In the Shadow of Service

by Steven Gardiner

Veteran Masculinity and the
Civil-Military Disjuncture in the United
States

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About...

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The research... The ethnographic component was completed between 2004 and 2007, and included life history interviews and participant observation at meetings and events of veterans organizations, primarily the American Legion, in the U.S. Midwest.

First A Question

VETERAN'S

Show of hands, how many of you are either veterans or current members of the armed services?

How about how many of you have a parent, spouse, sibling or child currently serving in the military?

Mobilization vs. Militarization

Exploring Veteran Masculinity: What I am exploring today is the gender-related adaptations and reactions of what I call “mobilized veterans”: those veterans actively involved in veteran causes and organizations.

Premise 1: The actual number of military personnel (hereinafter: soldiers) and veterans is **decreasing** both absolutely and as a percentage of the population.

Premise 2: The level of militarization, both political-economic and sociocultural... **is not.**

First...

Mobilization
Numbers

Active Duty Over Time

Year	Army	Air Force	Navy	Marine Corps	Total
1940	269,023		160,997	28,345	458,365
1945	8,266,373		3,319,586	469,925	12,055,884
1950	593,167	411,277	380,739	74,279	1,459,462
1955	1,109,296	959,946	660,695	205,170	2,935,107
1970	1,322,548	791,349	691,126	259,737	3,064,760
1980	777,036	557,969	527,153	188,469	2,050,627
1995	508,559	400,409	434,617	174,639	1,518,224
2000	482,170	355,654	373,193	173,321	1,384,338
2002	486,542	368,251	385,051	173,733	1,413,577
2005	488,944	351,666	358,700	178,704	1,378,014
2007	519,471	337,312	338,671	184,574	1,380,082
2011	565,463	333,370	325,123	201,157	1,468,364

Source: <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/>

Military Participation

% of total U.S. population in the armed forces, 1940-2010

Source: Molly Clever and David R. Segal. "After Conscription: The United States and the All-Volunteer Force." Security and Peace (Forthcoming).

Service During Wartime

Number of Americans who served on active duty in each era

Source: Department of Defense *Personnel and Procurement Statistics Principal Wars in which the United States Participated-U.S. Military Personnel Serving and Casualties*

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Percent Change in Veteran Population by State

The total Veteran population decreased 14.4% between 2000 and 2010

Period of service	Number in 2009	Percentage of all veterans	Median age	Percentage women	Percentage employed	Percentage in poverty in 1999	Percentage disabled
All veterans, 18 years and over	21,848,693	100.0%	49 (women) 64 (men)	6.9%	77.1%	15.7%	32.5%
Sept. 2001 to 2009 (Gulf War II)	1,682,349	7.7	37	18	82.2	n.a.	25.0
Aug. 1990 to Sept. 2001 (Gulf War I)	3,024,503	11.5	33.3	15.7	81.4	6.2	16.3
Sept. 1980 to July 1990	3,806,602	14.4	38.8	13.0	82.7	5.5	18.2
May 1975 to Aug. 1980	2,775,492	10.5	45.5	9.9	78.0	5.6	22.7
Vietnam era (Aug. 1964 to April 1975)	8,380,356	31.7	53.2	3.2	75.4	5.1	24.8
Feb. 1955 to July 1964	4,355,323	16.5	62.8	2.4	51.4	4.9	29.4
Korean War (June 1950 to Jan. 1955)	4,045,521	15.3	70.1	2.2	24.6	4.5	33.6
World War II (Sept. 1940 to July 1947)	5,719,898	21.7	76.7	4.2	11.6	4.8	45.2
Some other time	323,785	1.2	74.3	4.5	16.1	6.6	46.4

NOTE: The figures do not add up to 100 percent because veterans may have served in more than one time period.

Source: The U.S. Census Bureau.

Living Veterans per conflict period as a percentage.

