ALAPSZAKOS

SZAKDOLGOZAT

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Anglisztika alapszak

Amerikanisztika szakirány

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ALAPSZAKOS

SZAKDOLGOZAT

A Katonai Veteránok Helyzete az Amerikai Társadalomban
Military Veterans in United States Society

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Introduction

The military of the United States has always been highly regarded. Gallup has been conducting surveys to gauge citizens' satisfaction with different institutions in the US. In 2018, the military was voted as the institution with the highest confidence rating among people, with almost 80% of Americans putting more faith in the military than any other societal institution. This position has been held by the armed forces for almost two decades (Saad). The military is praised for its variety of achievements in the past as well as in the present. Its virtues, according to the public, are its competence, historical significance, and the people who serve. However, military veterans do not receive the same acknowledgment. Active duty service members are characterized as "Volunteers / Selfless / Willing to give up lives / Brave (…) Good / Reliable / Committed / Disciplined" (Newport, "U.S. Confidence in"). At the same time, veterans are often branded as broken, fragile, and crazy (Burgess; Kintzle et al. 13).

This thesis examines the status of US veterans in society. The first section outlines the differences between civil and military life; the phenomenon of the civil-military cultural gap, and how it affects retired service members. The second section explains the veteran's need towards education after discharge. The third section moves onto the obstacles veterans face when looking for employment. The following section examines the hardships that veterans have to go through when applying for health care. The last section will be a conclusion that summarizes the thesis.

Due to the highly divisive nature of the topic, it is not always possible to remain objective when discussing veterans' issues, since in cases their own narratives are used. However, as it is imperative to get to know retired service members' own accounts on the issues they face, this is an integral part to understand the veterans of the US.

In this thesis, veterans will be referred to by the wars they fought in i.e. veterans of World War I-II, Vietnam. In some cases Afghanistan and Iraq veterans are referred to as post-9/11 veterans.

An Overview of the Civil-Military Cultural Gap

This section will examine the differences between military and civilian life and culture, along with how said characteristics create the civil-military cultural gap. Additionally, the difficulties of transitioning between military and civilian life will be explained. A subsection will be dedicated to the different experiences that the Vietnam and Afghanistan veterans had when returning from the war.

First of all, life as a member of the military and as a civilian is vastly different. This dissimilarity is due to the fact that these are two distinct cultures. Raymond Williams divides culture into three categories to define it. For the purpose of this thesis, the third category will be used, which is the 'social' definition. This is explained as the unique behavioral patterns that can be detected among groups of people who coexist in the same environment (48). According to Scott, culture consists of a collection of 'collective representations' that are defined as:

> (…) beliefs, ideas, values, symbols and expectations that form the ways of
> thinking and feeling that are general and enduring within a particular society or
> a social group and that are shared as its collective property. (33)

These are the unique ideas and concepts of each society and group of people, which allows them to work as a cohesive unit, on the basis of their shared values. To understand some core differences among American civilian and military culture, one needs to take more than one factor into consideration. For the purpose of this section, diversity and self-reliance will be examined as characteristics, as they seem to be an important part of American culture and illustrate the differences in civilian and military life.

Diversity and self-reliance

As a nation of immigrants, the country's diverse population contributed significantly to today's culture in America. Apart from being American, people of different backgrounds proudly declare their origins as Hispanic-, Chinese- or African-American for example. Even though these people are unified as a nation under the United States, they still retain their unique characteristics to an extent, and enrich the overall culture. According to Bertsch, immigrants do not always fully assimilate to the new culture, but they keep their original beliefs and values while fitting in to the new environment (Bateman 133). This shows that in civil society it is possible to have more identities and it would not interfere with one's daily life. It is especially true in the US, where individualism is praised and encouraged and everyone aims to create their own personalities. This view is influenced by the traditional American values that were rooted in the early days of the nation's democracy, when everyone was responsible for their own progress, tirelessly working towards their own wealth, not waiting for help from anyone else (Tocqueville 575). Americans live by these values and beliefs even today.

