that might even accept military training and experience in exchange for actual class credit. But a few of them will actually even work with us while we're in the service and deployed overseas to get our degree.

Thus, to veterans it may seem that that universities' primary goal is not to educate, but to profit off of education. Instead of recognizing what a student already knows coming into the institution and allowing them to graduate faster, as Steve describes, most universities do not offer any sort of credit for military training, as is evidently true for the University of Nevada, Reno. Now double-majoring in physics and mechanical engineering, he admitted his background and training had been advantageous for his classes, but that it would have been nice to test out of those classes to begin with. While a big part of the transition from the military to civilian life entails a loss of occupational identity, bureaucratic obstacles can also complicate matters. This is just one example of moving from the top of a small world and having relative importance and responsibility within the smaller world of the military, to the bottom of a large world and having any previously earned achievements go unrecognized.

CHAPTER 6
Going to School
Transitioning to School

For individuals who leave the military and use their GI educational benefits, this institutional transition can sometimes be extreme, as they move from the collectivist approach of the military where everyone collaborates toward the same objective, to an environment where everyone is in competition with each other, working for personal goals. Most notably, institutions of higher education are much more individualized, where instead of working together in a smaller platoon of people, they are exposed to a new, more competitive environment with sometimes tens of thousands of students who all have personalized schedules. While entering the total institution of the military entails a loss of self-determination and independence, life in college is much different, as students have control over what they want to study and are expected to work independently. Certainly peers can learn from one another, and are sometimes expected to work together in college, but otherwise the majority of work done at school is expected to be completed individually.

The military as a unique total institution seems to have had positive lasting effects upon these participants' time in school. Most of the participants described going to college after their military service as relaxing in comparison to their military service, and that their military service had profoundly positive effects on their academic performance and self-discipline. At the same time however, leaving the total institution of the military in some cases also had negative effects on their transition to college. While in the military, everyone may more or less look and act the same, in college, student veterans are likely to feel like they do not fit in. In addition to certain moments of "culture clash," that Glasser et al. (2008) described, many of the participants that were interviewed described feeling fundamentally different than their classmates at UNR due to their age, maturity level, life experiences, values and beliefs. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, four-year postsecondary institutions have not been popular choices among student veterans for

reasons of both convenience and cost (Field et al. 2008). Another reason for this may be that two-year community colleges offer more vocational curricula, or coursework that can directly be applied to the labor market. Not surprisingly, one of the biggest issues that some of the participants in this study have had coming to UNR has been with a series of required classes in the Core Humanities department which is oriented toward the liberal arts.

A Paid Vacation

Most of the veterans I talked to actually described being in school with the aid of the GI Bill as being on a paid vacation, or a reward for their previous hard work. As far as their levels of stress are concerned, a lot of student veterans feel far less stressed than their younger counterparts in school, because their stress thresholds are much higher than average due to their military service. With a large workload, Steve, double-majoring in Mechanical Engineering and Physics, described school as “rough. But nowhere near as rough as it was back in the service.” The fact that many veterans may find school easy does not mean that they do not put effort into their studies or continue to work as hard as they once did. However, they do have a different perspective than their peers of what it means to go through stressful times. Rachel actually described going to school as relaxing: “It was pretty nice to go to college for the first couple years. Um...uh, you know...I had like, more than enough money to live on, and uh...you don't pay for school and all that stuff, so. It was kinda nice, it was kind of...relaxing, just to go to school and then go home and not have to work, and stuff like that.” Although she had not thought about going to college until two years after she was discharged from the military, Rachel found that being able to go to school without working was a pleasant change for her. Similarly, many of the participants in this study explained that compared with the rigorous training and lifestyle of the military, their college work-loads did not feel as difficult or daunting. Dennis told me, “ I like being around school, the environment is kind of relaxing, nice campus...you don't have people yelling all the time, without someone always getting yelled at in the background.”

For many of the participants, the sense that college life is less demanding than military life becomes strengthened when they socially compare themselves to civilians complaining about their stresses. Chris described, “Yeah, like I said, school is like a vacation for me. Other than like, I have to do homework, I like coming in here, talking to people. It’s just, I don’t know...you hear people are like, ‘Oh my god...I’m so stressed out...I have this test, and I don’t know what I’m going to do.’ And I’m like, ‘you really don’t know what stress is, at all. So you just kind of laugh at them.” Steve told me on his first day of class, “the professor’s telling us we gotta do, (and) a lot of the freshmen are like, ‘Ahh, how can I do all this?’ And I’m like, ‘Eh. I’ve been through worse.’” When Steve was completing his military training as an electronics technician, his sister, who was getting her degree in English at the same time, would call and complain to him about how hard it was. Also laughing, he would respond: “‘Okay, you have...you have absolutely no idea how utterly easy your life seems to me right now.’ Haha. And I almost flunked English in high school, and I would gladly...there were times in training where I’d gladly try to get a bachelor’s degree in English than go through one more day of training.” From being in this unique total institution that demands nearly perfect mental and physical performance, it is not hard for a lot of veterans to go to school, because comparatively, being in school is so much less demanding. Steve later described his disbelief about the sorts of things his college peers seemed to preoccupy themselves with: “...I mean. I look around and they're all angsting over all this pop-drama TV bullshit that you see all the time, and I'm just like, they really consider this a fucking problem?”

The following two examples do not deal directly with school, but they show how some veterans may also become irritated with other civilians’ complaints about seemingly trivial problems. Rachel described that at a civilian job once she was back home she felt easily irritated by:

...dealing with people- like someone's complaining about little stuff. Like, 'really? You're complaining about whatever...? You know, people are dying and having to fight in war and you're complaining that your lunch break is cut off ten minutes early?' I just, I was impatient with people's complaints about what - you know, maybe it was important maybe it wasn't important...but it was obviously important to them because they were complaining about it or bitching about it.

In this case, she recognizes that everything has relative importance, but she still felt irritated when people seemed to invest importance in negligible things. In the military, because everyone is subjected to the same circumstances, complaining most likely shows a sort of weakness and may have no point, since everyone has an unspoken, mutual understanding of suffering. Therefore, with a completely different perspective, a lot of veterans feel that civilians' complaints are unwarranted, and therefore even more annoying than legitimate grievances. Will, who works at a bank, explained that in the face of civilian complaints, he brings up the fact that he used to be a Marine: "Yeah, it's a little... it's funny, when customers are being upset or anything like that, up and down they'll play the trump card, or say something like, 'I'm not mad at you, I'm just mad at the situation' and I go, 'you know sir, that's why this job is a lot easier than my last job...'" When he does this, and explains that he is a former Marine, it usually silences them. No one wants to complain about personal bank affairs when the fact is brought up that people are fighting in wars.