Veteran Deaths

Projected Veteran Population 17 Years and Older: 2000 to 2036

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Actuary, Veteran Population Projections Model (VetPop), 2007, Table 5L.

Summary Demographics

Percent of the Population Currently
Serving in the Military: 0.75%

Percent of Population Who Are Veterans of the
Armed Forces: 7.0% ...and declining

Percent of Veterans who are
Women: 8% ... and increasing

Militarization

The Numbers

Inflation Adjusted Billions of Dollars

U.S. Military Outlays

Adjusted for Inflation (billions of FY2005 dollars)

As Percentage of GDP

Military expenditures as a percentage of GDP

Following Catherine Lutz and Michael Geyer, I define *militarization* as the entire process by which societies produce their capacity for collective violence... and the consequences thereof.

American Legion Rider, 2005

They Should Send Us

Mobilized veterans are acutely aware of the mobilization vs. militarization disconnect.

Many veteran informants indicated a desire to go “down range” after 9/11.

One informant, a Marine Corps vet and American Legion leader, said explicitly what many seemed to be intimating: “They should send us...,” meaning 40 and 50-something veterans.

Flag Raising: 2005, American Legion

Negotiating Gendered Meanings

- The current disconnect between mobilization and militarization, I argue has consequences for negotiating veteran identity, much of which is gender-loaded... even for female veterans.
- One of the historic adaptations of veteran identity is what I call the “banalization” of service: meaning that every veteran is conditioned to accept his own experiences as “normal” and ordinary, pointing always to the “more veteran”... ultimately ending with the heroic dead.

Who is Who

- The Cold War era veteran who worked as an Army radar man and installed relays in Grenada in the early 1980s, referred to himself as a REMF and pointed to the Marine Corps veteran of the Beirut deployment (and barracks bombing).
- That Beirut veteran points to a Vietnam vet who served 5 tours and was awarded 4 Purple Hearts.
- The Vietnam vet joked he should have learned to duck and identified the WW2 vet who jumped in behind enemy lines on D-Day as the genuine article.

Veteran Habitus

The banalization of service is part of the ordinary milieu (or habitus) in which and through which veteran habits and identity are formed.

This habitus partakes of a wider habitus of militarization that goes far beyond the DoD spending, and is implicated in regimes of toughening and hardening aimed particularly at young men, as the backdrop for the redundant development of potential soldiers.

Vet habitus partakes of this militarized habitus, but is also consciously separate from it, standing *between* military masculinity and militarization.

Performance and Pissing Contests

While deferring any claims to being the “real” veterans (in person), mobilized veterans create occasions on which they can perform veteran masculinity. This involves rituals such as funerals, flag raisings, and flag “retirements” (ceremonial burning).

It also, and more importantly, involves the associated social occasions during which they have situational permission to compete with each other and to “flip each other shit” and engage in “pissing contests”.

Covers, Uncovered

The Set-up

Dramatis Persona: Mark, Larry, Mark's Daughter

Mark's daughter, an AL Aux member, arrives late, without her
“cover” (hat)

In the AL and Aux, to be Uncovered is to be out of uniform... also
soldiers regularly have anxiety dreams about this...

Before Larry and the others can flick him shit about his daughter
being “out of uniform”... Mark reacts:

“Where’s your cover [i.e. cap]? And there is only one right answer,” he demanded.

“I forgot it,” she answered, shrugging, looking at him like he’d lost his mind.

“That’s the wrong answer,” he said. “You’re out of uniform.”

At that point Larry and Ryan stifled chuckles. Mark’s wife, also a veteran, interrupted the exchange by pointing out that the ceremony was about to start. Mark muttered “This isn’t over,” but took his place for the ceremony.

Conclusions

Veteran masculinity is a zone of contestation, defined *against* civilian masculinity and military masculinity, but proven and performed almost exclusively for other veterans. Current modes of performance may not be radically different from those of the past... which in itself is a commentary on the state of militarization waiting to be read