

RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION CONSTRUCTS “THE VETERAN”:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE STUDENT VETERAN IDENTITY AS FOUND IN CCC
AND *TETYC* SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

by
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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF AUTHOR

I'm just an ole' lump o' coal, but I'm gonna be a diamond someday.

—Billy Joe Shaver

ABSTRACT

Drawing on David L. Wallace's assertion that the field of rhetoric and composition needs to interpret and present our research into cultural communities in ways that no longer tacitly assume our rhetorical choices are neutral, I present a critique of 19 articles from *College Composition and Communication* and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* that contained one or more instances of five keywords and direct references to student veterans. Using a theoretical framework built from theory by James Berlin, Thomas Huckin, and Marguerite Helmers, I expose various stereotypical and problematic tropes we rely on and re-create in our scholarly writing about student veterans.

Additionally, my research reveals the ways in which the data indicates that our field consistently constructs student veterans from a position that places them outside the academy, leaving them without the respect of their instructors and peers, without inclusion in the classroom community, and without our efforts to recognize them as individuals and as students. As Thomas Huckin asserts, "Sociolinguistic research has shown that communities are created and maintained largely by their language-using practices" (85), and so the ways in which we construct the student veteran identity from an undesirable position in our printed scholarship has the effect of maintaining that construction. This practice can keep our viewpoints from evolving to acknowledge and respect our student veterans' backgrounds and working to create pedagogical theories that assist them in their educational goals. By looking closely at how we describe student veterans through our published research, we can begin to recognize the ideological lenses

we all carry, how those lenses view student veterans, and how those lenses subtly or overtly influence our perceptions of the student veterans we teach.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Since the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, veterans have taken the educational funding opportunities to enroll at higher education campuses across the nation. The various post-war periods since that time have brought new numbers of student veterans seeking college educations, and the period we currently find ourselves in is no different from the past.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which continue to return military members to their regular duty assignments all over the United States, make a significant number of military members eligible for the updated G.I. Bill, which offers generous scholarship benefits in comparison to older versions of the bill. Additionally, the military “stop loss” program, a wartime policy that temporarily extends military members’ service contracts, was scheduled to be lifted in 2011, allowing those who were not previously able to leave the service to return to civilian life and, perhaps, higher education (Shanker n. pag.). And veterans seem to be taking advantage of the educational opportunities they’ve earned as the most recent Veterans Administration report from 2011 shows a 39% increase in student veteran enrollment since the expanded G.I. Bill took effect in 2009, swelling the number of student veterans receiving funding from 564,487 in 2009 to 923,836 in 2011 (Veterans Administration Annual Benefits Report n. pag.). Additionally, President Barak Obama has created a new urgency for college attendance with his American Graduation Initiative, a program that seeks to place America as the global education leader with the most college graduates of any other nation (Brandon n. pag.), and current economic

conditions in America make college an attractive option to many, not just veterans. Finally—and more locally—Boise State University serves as home to a significant number of current or former military members with 2,300 (or 11.5 %) of our student body in this category (“G.I. Jobs 2012” n. pag.). These factors, among others, have led higher education to focus a stronger lens on college-bound veterans in recent years, which has resulted in a growing conversation by educators, administrators, and other higher education stakeholders regarding how to best serve this student population.

This newfound attention has served to highlight what veterans, especially combat veterans, need to succeed in an atmosphere that is admittedly different from the one they experienced in military ranks. Higher education has focused attention on making veterans feel welcomed on campuses, “veteran-friendly” has become the new catchphrase, and Veteran Service Offices have opened at schools across the nation. Mentoring programs, where a newly enrolled veteran is paired with an upper-division veteran, have been introduced in some veteran-heavy institutions, and more attention is focused on veterans’ mental and physical needs, which can be more complex than those of the average college population. Additionally, introductory 100 and 200 level courses are being offered to veterans only, creating cohorts of veterans who enroll in introductory-level courses at the same time with the same group. This is a practice rooted in history: WWII veterans were sometimes “fast-tracked,” attending college on an accelerated schedule in order to accomplish an entire year’s work in a few months (Anderson 418).