Being Good Students

While many veterans feel relaxed with going to school, they also seem to retain the kind of strong work ethic that they possessed in the military. For Laura, the discipline that she learned in the military allowed her to later have an advantage over her peers. As she explained, "I think honestly I have kind of an advantage, just because I think I have more discipline, in a way. 'Cause it's built in from the discipline that I had before...it becomes a part of...it becomes engrained in yourself." Luckily for a lot of veterans like Laura, the military as a total institution seems to have lasting effects on those who pass through it, in that it not only makes life afterwards comparatively less strenuous, but it also instills behaviors and values in its members

that encourages optimal functioning. As I have discussed, the military discourages individualism in executing the institution's collective goals. Laura told me, "I have to do well because if I don't then it reflects badly on me or it reflects badly on everyone else around me." Both the military and any college would be pleased with any student veteran who lives up to Laura's standards:

I feel guilty if I miss class...because it's my job, and if I just don't show up for something, then like, it's hard to let that go. Even if I'm sick...I'd have to be bleeding out of my eyeballs to not go. Like, I'd have to really be sick. And I feel really guilty even if I am sick and miss. Just because like, I'm on the GI Bill, so I'm getting kind of paid...you know, to be here...they're paying for it. So it's important that I live up to that.

Before this, Laura explained how even when she had pneumonia in the Navy, she still had to dress and "report to medical;" she could not just stay in bed. She also acknowledges that the government is giving her the opportunity to pursue a college degree that will open up doors for her, and she knows she must apply herself diligently. According to Tom, who is majoring in Criminal Justice, after being in the military he has begun to notice people in his college classes are careless about their education:

If anything I think I have um...I feel like I'm more disciplined when I go to school now, because when I was in, in school for the military - especially like the school that I went through for security...they were really strict...so like, when I came back, and like started going back to school...to see all these kids just be like, super-nonchalant about like, their stuff, and it's like, 'man, I don't want to look like that dirt-bag. Like, he looks like a dirt-bag.'

Something else that a lot of the participants in this study revealed was that they are unusually active in class, and tend to want to contribute to the discussion and make the learning process more collective. In the following quote, Will compares situations in college and in the military where an authority figure asks the group a question:

It's easy to tell veterans in class because we're the ones that respond. We're the ones that are active. It goes back to their position of authority. If a teacher asked a question, we're responding. Because like, I found, it was one of the weirdest things of class, one of my first classes where the teacher would be like, 'alright what do you guys think about this?' And nobody said anything! Taking that back into the Marine Corp, if we were in a mission briefing or something and somebody asked, what do you think about this, or you know, does anyone not understand this? You would be the exception if you didn't respond. Not if you did respond, on that. Because I mean, if you didn't respond, you'd get singled out, like what, you don't understand this? Do we need to go over this with you? Where in college it's just like, being on my I-mac in the back, just

playing whatever. Facebook, or chatting. I'm engaged in classes. Um... because you get more out of it, in reality there's probably a lot of classes I should have gotten B's in, but I wound up getting A's, cause the teacher knew I was actively learning.

As Goffman described, this is exactly the sort of situation in total institutions where “one person's infraction is likely to stand out and reflect against the visible, constantly examined compliance of the others” (1961:7). However, in the classroom, it seemed to Will that one person's compliance stood out in relief against a visibly non-compliant group. Because professors are in control of assigning grades, standing out as someone who actively listens to the lecture is usually positively sanctioned with a better grade in the class. Tom noticed he has gotten better grades in college compared to when he was in high school, and he attributed this significant and positive effect on his approach to education to his military training:

...it's like, I want to like, be engaged in class in everything. You know, so... which I think, which is funny 'cause I think the teacher's notice that more, so I get better grades 'cause of it now. 'Cause I was definitely not that way when I was in high school, you know...or middle school, I just could care less., but since being in the military I think I've been more...I try to get more engaged, and be more attentive in class if anything. And I notice people that aren't that way, you know, like civilians, just like you know, being on their phone, or just talking really loud in class, or just, you know, something like that. I'm just like, that gets on my nerves, like, you're here to learn and all this stuff. That's kinda what my opinion is...

Another reason that veterans may be more active in class, besides the fact that they are probably also doing their homework and have questions to ask and comments to make, is like Will described, because they also want to be respectful to their professors when they ask the class questions. As Laura told me:

It's really strange because like, I still, I see my professors as my superiors, so I see them as being like senior chiefs or officers or something, like, I respect that position. You know you respect the rank not the person. And I think a lot of young people they just see that person like, 'oh I don't like that person,' but you still have to respect that profession and what they've accomplished.

While it is not always easy to respect someone that you do not like, the military instilled in her the notion that “it is the uniform, not the man that is saluted” and a deep sense of awareness and respect for achievement, allowing for her to be a more engaged student (Goffman, 1961:115).

One form of respect for a professor is if their students are interested in the subject material that

they have dedicated their lives to and consider a value to society, and asking questions is one way of showing that. According to Sam, the reason he is an active participant in class discussions is because he has been through a lot to get there, so he values it a great deal, and knows that he has to take advantage of his time in class to get certain questions answered. Here's what he told me:

And, I think one of the things that, one of the things that's different about kids in my class, is that I've worked very hard and went through quite a bit to get here... so I'm a lot more engaged...I have questions to ask, and it's funny the reactions sometimes, and you'll see the kids like, 'uggghh.' You know... and I've had some kids come up to me after class and be like, "Man, I really appreciate the things you say.'

During his interview, discussing the maturity level of his peers at the community college he was attending before transferring to UNR he described their conspicuous moans in the background when he asked questions in class, and he mocked them for slouching in their chairs while groaning. Evidently, Sam greatly values being in college, even if it is not something he did immediately out of high school, "for the most part I'm just really grateful I've had the opportunity to do it now. You know. There's no timeline. And there's a little bit of pressure off too, you know?" Laura mentioned the fact that being in college was like a second chance for her and something she feels very fortunate to be able to do:

I think I was happy for the second chance. It was a second chance for me. I wish I had been able to finish the first time in college, but circumstance kept me from doing that. But I'm happy and I feel really fortunate to have a second chance to be here. So when I see people like... 'This professor sucks' or 'I don't know why we're learning this?' You know...and all this kind of stuff, I'm like, 'You'd be happy if you learned that this is your job to be here in class to learn. Like, you have no idea how fortunate you are.'

Just as Sam pointed out, a lot of student veterans have worked hard to be at the point where they are and want to take advantage of their time in college by putting in the amount of effort it requires to attain the kinds of results they aspire for.