In the military however, these notions are not appreciated, and they can even become a disadvantage. Enlistees are taught from the first day to fight for each other, to move as a unit and, most importantly, to give up their individual identities. In the military they are part of a military branch, and even though at this time more and more people from different ethnicities were able to enroll, their identities as an ethnic group were secondary.

Another important difference between civil and military culture is that the military is still a predominantly masculine environment, and women have to adhere to it. The military, thus, not only strips people of their civil lives, but also of gender in the case of women enlistees, as soldiers have to conform to the ideal masculine image associated with war (Demers 493). Not only do women have to face the difficulties of adapting to a completely different lifestyle in the military,

but they also have to create a whole new persona in order to be accepted to an all men's world (Demers 504). Western culture's image of women has to be left behind in order to assimilate into the military (494). It is an especially pressing issue today, as the number of female enlistees is on the rise. In 2015, during the presidency of Barack Obama, all combat positions became available for women and this decision opened up over 200,000 positions for female soldiers (Rosenberg and Philipps). By 2015, the share of female active duty personnel grew to 15% from the previous 11% that was relevant back in 1990 (Parker et al.).

Basic Training and Acquiring the Military Values

The indoctrination starts with basic training. Depending on the branch of military, basic training lasts between seven and a half to twelve weeks ("Length of Basic"). During this period civilians have to learn everything that enables them to transform into military service members: "Basic Training prepares recruits for all elements of service: physical, mental and emotional." ("Before You Serve"). There are rigorous training regimens, lessons of military customs, combat exercises, as well as bonding with fellow enlistees ("What to Expect In"). A part of basic training is becoming a member of a unified institute. In the military each branch has their own uniforms, and grooming regulations: these are the rules regarding their appearances including haircut, clothing and uniform as well as tattoos; things that in civilian life can distinguish one person from another (Powers). Strictly and diligently adhering to the set guidelines is essential to fit into the military image, however, by doing so enlistees are stripped of their unique civilian selves. According to Rod Powers: "The training programs are scientifically and psychologically designed to disassemble the 'civilian' and build from scratch a proud, physically fit, and dedicated member of the military". All this certainly helps new recruits in adjusting to military life; however, at the same time it effectively alienates them from civil society. In some cases, this drastic change of worldview gets so deeply ingrained in service members that they find it virtually impossible to

shed the military values following their discharge. Values that are praised and treasured in the military are in cases considered to be disadvantageous when trying to reintegrate to civil society. For example, military leaders and civilian employers look for different qualities in their subordinates. In the military, recruits are taught to follow a strict group-centric mindset, where they have to learn to be part of a whole system and they have to be able to willingly leave their own interest behind.

During basic training all enlistees have to learn obedience to their superiors, and how to operate within the chain of command that is unique to the armed forces. They also have to be aware that in the military the responsibility is on a different scale to what they experienced in their civilian life: "They are responsible for the lives and safety of those who work for them" (Halvorson 8). Furthermore, they learn a whole new set of values as well, including one of their most important command: "Leave no one behind" (9). Enlistees have to learn to look out for each other and prioritize others' lives before their own without hesitation. This kind of obedience and discipline is part of the universal military culture, and differs greatly from the one that they usually practice in the civilian world (Osiel 33). This is in contrast with the self-reliant belief of the Americans who, according to Tocqueville, "owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone (…)" (575). This is a fundamental divide between civil and military culture.

