

RESEARCH

Introduction

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Veteran identity is a crucial research focus that can help all entities that work with veterans to better meet the diverse needs of their veterans—from Veterans Affairs to educational institutions and workplaces to community support services. This special issue aims to continue the conversation about veteran identity taken up in numerous individual efforts in numerous publications and conference presentations over the past years and to further investigate our understanding of how, when, and why veterans embrace or distance their veteran identity from their lives or specific facets of their lives.

Keywords: veterans; student veterans; community; veterans services; identity

Veteran identity is a crucial research focus that can help all entities that work with veterans to better meet the diverse needs of their veterans—from Veterans Affairs (VA) to educational institutions and workplaces to community support services. Researchers and the general public alike have access to numerous pieces of raw data regarding veterans. Data tracks the number of veterans from a specific country, a specific race, or with a specific disability; data tracks the average time veterans serve, the average deployment, the average number of deployments, but veterans are more than just numbers.

Knowing the specific number of veterans enrolled at a local university who are women and have a service-connected disability does not guide the university to provide the best services for that student veteran, whether in the classroom or on campus. By the same measure, knowing that a community has over 5,000 unemployed veterans but hosting a veteran-specific job fair event where only 200 attend may leave the event coordinators mystified and wondering if the lack of attendance stems from a lack of marketing for the event or if there was another reason.

Those who work with veterans in different capacities may have completely different experiences with the same veteran. A veteran who regularly visits the VA hospital near her home for disability treatment may also be the same veteran who chooses not to disclose her veteran status on campus or at work, and data cannot explain this reasoning to us; data can only connect her name and veteran status to her use of her veterans benefits at the VA hospital and on the university campus. To better meet the needs of veterans requires better understanding of the nuances of embracing a veteran

status in specific facets of one's life and why veterans may distance themselves from their veteran status in other facets of their lives.

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The special issue opens with an international study about veterans. The work of Frondigoun, Campbell, Leith, Sturgeon, and Thomas in "Identification/Non-Identification Among U.K. Veterans in Scotland" considers a specific demographic of older, U.K. armed forces veterans and the reasons that members of this demographic choose to not identify as veterans, even as the U.K. definition of a veteran encourages diversity among their veteran population. This article focuses specifically on Scotland, but the research resonates in many ways with a more global veteran population.

Sheng-mei Ma's "Forgotten Taiwanese Veteran's Memory of Compulsory Service" and Greg Slayton's "Nietzsche's Abyss: This Veteran's Dilemma" provide first-person perspectives on veteran identity from two distinctly different contexts. Ma writes of his compulsory military service in Taiwan during a time of peace, yet a time when those serving in the military were viewed as "toy soldiers"; however, his experience speaks of experiences much more complicated than the connotation of the term. Slayton writes of his voluntary service to the US during a time of war, and his conscious decision to compartmentalize his military service for

a time, until he was able to shift his perspective to one that allows for more accepting of his veteran status. Together as well as individually, Ma and Slayton illuminate the complex struggle to embrace a veteran identity and the influence of personal experiences within the military on this struggle.

This special issue then turns to works that investigate more specific segments of the veteran population. Deon Hall, Jeffrey Rings, and Tyler Anderson's "Military Life Narratives and Identity Development Among Black Post-9/11 Veterans" picks up the thread of Slayton's voluntary wartime veteran identity and investigates the specific experiences of Black veterans, providing a framework for understanding Black veteran identity—a framework that can inform other models for investigating the role of race among other minority veterans. Vanessa Meade's "Embracing Diverse Women Veteran Narratives" turns to the role that sex and gender take in veteran identity construction, arguing that life experiences, outsider perception, and lack of services available for women veterans all play key roles in how women embrace or distance themselves from the veteran facet of their identity.

William Doe's "Veteran Identities in the Post 9/11 Era: Perspectives of an Intergenerational, Peacetime, Career Army Officer" illustrates how veteran identity is influenced by a number of factors specific to the veteran's period of service. Following Doe's work, the study presented by Scott Parrott, David Albright, Nicholas Eckhart, and Kirsten Laha-Walsh, "Mental Representations of Military Veterans: The Pictures (and Words) in Our Heads" looks at the influence of culture on veteran identity. This section concludes with Michael Hoffman's "Between Order and Execution: A Phenomenological Approach to Ethical Authority in Military Culture," which provides a rich understanding of the military culture so distinctly different from the civilian culture to which veterans return after service. Together, these three articles better frame the distinctions between military and civilian culture that further contribute to veteran identity.

The final section of this special issue turns the focus to an even more specific segment of the veteran population—the student veteran. Veterans enrolling in higher education must also consider how veteran identity fits with their newfound student identity, an identity which includes even more identity markers separate from their veteran identity markers. Corrine Hinton's "I just don't like to have my car marked': Nuancing Identity Attachments and Belonging in Student Veterans" presents interview findings that further complicate the nuances of veteran identity among student veterans and illustrates just how aware participants are about their identity construction. Stephanie Lau, Susan McKelvey, Christine Groah, and Elizabeth Getzel take a close look at an extremely specific population of campus veterans in "Unique Needs and Challenges of Women Veteran Students with Disabilities," where once again the numerous factors that contribute to veteran identity are shown to influence how campus support services must address these nuanced identity of student veterans to both reach and accommodate those who need their services.

This special issue addresses a number of intersections that influence veteran identity, yet this issue does not and cannot fully address each facet of veteran identity because each veteran's identity is nuanced and individual, as each of these pieces emphasize. The research in this special issue emphasizes how veteran identity can influence veterans' use of university, community, and government services and how these services should consider the various facets of veteran identity to better reach and serve their specific veteran population. Together, the works in this special issue offer insight into many of the facets that influence veteran identity construction and the authors' approaches offer frameworks and foundations for further investigation into veteran identity constructions.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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