More Difficult Transitions into College

While the majority of the participants in this study had very few difficulties in adapting to college after their military service, there are several who described some discouraging difficulties

in their transitions to school. For example, Sam, who spent nearly seven years in the active duty military, described that when he first started going to school, he constantly felt angry and frustrated. He mentioned “unfortunately, colleges and universities are like a Petri dish of everything that is bad about our society,” cynically lamenting over the fact that colleges are like businesses that simply prepare people for jobs. The military also trains people for specific jobs, but it is so they can functionally contribute to the military institution. Here, Sam describes some of the difficulty of transitioning from the military to college from the perspective of someone who had been exposed to a great amount of combat stress: “Yeah, I mean, that's you know, fortunately college, it's been really good for me and I'm really happy that I stuck it out... I didn't do so well at first...not academically, but I didn't do well socially in college at first, because I was so angry, at first...At first it was very difficult.” When Sam went to college, he chose to take a variety of courses that reflected several of his passions and interests, explaining: “the first things I took were a photography class, and I took a Middle Eastern history class, and I took a ‘War in Film’ class. Those were the first three classes I took.” Not surprisingly, it was the “War and Film” class, where he told me he “broke down and cried in front of the class...” For a veteran diagnosed with PTSD, seeing and hearing war in a simulation of circumstances similar to those they have just returned from could easily induce a flash-back. This brings up the point that student veterans taking courses whose material is related to the current wars may encounter more difficulties than usual.

This is especially so if the material is taught from the perspective of what student veterans may perceive as professor who espouse liberal beliefs and are against the wars. When asked what he thought about the generalization that all current veterans are politically conservative, Will replied that only about 10% of the people in his unit were liberal, or had not voted for Bush in 2000. As Will also explained, regardless of one's political leanings, veterans who have risked their lives and endured unimaginable experiences while in the military, hearing

open criticism of the wars may translate to student veterans as criticisms of the troops fighting in them. This may be one reason that veterans fear coming into liberal settings like four-year universities.

One point that Adam brought up was that while he felt comfortable saying anything to the people in his military unit, once he was in school he quickly realized that this was no longer the case:

Like, when I got back that was the thing, you know...I realized that there were things that you couldn't say in the classroom. You know, there are subjects that you can't, you know, that you can't talk about, because you realize that your....professor has a political orientation or point of view...one way or the other- 'cause I've seen it both ways. You know, and they have a set belief. I felt more like constricted in college than I did in the military. I could have easily spoken up in my platoon and been like, 'Hey, I don't..., 'this is what I think...' or whatever.

While many of the participants claimed that they were active in their classes, Adam actually described the opposite, and this probably has a lot to do with the fact that he decided to get his degree in History, which is a subject in which war is certainly relevant. He described: "a lot of people...ended up, I mean, most 90% of my professors were, every class, you know, everything had to relate to the current war, and they all of course were against it. So it was um, it was, it was interesting..." In 2004, a week after returning home from Iraq, one of Adam's first classes in community college he attended before transferring to UNR, was a history class where the professor asked all the students to write about themselves on an index card. Not thinking what they would be used for, Adam disclosed his identity as a veteran on the card:

So I'm like...age- 24, I got out of the military a week ago, you know, I went to Iraq and Afghanistan. Right. So I write something like that on the card. And...I realize...'cause this was back when the election was going on with Kerry versus Bush, so man, it was political. So then every day, the dude like what he would do is take the card out, and he would like, 'Oh, so...you know...Tiffany...you are blah, blah, blah' you know. So I realized very quickly that that was a huge mistake, and I was dreading it all semester. I was like....man, you know. And I realized very quickly that he sat on the side against the war - which is fine- 'cause I don't have a problem with that - but he was really against it. Really had a lot of issues with the war. And um, just little comments all the time...

As he identifies here, the historical timing of Adam's return from war exacerbated his transition home, and he felt anxious about being confronted by his professor. He also explained that the

subject material of the class was not directly related to the wars, and thus the professor should have professed the class material rather than his own personal ideology. On a different occasion, at a different institution, Will, an officer of the Wolf Pack Veterans before he graduated, received an email from an angry student veteran describing that the professor of his Core Humanities class had made disrespectful comments about the military. He described, “It was in the Core Humanities 203 class, and the teacher basically made a ding on the military and he kind of just let it roll off his shoulders. But a couple of classes later, he tells how the military fully indoctrinates people, and they have no choice but to kill - like all of a sudden we’re brain-washed zombies.” Certainly, military personnel are expected to follow orders, but, it is also an implicit expectation of academics to not espouse such absolute, sweeping generalizations. Dennis was also frustrated with the entire Core Humanities department, and has attempted to take three CH classes and has withdrawn each time:

...some of the teachers pissed me off, like...probably like, I don’t know...like Core Humanities, I try to stay away from the ones that are obviously bad, but...we have to take those, so...like one time, the first day of class, the professor said that the “Proud to be an American” song was the worst song that he’d ever heard, and that it was designed to brainwash people. And I was just like, ‘fuck you, man.’

In an interesting counterpoint, Adam indicated that college professors, like the military, also brain-wash their students, who are young and highly impressionable. He explained, “...they've (the students) never thought about it, they don't really know, and they're...you're in a position of authority and you're taking advantage of them.” However, the *information* behind this kind of indoctrination, especially when it is a departure from the intended learning plan, is not pre-approved by a body of officials and could be derived from unknown sources. Here is what Dennis had to say about the matter: “I think that classrooms- that professors in classrooms have become more concerned with peddling their own opinions, than actually teaching facts and history. I don’t care what any of them think, I want them to teach me what happened in history,

not their own twist on things.” Furthermore, Adam reasoned that both the military and universities teach students how and what to think, but in the military, “they look at you at what...as an ability set, like what you can do, what you can't do, how you can, you know, do this for the unit...you know, what, you know, how all that fits together.” In college on the other hand, he did not understand the functional purpose behind his professors’ opinions about the wars. As Will explained, a lot of veterans know that they will encounter adverse opinions in college, and while they usually do not become agitated when this happens, when an authority figure like a professor makes a negative comment about the military or war, they feel it as an attack against themselves, and that they have to sit there and listen, but not protest:

...certain things it just pisses you off, to where it becomes more of a distraction. But, the challenge is, that we're built into a higher-chain of command structure, on that. That's how we lived for four or five years of our life. To where you don't talk back. So if a teacher says something like that, ultimately we respect teachers because of the chain of, in a position of authority, so now we just have to almost kind of take it...you know, and that's a challenge that I think veterans feel so scared coming to a university-because the university is viewed as such a liberal area. And you know there are certain colleges and what not that are more liberal. But Nevada is considered a liberal arts school. And we know we're going to be exposed to opinions that we don't like, but the reality is that we want to get an education.