Reintegration to Civilian Life and the Difficulties that Follow

Even though there is a comprehensive process of introducing enlistees to military culture, the same does not happen when service members leave the military. There is a Congress approved Transition Assistance program in place, which aims to aid to-be-veterans and prepare them for their transitions, however, veterans feel that the program is not long and comprehensive enough ("Transition Assistance Program"). This results in an already highly vulnerable group trying to find

their place in society without proper instructions on how to do so. This is an aspect of the military that generates a range of problems for veterans. A post-9/11 veteran explains the situation as the following:

> A lot of people joke that there's no un-basic training. Like I notice when you go in the military you have that little nine-week period where they just like erase everything you know and just teach you. But then once you're out there's, like I didn't know there was help out there or anything. (qtd. in Kintzle et al. 12)

In the following paragraph, the reintegration difficulties of Vietnam and Afghanistan as well as Iraq veterans will be examined.

Neither Vietnam nor post-9/11 veterans received an overall positive welcome upon their return. Veterans of the Vietnam War (1955-1975) had a difficult time re-adjusting to society, as they were faced with unease and hostility: "Society as a whole was certainly unable and unwilling to receive these men with the support and understanding they needed" (Appy 306). Veterans carried the heavy burden of all the tragedy they faced on the battlefield and they were unable to connect with civilians. As Christian G. Appy explains, Vietnam veterans at the time were systematically forced into isolation, as they were seen as government pawns, and some even felt after a while that they are unable to be near civilians due to this treatment (306). The Vietnam War was by no means viewed as a success; according to the National Archives' Military Records, by the end of the war there were a total number of 58,220 fatal casualties ("Vietnam War U.S."). Additionally over 500,000 service members deserted and an anti-war movement started as well. As Americans at home could follow the proceedings on TV, they were faced with the terrors of war ("Vietnam War"). Nevertheless, civilians were unable to connect with returning veterans, as watching the broadcasts of the conflicts was not the same as experiencing them. As a result, they were more likely to turn away from the returning retired service members and disregard them.

Vietnam veterans were the first group of retired military personnel to be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition that at the time was still largely unknown, having been recognized five years after the end of the war (Schlenger and Corry). "PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault." ("PTSD Basics"). PTSD has an especially high rate of occurrence among veterans, as combat situations and the stress of military life add up to admittedly traumatic events. According to studies, PTSD can develop right after the traumatic event, but it can also show the first symptoms after years have passed ("Aging Veterans and"; Marmar et al. 880).

Veterans of the Afghanistan War (2001-present) and Iraq war (2003-2011) face similar, but at the same time drastically different problems. They too have a hard time reintegrating into society and finding their place in civilian life. Whereas the Vietnam War triggered a negative response from civilians, in the case of post- 9/11 veterans, society does not appear to care about them (Singer and Brooking). As less people have military connections, it becomes easier to disregard the war itself and not follow the day-to-day events of it, like at the time of the Vietnam War. Furthermore, the conflicts no longer have direct financial or emotional consequences on civilians. People are not affected by the war to the same degree as before, and as a result they are indifferent towards the veterans who return (Fazal and Kreps).

A problem today's US veterans face is that only a fraction of people share the same experience as them. In 2016, the number of veterans in the US accounted for almost 10% of the adult population (Livingston). Compared to the total US population of over 300 million, veterans are a small group who share the same experience ("U.S. and World Population Clock"). Moreover, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) predicts further decline in the coming years (Bialik). Before the draft ended in January 1973, there was an abundance of people with military experience, and being a veteran was more common than today. For over 30 years, from 1940 to 1970, the majority

of men shared this same experience (Newport "Veteran Status"). With the era of the all-volunteer military, the number of people involved with the military has drastically dropped. In 2015, the share of active military personnel was 0.4% of the American population, so in the upcoming years, the number of veterans will likely decrease even further (Parker et al.).

All the above translates to the hostile environment veterans return to. It is not only the social structure and culture that is foreign for them. Retired service members have difficulties assimilating into their civilian roles as students and workers too. The following section will elaborate more on the possible explanations behind this.

