



Journal of Veterans Studies

Review by Laura Sparks

Pathways to Pacifism and Antiwar Activism among U.S. Veterans: The Role of Moral Identity in Personal Transformation

Julie Putnam Hart and Anjel N. Stough-Hunter | pp. 216 ISBN 978-1-4985-3863-3

Pathways to Pacifism and Antiwar Activism among U.S. Veterans, coauthored by sociologists Julie Putnam Hart and Anjel N. Stough-Hunter, chronicles the journey of 114 Vietnam, Korea, and Iraq veterans from war supporters to antiwar activists. Written in careful, cogent prose, and in a manner accessible to a broad audience, Hart's and Stough-Hunter's research seeks to understand the catalysts that shift veterans from a pro-war to an emphatically antiwar activist stance. Their work also discusses how masculinity is renegotiated in identity change, offers a nine-point identity change model, and reflects meaningfully on findings and opportunities for further research. Relying on the stories of over 100 antiwar veterans, Hart and Stough-Hunter's research provides a clear, thoughtful approach to recognizing the key roles of narrative and memory, as well as collective identity in identity transformation.

Both authors evidence a strong commitment to the book's research project, and a noteworthy awareness of the complexities entailed in such work. Julie Putnam Hart, PhD, associate professor of sociology at Ohio Dominican University and first author, locates the impetus for this project in 1986, when she attended a lecture by Lieutenant Colonel Robert Bowman. Her research into antiwar veteran activists, which began in the early 2000s, was augmented in 2012 by the efforts of Anjel N. Stough-Hunter, PhD, assistant professor of sociology, also at Ohio Dominican University. Stough-Hunter's contributions included transcription, data analysis, and coding, as well as acting as an "outsider" in the data analysis process. While peace-building and nonviolence are common themes in Hart's publications, Stough-Hunter's research interests include gender, health, and natural resource management in small communities. Together, Hart and Stough-Hunter have crafted a rich and compelling study that helps readers across academic and non-academic areas understand how veterans' attitudes about war can shift dramatically over time.

Chapter 1, "Identity Theory," and chapter 2, "Research Methods," detail Hart's and Stough-Hunter's approach to studying veterans' antiwar stances and are especially useful for readers unfamiliar with identity theory. Crucial to the authors' analysis of veterans' experiences is the concept of identity control process, drawn largely from Burke and Stets (2009). Social interaction is key for identity formation, and "individuals engage in a continuous self-regulating cycle of identity verification" (p. 2). Identity standards are the "meanings and criteria" individuals associate with each of their identities, but these meanings are in flux (p. 11). According to Burke and Stets, individuals receive feedback, otherwise known as "inputs," on their "behaviors related to gender identity and other identities" (p. 2). Individuals also produce "outputs" into their environments (p. 3). Through inputs and outputs, individuals attempt to create "identity verification," and when necessary, identity change. Crucial to that process, Hart and Stough-Hunter note, is the role of collective identity, or (new) groups where individuals can receive identity verification (p. 13). *Pathways to Pacifism* argues that rather than simply a change in views or beliefs, the move to an antiwar position actually entails an identity shift.

The authors are interested in identity changes over time; they extend the work of Leitz (2014) and others to examine military identities and “the role of movement participation in the identity change process” (Hart & Stough-Hunter, 2017, p. xviii). Moreover, they describe themselves as interested in moral identity disruption and moral injury, and observe the ways in which identity conflicts are inherent in the experiences of antiwar veterans in their study (p. xviii). It is worth noting that “antiwar” includes both a Just War and a pacifist perspective, both of which are represented to varying degrees across interview subjects.

Participants in their study include volunteers from Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, as well as members of the Mennonite Church USA. Interviews were conducted using an eight-point scale from militaristic to pacifistic, and participants were asked to describe how they identified with particular positions at age 18 and now (p. 22). The authors make a viable case for their grounded theory approach, including their reliance on in-depth interviews and veterans’ narratives about themselves. They explain memories are “essential to understanding our respondents. We believe it is more important to understand the respondents’ perspective rather than some ‘objective’ truth about what occurred in the past” (p. 18).

The bulk of the book features case studies that represent a range of ages, wars, and life experiences. The study identifies four main catalysts for veterans’ identity changes: combat, betrayal, religious conviction, and education, each of which are discussed in depth in chapters 3-6. The authors emphasize that the four catalysts at times overlap, and that multiple catalysts might be reflected in a single veteran’s experiences. Readers see a variety of identity change processes reflected in participants’ narratives.