As Will described, most veterans going to college are well aware that they will probably encounter viewpoints that they disagree with. Hank explained that when he first began going to school, several days after returning from Iraq, he was more defensive of the military and irritated with people's lack of understanding than he currently is, but he says he has realized that people are going to speak their minds whether he got upset or not:

I've learned that, you know, you're gonna run into people that want to speak what they think and it doesn't matter, so. It doesn't matter to me, 'cause they can say whatever they want to say...until they've done what I've done they don't...belong anywhere on my level, so. I'm not going to lie, when I first came home yeah, most definitely. I...hated a lot of people 'cause of their comments and what not. You know...people's lack of understanding or...knowing what really goes on over there. But...now it's just like hey, people are going to speak what they want. Everyone has a right to say what they want. I mean that's one of the reasons we fight. That's one of the reasons we do what we do. So they can...sit there and complain and whine.

Here, with a little sarcasm, he notes that freedom of speech is an important part of the democracy that we live in, and is something he defended in his military service- but people still sit there and

grumble about how the grass is always greener when they could get up and do something about it. He nonetheless says that it does not really bother him anymore. While this may be true for some student veterans, this was certainly not the case for Adam, who majored in History. Once the professor finally pulled out Adam's note card one day and read the description he had written down, of course he asked Adam in front of the class what he thought about the war, which made him feel uncomfortable:

So....Adam...you were in the military. You went to Iraq...what do you think about all this?' And I'm like...what was I supposed to say? You know, and you get that question a lot. You know, 'well what do you think about the war?' And I'm always like, 'well, it's a little bit more complicated than that...' You know, to be like, 'yes, it's good!' or 'yes it's bad!' There's good things that happen and there's bad things that happen. You know? And it's like anything else in life, you know? It can't be boiled down that simply.

Oftentimes people prefer straightforward answers and for things to fit neatly into categories, but as Adam pointed out, many situations in life, like war, cannot be characterized in just one way, or into a few words either. Rachel described, "I just go to class, I participate, other people participate...sometimes I bring up my experience from Iraq because it pertains to the conversation, and um, people will listen." However, while she was actually more open than Adam about her status as a veteran, the following statement echoes Adam's feelings in how she feels frustrated that she was always expected to have something to contribute or share with respect to Iraq: "...when people um...on the topic of Iraq or um, war comes up in a class, you know, I don't really have anything to contribute, and they're like, 'Rachel, what do you want to say about this?'" Rachel also did not like the fact that she was continuously singled out because of her label as a veteran, as if "that's all people...kind of see in you." Although she agreed to be interviewed for this study and was sought out because of her identity as a veteran, she still described that it is irritating when people only wanted to talk to her once they find out she is a veteran:

A lot of people like find out I'm a veteran and they come up to me and they're like, 'whoa, you are a veteran...I would love to talk to you sometime.' And I'm like, 'well, okay, we can talk about it,

but you know...you didn't talk to me before.' You know what I mean? Like, I've been in your class all year, and now just because I'm a veteran you want to talk to me. So sometimes I get a little bit bitter about that, like, you only want to talk to me because I'm a veteran. 'Cause, there's so much- there's like veteran, and then there's like, you know- social worker, you know...

Adam described that when he was singled out to comment on the war, it was almost as if the person asking about it already had their mind set on the matter, and that he probably could not change their mind anyways. At this point for Adam, after this experience in his first college class right after coming back from war, he went "completely underground," saying "Hey, this is too easy. I mean, if nobody knows I'm a veteran, then...I don't have to answer any stupid questions, and we can just get on...'cause I'm here to go to school and I'm not here to, you know, have a debate about Iraq." It was not until he was at UNR taking a class on the Vietnam War that changed his approach to disclosing his identity as a veteran at school. Getting to know the professor of this class made him realize that he should not hold back his identity as a veteran, and that he should share his views and his knowledge for other people to have a chance to understand the wars and goes on in the military. Adam said:

Now some veterans, they have no problem just going out and being like, 'this is my experience, I'm gonna tell everyone about it'...you know, that just wasn't me. You know, so...it changed me in the way that I thought, okay well, I have a responsibility, you know what I mean....to at least tell people my point of view. They can take it however they want. You know, but I have the responsibility- if I don't give people the chance to understand, or try to at least educate them- well then, of course they're gonna not understand. You know what I mean- 'cause I never even gave them the opportunity, I just said, 'well, then you can't understand.'

It is with that kind of an outlook that people like Adam, and the other veterans who volunteered for the study were willing to share these kinds of details of their lives with civilians.

Unlike Adam's decision to 'go underground' and then later recant that decision and open up about his identity as a veteran, Sam had a different experience with disclosing his identity as a veteran. He described: "Well I talked about it a lot more in class in the beginning. You know, I...I tried to get that distinction out there as quickly as possible so that I could reinforce the uh, the otherness, you know I wanted, I wanted that. Now, I don't talk about it as much, if at all. But they figure it out pretty quickly." While it is each veteran's choice whether or not to disclose their

identity as a veteran, even if veterans are ‘underground’ and not talking about their veteran status in college, some people will figure this out regardless. Here is how Adam described feeling when he was not telling anyone he was a veteran he said: "...some people it's really funny...they kinda know...They would know. Like, I was much different then. You know, I was like, still, you know...really skinny and like in good shape, and had no facial hair, and well-kept. So...some people just kinda knew." Steve also supported that, while it may be a subtle detail or two that suggests someone is a veteran, that there definitely is a more weathered look to veterans: "There's just a certain look about veterans that sets them apart. I mean yeah, it's really subtle, but you, once you learn what is there, you can pick out the guy who went half-way around the world and nearly died a half-dozen times." At the same time, however, Will described whether or not people can tell someone is a veteran, and claimed that veterans could pick out other veterans pretty easily, but that it can be a little trickier for civilians to tell who is a veteran because it is not a clearly identified characteristic:

...most of the time people don't even know you're a veteran. 'Cause it's not like a label you can clearly see like you're black, or you're-depending how gay you are - if you're openly gay or something like that so it's not like people feel sensitive. So, we hear things, and we just let them roll off our side, or off our back. But, when people are around, you know, openly gay, or blacks, they're that much more sensitive to say anything. They don't know what veterans are. They don't know what veterans look like because there's not a clear definition of, this is your veteran. Because there's not. We're black, we're white, we're Hispanic, we're skinny, we're big, with fat, with muscle, we're bearded, we're clean-shaven... you know...so people feel free to say what they want about the military, because it's an open campus...