Educational Opportunities for Veterans

Due to their alienation from civilian society, veterans constitute to one of the most vulnerable groups of US society. Military service changes people in their very core while they are just recruits. It instills new sets of values and worldviews and as a result, when returning to the civilian world, it seems foreign to them. As discussed in the previous section, this can be one reason why veterans face a variety of difficulties when trying to reintegrate into society. To be able to get by in civilian life, a large number of veterans have to continue their education and attain a degree. The following section is about the difficulties along the way.

As a result of the limitations of the all-volunteer military, the armed forces are increasingly compelled to rely on multiple deployments to keep their numbers consistently large and sufficiently fulfil their peacekeeping obligations. Following the armed conflict of the 9/11 terror attacks in general each service member was deployed multiple times; approximately 2.77 million enlistees were involved in 5.4 million military actions; this translates to each service member participating in at least two armed conflicts (Wenger et al.). Due to the inherently violent nature of war even one deployment is demanding for service members both physically and psychologically. Multiple deployments, thus put extreme pressure on the participants. As it is in the best interest of the

military that their enlistees serve for as long as possible on as many missions as possible, the minimum age is 17, so enlistees have the chance for a longer military career ahead ("Are You Eligible"). This, however, means that veterans do not have the same level of education as their civilian counterparts competing for the same position. This indicates that retired service members have difficulties finding a workplace and building a career. According to a 2015 study by Pew Research, less than 7% of active duty enlistees had a Bachelor's degree, compared to 19% of US adults (Parker et al.). Even though in the military they learn valuable skills, these, in a lot of cases, are not appreciated in the civilian job market, so veterans are motivated to go to universities to acquire a diploma and attain further education. They receive an extra motivation from the US Government as well, with incentives such as the monetary aid of the G.I. Bill of Rights (G.I. Bill).

The G.I. Bill started in 1924, known as the World War Adjusted Act, a financial aid which was awarded to veterans proportionately to their time spent in active duty. However, it allowed the government to stretch the deadline for payment for 20 years, which caused significant outrage among veterans. Throughout the years the original concept was changed and updated to facilitate current needs. Today it can be used to cover expenses after discharge, including education and housing aid, books and the chance to transfer these benefits to a next of kin ("Post-9/11 GI"; "History of the G.I."). The opportunity for further education after discharge is sought after by those veterans who had no higher education experience prior to enlistment. This need has been realized by for-profit education companies.

FPCUs: A Need Recognized and Exploited

For-profit colleges and universities (FPCU) in general offer short term programs concentrating on specific occupational fields. As a result the courses usually target a particular industry, career field, or even job role. The educational programs of FPCUs are aimed at groups of people with unique needs and expectations, such as veterans, however, in some cases these courses are not

accredited (Hentschke et al. 1-3). Additionally, it is notable that these FPCUs historically distribute far less degrees compared to traditional higher education institutions. Furthermore, other schools and institutions might not accept the diplomas that get awarded (Breneman et al. 7-8; "Share of All Degrees"). According to 2008-2009 data, 66% of the students of FPCUs receiving the most benefits dropped out without acquiring a diploma (Harkin 5).

FPCUs are obliged to separate their revenue depending on whether it is federal fund or not, with federal funds not exceeding more than 90% of the total revenue. Since educational aid from the G.I. Bill is considered as a private source of financing, it is in the best interest of FPCUs to enroll as many veterans as possible, a practice known as the 90-10 rule (Petraeus). To achieve this ratio, these establishments apply aggressive marketing strategies and misleading advertisements to draw in a high volume of applicants to maximize their gains using this loophole. Tom Harkin's report found that even though the overall student enrollment has decreased in the period between 2010-2013 at the top eight FPCUs, the veteran enrollment ratio in all of these facilities increased between 61-657% (8). In 2014, seven of the eight highest ranked FPCUs were investigated because of accusations concerning unlawful practices during marketing and advertisement for recruitment as well as operations.