Chapters 3 and 4 introduce the first two catalysts for change, combat and betrayal. Chapter 3, “The Combat Catalyst of Identity Change,” analyzes the ways in which moral injury severely impacts identity change. Having oftentimes witnessed troubling acts by comrades, veterans’ moral beliefs were transgressed to the point of moral injury. Interviews with these veterans indicate that participation in communities like Veterans for Peace has proven crucial to their moral and group identity. Veterans in the betrayal catalyst group, introduced in chapter 4, experienced similarly dramatic shifts in pro-war and anti-war identities. Those whose antiwar stance was impacted most by the betrayal catalyst tended to be well-educated, and, unlike in the combat catalyst group, battle itself was not what “triggered the pro-war identity disruption.” Instead, the authors explain, it was the “raw experience of betrayal by the U.S. government they loved or a leader they trusted” (p. 44). Many antiwar veterans introduced in this chapter experienced these emotional disturbances years after their military service.

Chapters 5 and 6 offer in-depth discussion of the remaining two catalysts, religious conviction and education. In chapter 5, “The Religious Conviction Catalyst of Identity Change,” we learn that most veterans in this category experienced identity disruption after leaving the military, during a “period of reflection and study” (p. 61). Some of the more profound changes undergone by these veterans include sacrificing military careers and income as they developed antiwar moral identities (p. 66). Not unlike the religious conviction group, the final catalyst group emphasizes the role of learning and mentorship in identity change. Chapter 6, “The Education Catalyst of Identity Change,” identifies how higher education and independent study of U.S. history and policy can provoke change. Educators will find this chapter potentially useful for understanding some of the identity-related challenges for veterans returning to school. Increased “critical thinking related to issues of war and U.S. policy” (p. 78) is the common denominator across this group. Most veterans for whom education played a pivotal role served during periods when the U.S. was not at war (80 percent), and did not experience disruptions in their pro-war moral identities during military service.

The disruption, then, happened when they engaged differently with information and new people in education settings outside the military.

Complementing discussion of the four main catalysts, the book's remaining chapters (7-9 and "Conclusion"), offer new avenues into understanding the breadth and depth of the authors' research. Chapter 7, for example, focuses on the differences between veterans who identify as antiwar activists and those—a very small sample—who do not. While salient factors vary, Hart and Stough-Hunter find that the network of active relations that comprise collective identity provide crucial support for antiwar veterans and thus impact possibilities for identity change.

Highlighting yet another key factor, the following chapter unpacks the role of masculinity in antiwar identity shifts—a particularly important aspect, given the hyper-masculinity typically rewarded in the military and the often-negative associations with pacifism. In chapter 9, the authors take a wider view, outlining a specific identity change model with nine distinct periods. They are careful to note that this process model is not fixed. Not all antiwar veterans experienced all nine periods and "some veterans returned to earlier periods as inputs changed in new environments" (p. 132). These later chapters bring into relief significant aspects of the identity change process that received less attention in chapters 3-6, and provide readers with meaningful ways to think critically about the data's implications.

The final chapter, "Conclusions and Implications," helpfully contextualizes the study within our current challenges in supporting veterans and service personnel. Citing suicide rates and numbers of veterans impacted by PTSD, the authors emphasize how crucial it is that we continue researching the identity change process and the experiences of veterans. They provide specific recommendations for faith groups and the U.S. Military, as well as suggest directions for further research.

As I hope this review makes apparent, *Pathways to Pacifism* is careful, thorough, and smart. The authors are mindful of their subjects' experiences and the implications of doing trauma research, and serve as a model for conducting ethical research useful to a wide audience of readers. Were I to ask more of them—and they cover so much ground it feels unfair to even ask—it would be for a fuller accounting of female veterans' experiences, which seemed subsumed by the attention to masculinity and the four catalysts (one of which, combat, largely excluded women from the outset). This also points to the necessity for further research, along the lines Hart and Stough-Hunter themselves suggest. In addition, I would be interested in their research's implications for the classroom, especially since education and critical thinking played a not-insignificant role in some antiwar veterans' experiences.

The book's focus is not on pedagogy, but perhaps contextualizing some of their findings for educators in the "recommendations" sections of the "Conclusion" would have been a useful addition for academic readers. Lastly, the authors' attempt at a more hopeful turn in their "Final Note" does not do full justice to the rest of the book's mindful analysis of identity shifts toward nonviolence. The "Final Note's" reliance, especially on Steven Pinker's (2011) account of civilization and violence, risks valorizing discourses about the progress of civilization, discourses which cannot be unhitched from colonialist projects that are inherently violent, and that arguably produce the very wars impacting veterans in this study. *Pathways to Pacifism's* strength is that it advances research into and celebrates the importance of veterans' stories, work which complicates, rather than solidifies, grand narratives of progress. Ultimately, this book serves as both a rich model for theorizing identity change and a timely guide for understanding and supporting the veterans and service personnel among us.

References

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