Even when there is a subtle indication that someone might be a veteran, this information may not be reliable. Even though the “high and tight” haircut is a classic military hair-style, Will mentioned that some civilians may just like it, that you never know. Chris actually said that because he was required to shave for three years in the military, the first thing he did when he got back was to grow a beard. Therefore, as Will said, there is no clear definition of what a veteran is, or what they should look like, or how they should behave.

Sticking out and not fitting in at school

In the military conformity is stressed, everyone is dressed the same, and they are encouraged to “fit in.” Whether or not they actually do stand out on college campuses to their peers and professors, many of the participants in this study described that while socializing was not their primary goal while in college, they felt like they did not fit in, and were almost fundamentally different than their peers. One likely factor why veterans do not prioritize making friendships in college is that they feel it will not come close to matching the camaraderie they knew in the military. Earlier, it was mentioned that Adam and Sam said about their experiences and connections with others while they were in the military, which they described as the pinnacle of what life had to offer them. Thus, veterans going to college that are returning from such intense relationships and experiences may not feel motivated to meet new people who are unlike them in many ways. For instance, Dennis explained that his experiences in combat made him feel different than his younger classmates because they have never been close to anything like that:

I definitely feel different from people ‘cause most people haven’t been shot at like eighty times and been blown up more than once, or seen car bombs go off. Most people, they don’t know what it’s like to be around stuff like that. It makes you feel a little different. ‘Cause like, all my friends in the Army, like, most of them have killed people, and like, we’ve all been shot at, so you get out and like...it’s just like, really just a bunch of kids...

According to Steve, “on the whole I do feel kind of...apart...that I’ve gone forth and done something that none of them ever dreamed of.” This statement, which could also apply to all student veterans, reiterates the fact that they may feel fundamentally unlike their peers because they chose a different and harder route in life when they were independent from their parents and graduated from high school. Hank also mentioned that he took the proverbial ‘road less travelled,’ and that being back in school is new to him, not having been to school in over five years, explaining: “except at the same time it’s new as well, I’m not used to it. You know, I didn’t go to college straight out of high school, I went a total different route so...” Doing the math, a good estimation is that student veterans (unless they are in the Reserves or National Guard) will be at least around 22 years old. While it is common to make friends with others the same age, at

a college where the majority of students are anywhere from 18-22 years old, it is more difficult for student veterans to do this. Will describes that when he wanted to go out and drink, none of his classmates were able to because they were too young, and then he implies that when they were 21 and were wanting to drink, he was a little further along in his life course and was no longer interested:

We don't feel like we fit in. It's kind of awkward to be, you know, like your first class, you're 22, and everybody's 18, and you're like so where do you want to go? And they're like, "want to go to an under-21 club?" And you're like, I really kind of wanted a beer. Or something, and then you don't know anyone in that age group, if you don't have any friends already. And then by the time your friend are 21, your classmates, you're 26, or 25.

Also, Will entered the military when he was 18, and many of the other participants entered when they were in their early twenties, making them even older than the average college student.

Before eventually graduating from UNR, a number of the veterans I spoke with had started off going to community colleges, which were described as having slightly older student populations than UNR. Therefore, these student veterans probably felt like they fit in a little bit more in community colleges and were overwhelmed at how young everyone else seemed when they arrived at UNR. Adam, for example, told me: "Cause by the time I went to UNR I was like, 'Holy crap, these kids are young.' You know...especially when you get in those like Core Humanities classes and things like that...you're like, 'holy crap. You know, they're young. They're like 18, 19, and they don't know anything.' You know?" By "not knowing anything," Adam explained he meant that these students have young, impressionable minds, and they are also less mature and lacking life experience. Hank, who is now in his late twenties, has a completely different history than most of the other college students around him, and he says it is still hard to get used to being in a place where everyone is significantly younger, and, as he tactfully implies, less mature:

The whole class atmosphere is great, but it's just the whole thing kind of...I don't know, I'm at a very different age than everyone else, and my mentality is totally different from my experiences,

so, sometimes it's a little hard to get used to all the young individuals there, but it is what it is. But I mean the school itself - it's great; I have no complaints.

According to Will, it is not that student veterans are necessarily more mature people when they return from service, but that they know what they value in life: "people say the military must mature you...but it really doesn't; it just makes you realize what you value in life." So, put differently, it may be that their dedication to school is a result of how much more they value their education, because their time in the military allowed them to realize this was important. At the same time, some veterans, like Chris, do notice how immature their civilian peers are, but it does not bother him: "You kind of notice how immature they are, and it just takes you back to what you were like at 18 or 19...Like I was really stupid and immature when I was nineteen, so..."

Laura finds herself stunned at the kinds of things she sees and hears at school:

I heard this girl by the shuttle stop the other day, she was on her cell phone, and she was just like, how much money she had in the bank, and... talking bad about her parents, and she was like saying who she had hooked up last weekend, you know all this personal information...And you hear this stuff on the shuttles you know, like you hear it, and you're like, 'What are you doing girl? Like, quiet. Keep that stuff to yourself.' Not all the stuff she saying was so shocking, it was the fact that she was saying it so loud and didn't care, like she didn't see all the people around her, and she just wasn't aware. So I think it's that awareness you get when you're older too, but I think you get it really quick when you have a lot of people watching you. And the military everyone's watching you.

From what she says here, she emphasizes that the constant surveillance in the military forces people to gain situational awareness. As mentioned previously, anyone that passes through this institution's preliminary regimentation is forced to become more aware of others around them, and anyone who has experienced military combat in addition to that, is habituated to constant vigilance and awareness of their surroundings. As Laura speculates, this awareness of one's surroundings is something that is usually developed over time, but she thinks her military experience may have hastened its development of her. Sam described knowing he cannot expect much out of his peers or force them to have the same kind of awareness that he has, because they simply have not had the same kinds of experiences as he has:

When I stop and pay attention to it...I try... I've actually kind of had to learn just to put blinders on, and not, and not have great expectations for the kids around me, and realize that they, that they

have their own set of experiences or lack of, and they are where they are...and that I can't force anybody into awareness, or my version of awareness. So I don't look at it much anymore as...it was good that I was able to make that change, because for a long time it seemed like I was frustrated all the time. Every time I heard somebody talk around me, in a classroom...for the most part, you know, give or take you know, a few different kids and a few different times. I definitely feel...other.'

One point that Sam brings to light here, is that as a veteran who has been through the military institution and served multiple deployments overseas, he has a different version of awareness than most of the younger civilians in college around him, making him feel different or 'other.' Hank mentioned he does not really fraternize with anyone at school: "I just kinda stick to myself, go to school... just going from class to class." Thus, for many student veterans, the fact that they are older, more mature, with a different set of life experiences and approaches to being in school, sets them apart from the rest.