As an example, the University of Phoenix, an FPCU giant, used recruitment and advertising practices that implied that the college was endorsed by the military. They held sponsored events, seminars and workshops, where they encouraged attendees to pay special attention to the University of Phoenix and they used military insignia without permission (Glantz). In 2012, President Barack Obama signed an executive order that aimed to "end fraudulent and unduly aggressive recruiting techniques on and off military installations, as well as misrepresentation (...)" ("Executive Order 13607"). The "gainful employment" law was implemented in 2015, and its aim was to hold accountable for-profit institutions "for graduating students with poor job prospects and overwhelming debt". However, the Trump Administration plans to eliminate this regulation by the

summer of 2019, so FPCUSs would no longer be in this accountability system, and they keep targeting veterans (Green).

Veterans fall victims of false and misleading information from recruiters regarding tuition fees, the length of the program, as well as future prospects following graduation (Harkin 10). Retired service members, with assistance from the ever helpful recruiters, sign up for these programs and leave with debts and no use for their diplomas, if they are able to obtain one. In The Hechinger Report, two veterans talk about their experiences with FPCUs. Both of them emphasized how obvious it was that the university wanted them to enroll going so far as to help them fill the necessary paperwork and also offering assistance when applying for G.I. Bill benefits, and later when those did not cover the tuition fee, for student loans. These veterans were left heavily indebted, joining the ranks of many others with nearly $1.3 trillion in loans outstanding in the US today. A large part of this debt was accumulated by students attending FPCUs, with over 10% of borrowers having difficulties paying the loans, and defaulting on them (Cilluffo; "National Student Loan"). According to McFarland et al. "the percentage who had student loans was higher for those who attended private for-profit institutions (78 percent) than for those who attended private nonprofit (58 percent) and public (49 percent) institutions" (29). This means that not only do veterans not receive the education they hope for, but they also end up with student loan debts. The accumulated debt combined with grim prospects on their careers put a heavy burden on retired service members. The following section will elaborate on the difficulties of veterans when looking for a job.

Veterans in the Civilian Workforce

This section will detail the importance of having a career in US society, and what challenges veterans face on the US job market upon their return. The first subsection will examine the importance and significance of a career in US culture. Following this, the unique situation of

veterans will be explained, and the difficulties they face in employment due to their military training. Moving on, the next subsection will be about the health issues of veterans, and the impacts these have on their employment.

Veterans and the American Dream

Having a job is an important part of an individual's life, as being able to provide for oneself is a necessity as well as a symbol of independence and a significant part of one's identity (Scott 12; Yanchus et al. 37). In America, being self-reliant and independent is a fundamental part of a person's social standing. As the individual is praised for their accomplishments, having a successful career can be a measure for one's overall achievement in life. "The individualism of modern culture places great stress on the need to maximize income through diligence and application in a chosen occupation" (Scott 12). Attaining success in life and being able to provide for oneself is a cornerstone of the American Dream. The construct of the American Dream is a fundamental part of US history and culture. This notion has more than one aspect, among others the idea for a better life in America, and that through hard work and dedication it is possible to achieve a better life (Cullen 7). This, however, does not necessarily mean unattainable wealth, rather a sense of personal fulfillment which varies from person to person. In fact, according to the survey conducted by Pew Research Center regarding the current perception of the American Dream, being wealthy ranked as the least essential element of it (Smith).

The Unique Difficulties of the Veteran Employee

Even though fulfilling the American Dream does not necessarily revolve around wealth, having a career is an integral part of it (Smith). This poses obstacles for veterans, as they have a more difficult time adjusting to a job role compared to their civilian competitors. This phenomenon is explained by Merton on the principle that for the same goal, people have to rely on their own

sets of resources to advance towards it (qtd. in Scott 12). In the case of civilians and veterans it translates to difficulties brought on by the different experience and skill sets these two groups possess. Since those with only civilian backgrounds are not expected to assimilate to a whole new culture, i.e. military culture, they have significant advantages when performing in a civilian job environment. According to a 2012 Prudential report, 69% of veterans asked confessed job acquisition to be the greatest challenge when returning from active duty ("Veterans' Employment Challenges" 4).