Making a Veteran-Friendly Campus

Again, Lokken et al. (2009:45) describe "veteran-friendly" campuses as: "individual campuses that have made concerted efforts to remove barriers to veterans' educational goals, to create smooth transitions from military life to campus life, and to provide information about available benefits and services." When the participants of this study were asked what could possibly help make UNR more welcoming to veterans, many of them did not have any serious complaints about the university. It was mentioned earlier that Steve would have liked to have seen some of his military credentials recognized by the school and given credit for the credentials he already has. Following up on what the literature mentioned about the "liberal professor and conservative veteran scenario," at UNR, there have been several veterans that have been offended by their Core Humanities professors who criticized the current wars (Glasser et al. 2009).

Dennis mentioned, "Sometimes I don't think the professors are sensitive to the fact that there are lots of veterans in their classes now. And they don't appreciate their warped sense of patriotism." Hank described that although little comments about the wars or military are irritating, he also

feels that people have the right to say what they want, as after all that is one of the freedoms that he defended by serving in the Marines.

Veterans in college may have one thing in common with the rest of their college peers; they are ostensibly there to get an education. However, as has been echoed by this sample of student veterans, many feel more equipped to be in college because they value it more, they are more disciplined about their work, and they can handle its pressures. At the same time, due to their differences in life experiences, some veterans in school may also feel isolated, especially if they are returning from an environment of military camaraderie. This is exactly why an organization like the Wolf Pack Veterans was organized. As Rachel explained, it is beneficial for veterans to have other veterans to talk with because there are certain things that veterans may want to discuss, but cannot discuss with their family, significant others, or civilian friends. Here is what she says:

I'm not the same person versus who I am when I'm around a bunch of veterans, because you can talk about different stuff...you have different stuff in common, and people understand different things about you...so those sort of things change, differ - depending on different like social settings I guess - your family certainly you don't talk about war stuff with your family, like they don't usually ask stuff about that. Um...so we talk a lot about stuff that we wouldn't talk about with other people I guess...veterans to veterans. I didn't realize that.

Here, Rachel attests to the fact that as a veteran, instead of constantly being around her Army unit, and being one type of person, every day she transitions from being a student of social work, to being a veteran and working at the VA, to being a family member at home. Since she cannot discuss certain military topics or stories with her family or friends at school, either because they would not understand or it would be inappropriate, she considers it helpful for veterans to have other veterans to talk to. That is precisely why the veterans' organization the Wolf Pack Veterans was founded by several student veterans several years ago at UNR.

Steve, who has been part of the Wolf Pack Veterans since it was founded expressed, "It's really great to have a bunch of other students here that know more or less what you've been

through.” He complained that for a long time he was the only person from the Navy, but says there are other students in it that know “more or less” what he has been through; because working in an engine room below deck is not the same as being an infantryman or a mechanic or a truck-driver, but his fellow student veterans are more like him than anyone else around him in college. For Sam, who is also involved with the Wolf Pack Veterans at UNR, bringing veterans together is something that he has grown passionate about since departing from the military. Talking about one of his best friends from the Army, who is the reason he moved to Reno in the first place, he described some of his reasons why he is active in the veterans’ community today:

Matt and I have been through an incredible amount together. And...huh, it's just. I, I...I'm not, I realize that, the whole idea of 'no man is an island.' Like, that really makes sense to me, you know. I'm, I'm a tribal person, I didn't have...uh, not every veteran is like me, I realize that...but there are a lot of guys who do, whether they realize it or not, want to...they want something, you know, to hold on to. Something to like...to help, to just, uh, it's nice to know that you're not out there on your own. And so... if I can help facilitate that, then that's what I want to do...

Whether it is being around other veterans that more or less know what one another has been through or helping student veterans know that they are not alone, having an on-campus veterans’ organization is a positive element for veterans at UNR. As was mentioned earlier, a study by the American Council on Education found that only 30% of their sample of 723 ‘veteran-friendly’ institutions offered a student veteran organization/club, so the fact that several years ago a group of student veterans took the initiative to organize is an impressive achievement (Cook and Kim, 2009). Chris also acknowledges that having the Wolf Pack Veterans on campus is important:

I mean, it's good to have the club because, you know, it's good for veterans to get to have other veterans to share stories, and talk and stuff, and you know, talk about school and get together if anyone's having coping issues....

While student veterans are doing what they can to welcome other student veterans on-campus, Chris mentions that what the school should be putting more of an emphasis into is “putting out information to veterans, that you know, that's where the vet's services is, this is what your benefits are...this is what you're entitled to, so you should, you know, you should put in for it, you should

get your GI Bill, you know, you should get what you earned, by being in.” This sentiment is concurrent with what participants from ACE’s 2008 focus groups revealed, that guidance on “navigating the maze of GI Bill educational benefits” would have been helpful (Cook and Kim 2008:26). For example, members of their focus group revealed that they were not very knowledgeable about the GI benefits that were available to them, and retired veterans no longer had access to the education offices on military bases (Cook and Kim 2008:25). Tom explained with the following metaphor, “You gotta kinda like, put your foot in the door, and really like knock on it and try to get all the information that you can if you want to go to school. So...that’s what I’ve learned, is like, nobody’s gonna do it for you; you gotta do it yourself.” Dealing with the paperwork necessary to attend school using the GI Bill may be one difficulty in leaving an environment where activities are completed collectively, to one where they must be completed individually. It is also a metaphoric hurdle that veterans must traverse before reaching the ultimate goal of accessing their educational benefits. A certain amount of educational benefits are available to veterans after their military service, although it is apparent that the VA does not make the process of completing the paperwork easy, and it may be helpful for postsecondary institutions to implement services to facilitate this process.

CHAPTER 7

Discussion

A synopsis of the data and analysis

After interviewing a limited number of student veterans at the University of Nevada, Reno, one valid if not obvious conclusion to draw is that they represent a unique, rare group of students that come from “all walks of life” (in the words of one of my participants, Laura). Naturally, like any population, “veterans” do not neatly fit into a stereotyped category. While people may immediately think of infantrymen when they think of military personnel, the reality is that there are innumerable “behind-the-scenes” personnel in support positions who also voluntarily entered the military during a time of war. My subjects’ experiences and motivations leading them to enlist in the military, the branch of the military they enlisted in, their military occupations specialties (MOS), how long and where they were deployed to, and with whom they served are just a few factors that impacted their overall experiences in the military, as well as their later transitions back to the civilian world and into higher educational institutions.

Most of the veterans I spoke with shared that the bonds they formed in the military are truly unlike those formed anywhere else, and this may be the result of living in a total institution that reinforces the importance of the group over the individuals comprising it. The bonds that are formed are built on shared mental and physical suffering but also through togetherness in strenuous circumstances, in which trivialities are stripped away and there is a certainty about who people are and where they stand on issues. Returning to civilian life and leaving this camaraderie with people who have become virtual family members may entail experiencing an uncertainty about people, their backgrounds, intentions and beliefs. Oftentimes as well, individuals leave the military at just the point when they are familiar with how the system works, and when they have achieved rank, authority, and responsibility over others, including access to information. At the same time, many of the achievements made in the military are typically unrecognized by certain

institutions in the civilian world, including most colleges and universities. A handful of the participants in this study also mentioned experiencing culture shock at returning to civilian life, and having surreal moments in grocery stores or airports, and realizing everyone lives life as if wars were not in progress at the same time.

Undoubtedly, individuals that are returning from combat deployments are prone to struggle more with the transition home than individuals returning from non-combat environments. While it is true that veterans encounter extreme shifts in the normative behavioral expectations when they leave the military or combat and return home, it is not as if these individuals do not already know this. But rather, as was shown by Sam's story of becoming 'rewired' in his reactions to stimuli in combat, the way that a person interacts with their environment in war can have a profound and lasting impact on how they react to similar, yet unthreatening stimuli in the civilian world. At the same time that the combat veterans described being overly aware of their surroundings back in the civilian world, even participants who were non-combat veterans described being more aware of their surroundings and the people around them, which is an indelible mark of the total institution.

Back in the civilian world and enrolled in college classes at either a community college or at the University of Nevada, Reno, (in some cases only days or weeks after being discharged from the military), several of the participants in this study revealed that it was much less stressful than their experiences in the military. They reported being more disciplined in their studies and engaged in class discussions, with questions to ask and comments to make. Also, those who joined the military in part to be able to go to college noted that they valued their education more than their younger peers seem to outwardly display. In and of itself, transitioning from somewhere where they blended in with the rest to somewhere they stuck out a little may have been off-balancing. Indeed, being older, usually more mature, and with different personal histories than a lot of individuals in college makes student veterans stand out, even at times

feeling “other.” While this perception may be extreme, it is interesting that some veterans feel they have moved from one realm where they were “other,” in the war surrounded by a hostile out-group, only to feel “other” even in their prescribed in-group.

Although the participants of this study expressed knowing ahead of time they were likely to encounter adverse opinions about the military and war by coming to a more liberal area, they conveyed that it was still difficult to listen to what they perceived as disrespectful comments. Several participants described feeling frustrated with professors who, in presenting a different world view, seemed to criticize the military from afar, without “having been there.” This in turn might cause student veterans in class to be cautious about disclosing their identity as a veteran so as not to feel judged, although veterans can add a nuanced perspective to discussions. This may be one reason four-year universities may fear losing student veterans to on-line colleges, where students work without face to face interactions with a professor and peers.

Although university campuses are typically liberal areas, and although liberal individuals may consider themselves defenders of diversity, it is apparent that the kind of diversity that many GWT veterans are bringing to college campuses across the nation may not be as welcomed as other types diversity. Ultimately, the voices of students that could add different perspectives to the learning process should not be silenced or dismissed, because this is contrary to the process of learning.

Strengths and Limitations of Current Research

The nature of the qualitative research methodology used in this research impacts the validity of the results in both positive and negative ways. A great amount of information was produced in the face-to-face interviews with the student veterans, and the participants provided insightful and detailed narratives about their experiences in the military, coming home and going to school, as well as issues beyond the scope of this study. As such, the findings of this research were not so much answers to specific questions, although they framed the structure of the

interview; but rather, the participants were actively involved in the process as well. As this research was exploratory, it was appropriate for the participants to set the boundaries of what was relevant, and as such, rather than limiting what they had to say through pre-determined response options of a standardized interview, the informal, open-ended answers in this study granted the respondents greater freedom in what they wanted to say. In turn, this elicited unprecedented responses. If a standardized interview had been designed to probe how student veterans felt about their transition to college, a response option that it was “like being on a paid vacation” would be unlikely, but a significant number of the participants in this research narrated their experiences with this exact discourse. With the qualitative method of interviewing with open-ended questions, the data directed and substantiated any theoretical insights, and this process revealed unforeseen insights. Additionally, if a cross-sectional view of student veterans on campus had been obtained, and their experiences leading up to this were not investigated, the reality of how the military as a total institution shaped the participants’ current lives would not have been uncovered. Furthermore, the questions asked in each interview were influenced by the responses of previous participants and thus the direction of the research was informed by the participants themselves.

There are also numerous limitations in interpreting the findings from a small, purposively determined sample. The fact that each participant was asked similar, but slightly varied questions may also have been a limitation. The largest limitation of this study was the rare nature of the target population and the lack of a sampling frame from which to recruit individuals randomly. Thus, only veterans that were willing to be interviewed and to be open about their experiences were interviewed. Veterans that were either not in the Wolf Pack Veterans club, or who did not know anyone in the club, did not have the opportunity to participate in the study, and thus, if they differed in any meaningful way from my final sample of participants, a selection bias is highly probable. In other words, the results should be interpreted cautiously, because student veterans

who are the most alienated and having trouble transitioning to college, or those who do not disclose their identity as veterans, may be more isolated from the student veteran-led organization that formed the basis of the recruitment for the sample.

Policy Implications and Directions for Future Research

Although the results of this research cannot be generalized to student veterans across the U.S., or even to student veterans at UNR, they may have implications for the university to instate policies conducive to improving student veterans' transitions to college. One major step would be for UNR to consider accepting academic credit for military training and experience. Another possible way to welcome veterans on campus would be to designate a physical space for the Wolf Pack Veterans organization, increasing the likelihood that veterans not already affiliated with the club would go there to receive social support and meet other veterans on campus. It would be useful if this space was attached to the Veterans Service center where student veterans could conveniently find assistance with information about pursuing GI benefits. Also, as has been explained, some of the student veterans in this research indicated feeling uncomfortable in their classes due to criticisms of the wars. However, this research only represents one investigation of one point of view, and more research is needed from the perspectives of professors and students about their attitudes toward veterans to be able to make any recommendations to ease veterans' discomfort in the classroom. Before knowing specific ways to raise professors' and students' awareness about this seemingly new kind of diversity on campus, it is helpful to obtain "both sides of the story," and to discern whether students and professors are aware of a "story" or a problem at all. Glasser et al (2009:33) have a very simple suggestion that could be easily implemented- on Veteran's Day the university could announce the number of student veterans currently enrolled at the school. This would alert students and faculty as to the number of veterans on-campus, and it may help some student veterans realize they are not alone.