Apart from the usual struggles that every civilian member of the workforce shares, veterans face their own unique issues. Mcallister et al. argues that following the rigorous training of the military the service members acquired such characteristics that made them unfit for civilian employment (94). In the military, from the early days recruits are taught that they are part of a cohesive unit, they always have to have each other's backs, and consequently, they have to be able to rely on the other enlistees. In a sense, this process strips enlistees of their individualism. This indoctrination is essential for survival during combat situations, and it strengthens the bonds between the service members. As opposed to this, in civilian life the same rigid rules cannot be observed to this extent. Life as a service member follows a strict and steady structure, with tried and constructed daily routines and the constant adherence to an unyielding hierarchy from day one.

This pattern does not align with the ever present individualism of the civilian workforce, and puts veterans in a detrimental situation compared to their self-driven, more materialistic civilian peers (Demers 162).

Additionally, as a result of the military values and strict training, throughout the time of active duty, service members are surrounded by a close-knit community. The pressure of the battlefield and the indoctrination of military values result in a unique awareness of each other, which lacks from civilian relationships. Sinek proposed that the merit based system of military operations and business life are outright opposites of each other's in the sense that the two systems reward opposite

values. The military in essence fosters an environment which enables and enforces people to regard each other with trust and cooperation. This is useful on the battlefield under life threatening circumstances; however, it is a great disadvantage in civilian life where people only work for their own gain and in cases knowingly sabotage their peers (8-9). After the military service, veterans have to face this completely different environment of the civilian working life. They have to go through not only mental hardships stemming from this different mindset but also physical barriers as a large number of veterans return disabled.

Health Issues Put Veterans at Additional Disadvantage

Another issue unique to veterans is the hindrances they face during job search and employment as a result of their combat related injuries and health problems. Owing to the improvements of protective equipment and medical care in the military and on site medical attention during combat, a large number of previously fatal injuries are now treated immediately (Reiber et al. 276). This change in numbers is especially conspicuous when observing figures from the conflicts of Vietnam and Iraq. According to Goldberg, the survival rate of all injured service members in Vietnam was a mere 86.5% compared to the more recent Iraqi conflicts 90.4%, which shows an improvement rate of over 4 percentage points (13). While these advancements in hospitalization saved plenty of lives, the surviving veterans face reintegration into civilian life with major injuries apart from the usual hardships of an uninjured veteran. According to a study by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics 32% of post- 9/11 veteran had some kind of service connected disability, compared to 17% of all other veterans ("Profile of Post-9/11" 10). 65% of respondents in the Prudential survey have some kind of mental or physical disorder after discharge. These conditions contribute to the challenges of civilian life for these veterans, as retired service members with the aforementioned health issues are more likely to find civilian transition and employment burdensome than their uninjured peers ("Veterans' Employment Challenges" 6). Additionally,

disabled Americans in general face more obstacles than the non-disabled, so disabled veterans suffer from both of these issues' negative effects.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was ratified in 1990; "a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public ("What is the Americans"). In the past 20 years, a lot of improvements have been made; however, the employment situation of the disabled is still grave. The disabled are still more likely to be unemployed than the non-disabled. Furthermore, the gap in employment and wages is still present, and shows no sign of disappearing in the near future, as recent findings show that apart from minor fluctuations there has been no significant change in the past two decades (Kraus 2; Katz et al.). This is an important issue for veterans, as over half of the total veteran population suffers from some kind of a disability, and these people are further discriminated due to their conditions; the social reaction to the disabled is still mainly negative. Employers list a variety of reasons as to why they are not keen on hiring workers with disabilities. Over 80% of respondents felt that "They don't know how to handle the needs of a worker with a disability on the job" (Kaye 530). This shows that the special needs of the disabled are still unknown to a large number of employers, even though the ADA has been in place for quite some time now. Furthermore, there is an increase in PTSD diagnoses among post- 9/11 veterans, which is in part attributed to the decrease of civilian support (Frayne 33). Stigmatized by their physical and psychological scars, veterans have an increasingly difficult time returning to civilian life.