This exploratory, open-ended research has highlighted a number of other questions that need to be further addressed in more systematic ways. First of all, greater numbers of student veterans returning from the Global War on Terror should be studied, and from various types of post-secondary institutions. By sampling from a larger, high-enrollment institution, some type of list may be more readily available, and a random sample of participants could then be sampled and studied. Additionally, as several of my participants described feeling frustrated with professors, as well as comments made by peers, another idea for future research is to learn the full range of what professors and college students are thinking about veterans, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, perhaps through survey methods. This is one way that also may increase awareness about the presence of student veterans on campus.

Concluding Remarks

There is very little, if any research on the transitions involved in individuals leaving total institutions and reintegrating into society and various other types of institutions. Unlike other total institutions such as prisons and mental hospitals, where responsibilities are often revoked for the duration of the inmate's stay, the military often confers its personnel great amounts of responsibility. Yet, this can easily disappear upon leaving the military, because not all of the skills gained during military service can be easily translated into civilian employment. For the majority of individuals that do *not* enlist in the military as a career, leaving the military may indeed feel like moving from being a big fish in a little pond to a little fish in a big pond. Also upon leaving the military, retiring veterans typically must depart from friends that may have become closer than family. The camaraderie that is formed in military units- especially in combat units- is very different from the bonds that most civilians form with their co-workers and it perhaps stands apart from everyday bonds of friendship among civilians. When returning to civilian life, departing from one's comrades may make re-commencing former relationships after time apart feel ambiguous or even superficial. In addition to this, veterans may also have to cope

with mental and physical debilitations caused by war while transitioning back into what seems like a foreign culture.

Additionally in the theater of war, military personnel are expected to engage in a kind of violence that is socially forbidden in any other context. This violence of war not only causes innumerable physical and psychological effects, but along with the losses attached with such violence, evident in the mounting documented casualties of the war - and those to come - this very aspect of the war is clearly something that divides the U.S. as a nation, and it is manifest in the political and ideological fault-lines in the classroom. Arguably, the nation's enlisted men and women join the military because they believe they will be doing a service to the nation, by defending it militarily from foreign threats. Whether not they actually *have* done a service for the nation is what is so vehemently debated across the nation, and still, many U.S civilians' understandings of the wars and the troops fighting in them are far-removed from reality. In reality, a significant number of individuals who dedicate time to serving in the Armed Forces may have had little control in deciding whether to enlist in the first place or what they are obliged to do while in the total institution of the military.

Now is an ideal time to continue research on retiring military personnel of the GWT and their transitions back to civilian life, as well as into colleges and universities across the country. With combat personnel ordered to leave Iraq in August 2010 (Copper and Stolberg 2010) and the war in Afghanistan raging on, colleges and universities should be prepared for an increase in veterans on campus, and whether veterans are readily visible or not, higher education should welcome the kind of diversity they bring to the classroom. As an environment of learning, colleges should welcome this special population of students and the power to make a positive difference by helping veterans adapt to life at their institutions, helping veterans and civilians integrate, and bridge any ideological fault-lines.

APPENDIX A- Interview Questions

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Why and when did you decide to enlist in the military and in the branch that you chose?
3. Where were you deployed to and for how long?
4. Could you describe your experiences of being discharged from the military and returning to civilian life?
5. What kinds of things do you think helped or impeded your return and transition from the military to civilian life?
6. Did you have supportive friends and family to return to?
7. After an extended period of time in the military, did you lose touch with friends from home?
8. Do you feel like there were any behavioral norms that were appropriate for the military that you had to abandon altogether in civilian life?
9. Once you were back home, why did you decide to go to college, and how soon after leaving the military was it that you began college?
10. Did you have an area of academic interest at that point, or did you plan on exploring different subjects in hopes of finding an interest?
11. Do you have any idea what you want to do with your degree once you graduate?
12. Do you feel that the stressors of being an average student are different from being a student veteran, and if so, how?
13. Are you employed in addition to going to school?
14. Do you have children and/or a family to take care of?
15. Do you feel like some of your academic skills diminished/improved since your time in the military?
16. As a “non-traditional” student, do you feel comfortable around other students?
17. When on campus, are there ever any moments when you feel uncomfortable for any reason?
18. Have any of your professors asked you to speak on behalf of all student/veterans?
19. In general, do you like for people to know that you are a veteran?
20. How does it usually come up that you are a veteran?
21. To what degree do you feel like your status as a veteran defines who you are and shapes your identity?

22. As far as making new friends since being in college, how important would you say it is to be friends with other veterans?
23. How important do you feel it is for your transition to college to be part of an organization like the Wolf Pack Veterans?

Appendix B: Brief Subject Descriptions

1. **Will** joined the military right after High School, and was in the **Marines** as a ‘ground intelligence analyst’ for five years. During his service, he served three deployments to Iraq.
2. **Laura** joined the **Navy** when she was 21 years old, served for three years and was deployed to Japan for two of those years working in intelligence.
3. **Steve** he joined the **Navy** right after High School, serving for five years. Three of those years he spent in the engine room of an aircraft carrier helping maintain their nuclear power plant.
4. **Chris** joined the **Army** when he was 19. He served for three years in the Army as a mechanic, and was deployed to Afghanistan for 10 months in 2005, and is currently in the Reserves as well.
5. **Sam** joined the **Army** in his early twenties, and served for just under seven years as an infantryman and squad leader. His first tour was with a NATO unit that deployed to Kosovo and Bosnia, and he served in Afghanistan and Iraq.
6. **Rachel** joined the **Army** in her early twenties. She served for four years in a transportation unit as a truck driver. Her first duty station was in South Korea, then she spent two years in Germany, and was finally deployed to Iraq her last year in the Army.
7. **Tom** joined the Nevada Air Guard (Air Force) in his early twenties, and worked in Security Forces, and was deployed to Krygystan for a year. He is now in the Air Force Reserves and will soon be trained in pest control, and eventually deployed to Afghanistan.
8. **Hank** joined the **Marines** right out of High School when he was 18, and served for 5 years. He served two tours to Iraq, and one tour to Afghanistan in a reconnaissance unit.
9. **Adam** joined the **Army** when he was 21. He was deployed to both Afghanistan and then to Iraq with an anti-armor unit. He graduated from UNR several years ago with a degree in History, and now works for the VA.
10. **Camden** joined the **Army National Guard** almost eleven years ago, when he was still in High School, and is currently an NCO in communications, and he works full time for the National Guard as a network administrator. He was deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in 2002-2003. He will also deploy soon to Afghanistan.
11. **Dennis** he joined the Army when he was nineteen and served for four years as medic, and was deployed to both South Korea and Iraq. In both places he was attached to an infantry unit, and in Iraq he accompanied them on their missions and provided emergency medical care to both Iraq civilians and U.S. military personnel.

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