Difficulties When Applying for VA Benefits

The following section will shed light on the difficulties veterans face when applying for Veterans Affairs benefits. Keeping the veteran population satisfied is in the country's best interest, as they are the ones that spread the stories of what life is like in the military as well as following

discharge. It is a significant aspect, as all enlistees hope to become veterans and rejoin society, and with the draft era being closed, these stories shape perspectives of the military. A favorable view of the military and the government's support system for retired service members has the potential of yielding higher enlistee numbers. This means that a high rate of veterans' satisfaction is imperative for the US to remain the global superpower it is today. Retired service members receive benefits on account of their status; however, in cases these benefits lack in quality. Additionally, "Veterans returning from combat operations are eligible to enroll in VA health care for five years from the date of their most recent discharge without having to demonstrate a service-connected disability or satisfy an income requirement" (Murphy et al. 5). The following paragraphs will detail the experiences veterans have when applying for VA benefits.

While on active duty, service members rely on the Department of Defense (DoD) for health care. Following their discharge, they fall under the Department of Veterans Affairs' jurisdiction. The handover of patients between these two providers is difficult and time consuming. According to Murphy et al. as there is no joint database of patients, veterans have to go through the same physical checkups they may have already went through possibly interrupting a treatment already in process. Additionally, they have to build a relationship with a new physician. Following the trauma and physical toll of the military service this is an unnecessary hassle (19). Furthermore, both DoD and VA are criticized for not properly monitoring their patients' progress and the long-term effects of the treatment of PTSD, one of the signature conditions of today's veterans ("Treatment for Posttraumatic" 1403).

Apart from this, another pressing issue is the long waiting time at VA medical facilities. The Department of Veterans Affairs is the government agency that caters for veterans' needs, and the Veterans Health Administration is responsible for providing medical services. Even though this dedicated body exists for the aid of veterans, there are many obstacles that retired veterans face when they need medical attention. The lack of adequate healthcare for veterans is a serious issue,

as this is a group of people who definitely need help. As mentioned in the previous section very few of those who leave the battlefield do so without medical issues, may those be physical disfigurements or mental health problems. The surge of medical conditions such as PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injuries mean that veterans are now more than ever would be reliant on easily accessible healthcare (Reiber 275). Additionally, long waiting time for health care also bring other issues up for discussion. According to a 2014 report by the Office of the Inspector General, 1700 veterans were waiting to receive an appointment at an Arizona based medical center, and they were not even on the waiting list. Consequently, they were "at risk of being lost or forgotten in Phoenix HCS' convoluted scheduling practices. As a result, these veterans may never obtain their requested or required primary care appointment" ("Review of VHA's" 1). At the same time, the report emphasizes that even being on the waiting list and having an appointment date set up is not a guarantee for a speedy process, as the average waiting time for the first primary care appointment in 2013 was 115 days (3). Not only do longer waiting times create public trust issues towards the VA, it is also harmful for the veterans, as their health suffers for it because during this time their conditions can deteriorate ("Review of VHA's"; Pizer & Prentice S678). Studies show that long waiting times were correlated to worsening medical conditions as well as higher mortality rates among patients (qtd. in Pizer & Prentice S678).

The same research also found that veterans of age 70 or over were more vulnerable to these outcomes, putting an already vulnerable group at an even greater risk (S679). This vulnerability can be attributed to the fact that with older age the chances of chronic diseases increase as well (Amara 2). This is a serious issue as, according to 2016 data, over 30% of the veteran population is over the age of 70 (Bialik). There were attempts to improve these conditions, for example through the Veterans Choice Program:

The Veterans Choice Program is one of several programs through which a Veteran can receive care from a community provider, paid for by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). For example, if a Veteran needs an appointment for a specific type of care, and VA cannot provide the care in a timely manner or the nearest VA medical facility is too far away or too difficult to get to, then a Veteran may be eligible for care through the Veterans Choice Program. ("Veterans Choice Program")

However, this initiative does not fully eliminate the problem, as patients can still wait for 70 days before receiving care, and medical service providers use up all potential time to process the requests ("Veterans Choice Program: Improvements" 22). The current administration tried to overcome this issue by signing the VA Mission Act bill which would expand private healthcare options for veterans. The bill, however, is already causing debates, as the cost of implementation is too high and there are no appropriate fiscal sources to cover it. Furthermore, it is widely regarded as an attempt for privatized healthcare for veterans as well as an opportunity to withdraw federal funding from VA (Sisk). This has the potential for becoming a never-ending circle: "When more is lavished on private care, less is available for maintaining the quality of VA facilities. It facilitates a vicious circle of underfunding VA and using the resulting problems and shortfalls as a rationale for privatization." (Tiefer)

Furthermore, according to a research on post- 9/11 veterans, this group is more prone to have mental health disorders and they are more likely to apply for healthcare services in the VA system. However, reports show that the long waiting times force a number of patients to seek treatments from other providers. Nonetheless, the cost of these treatments is not always covered by their health insurance (Ghosh et al. 2). However, if the health conditions do not allow long waiting times then

veterans need to choose the easier and more expensive option instead of the free or low-cost offer of VA (Pizer & Prentice 626).

Inadequate Health Care for Female Veterans in VA Facilities

Female veterans face additional difficulties when trying to obtain VA health care. Even though women have been members of the military for years now, and their numbers are steadily growing, their healthcare needs following their discharge are not always fulfilled. According to statistics by the Department of Veterans Affairs the "Number of female Veterans grew at an average annual rate of 0.8% between FY 2007 and 2016, while the number who used VA benefits has grown at a rate of 4.3%" ("VA Utilization Profile"). However, due to the issues women face it seems that VA is unable to keep up with their demands.

The complexity of female veterans' health care cannot be underestimated. As previously elaborated, in modern conflicts service members attain more serious wounds than in previous conflicts. Additionally, following during the post-9/11 missions the protective gear provided to women was not properly tailored to the female anatomy, and thus did not proved to be fully effective. "The post-9/11 wounds often result in multiple organ damage with head, eye, ear, spinal, torso and open amputation injuries" (Murphy et al. 11). Women have gender specific issues following an amputation, especially during pregnancy and studies found that "more likely to be unsuccessful in fitting of their prosthesis, to experience skin problems after lower extremity amputation (...), and to have greater intensity of pain. Women with upper extremity amputation are more likely to reject their prosthesis" (12).

Conclusion

To summarize, this thesis shed light on a number of the many issues retired US veterans face after discharge. The first section explained the concept of the civil-military cultural gap. It shed light on some core differences in these two worlds, as well as on the different perceptions of the core American values of diversity and self-reliance. Even though the issue has been in the forefront for years, veterans are still ostracized, and their declining numbers further enhance this issue. The second section examined the educational opportunities and difficulties of retired service members. It found that for-profit institutions draw profit from veterans and in cases they use misleading practices to draw in as many veterans as possible. In the third section the importance of career and the American Dream were explained. Having a career is a cornerstone for the average US citizen. However, veterans face many hurdles along the way to a stable workplace. In addition to their status-based alienation, the health issues and disabilities resulting from deployment also put them at disadvantage compared to their civilian peers. Moving on the next section detailed the shortcomings of the VA system. Long waiting times bring along a number of other issues, and veterans suffer for it. Additionally, women reportedly run into further difficulties on account of their gender and find that regardless of their growing numbers, their medical needs are still not entirely met.

Even though the military is an important part of the overall US conscience, veterans seem to be left behind in many aspects of life. There should be more public awareness on veteran's issues, and more effort to support those who fought for the United States.

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