As an often-required class that introduces incoming students to academic discourse, college level writing and thinking, and flexible literacy strategies, First-Year Writing sits perfectly placed to lead the academy in investigating the appropriate

pedagogies and classroom approaches to accommodate student veterans and allow them to be perceived as a strength to the classroom. But before we can draw conclusions about the way in which we educate veterans in our classrooms, we have to deeply consider what our scholarly rhetorical choices reveal about who we believe student veterans to be. This study examines ten years of articles from two English-focused professional journals, *College Composition and Communication* and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, for references to student veterans; categorizes these references; and analyzes the language used to describe student veterans to present the various presuppositions and stereotypes that may be interpreted therein. The study reveals that the language we use continues to construct student veterans in ways that situate them as outsiders to the academy, a position that we must address and overcome so that we can advance our understanding of student veterans' needs, both educationally and interpersonally.

Chapter One consists of a review of the research, theory, and pedagogy that foundationally constructs the need for additional research about student veterans. Chapter Two builds methodological and theoretical frameworks that guide the structure of my research through the selection and analysis of articles that constitute the study corpus, namely those published from September 11, 2001 through the end of 2011 from *CCC* and *TETYC* that contain one or more instances of five identified keywords: military, war, veteran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Chapter Three presents my analysis of the ways in which rhetoric and composition constructs the identities of student veterans as it appears within the published articles, sorting the data into categories that reveal various stereotypical and problematic tropes we rely on and re-create in our scholarly writing about student veterans.

The remainder of this chapter identifies the rationale for this research and outlines rhetoric and composition's practical and theoretical history leading to the examination of the various cultural communities we find in our classrooms and, finally, positions this study as a necessary element in our current body of research.

Literature Review

This review of pertinent literature begins with a short review of the rise of higher education in America, the events of which brought students onto college campuses who were different from traditional historical attendees. In response, educators from English departments began to study the ways their historical pedagogical methods and approaches instructed students and started important student-centered research, which then led to a number of new teaching approaches. I then review the pedagogical and cultural impact of the Dartmouth Conference and the ways the field of rhetoric and composition has begun to study the various cultures and communities we encounter in our classrooms.

A Brief History of Higher Education in America

Situating this study within the historical timeline of rhetoric and composition's research into various cultures and communities necessitates a short historical background of higher education in America in the late 19th and early-to-mid 20th centuries. While the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (the G.I. Bill) is credited for bringing non-traditional students to college campuses all across America, it doesn't rightly deserve sole billing. The struggle for equal access to higher education in America was a series of steps, the most influential of which were:

- 1862/1890—The Morrill Acts established endowments for states to create public colleges (1862) and required those states still entrenched in racial segregation to split the endowment funds equally and develop institutions for minorities (1890), leading to the creation of what are referred to as historically black colleges and universities (HBCU).
- 1918—Compulsory state laws for children’s attendance of primary and secondary school combined with the rapid growth of technology during the early 20th century led to an increased need for both educated workers as well as educated teachers, increasing the demand for higher education opportunities.
- 1935—The National Youth Administration provided work-study scholarships for 620,000 post-secondary students.
- 1946—The President’s Commission on Higher Education recommended an expanded community college system, improved access to higher education, and equitable educational facilities across economic levels and races.
- 1954—The Supreme Court verdict of *Brown v. Board of Education* ended the “separate but equal” segregation of public schools.
- 1958—Title II of the National Defense Education Act created a need-based scholarship geared toward low-income students studying math, science, and foreign language.
- 1964—The Civil Rights Act, a landmark bill in American history, outlawed racial and gender discrimination.
- 1965—The Higher Education Act, a law with five parts, including Title IV, “represented the first generally available aid program for postsecondary students. The two most important elements of Title IV were federal ‘scholarships’ or grants, and federally insured loans with subsidies on interest for eligible full-time students” (TG Research and Analytical Services 20).

Finally, the post-WWII G.I. Bill was influential in creating a newly affluent middle class by allowing military servicemen to attain college degrees, some of who would not have ordinarily pursued them. What is not as widely acknowledged is the impact the bill had for creating a sort of college mindset for America. The children of those who benefitted from the G.I. Bill grew up with college-educated parents, in turn creating an expectation for their own participation in college. These post-War “boomers” (children born from 1946-1954) came of college-age in the mid-60s to late 70s, during the time English composition began to change.

So within this framework, we see the external factors at work that opened the doors to higher education for many who desired it, which in turn demanded radical changes to traditional methods and approaches to writing instruction. Veterans, although acknowledged as students entering higher education, were then evaluated through the lens of what we refer to as current-traditional pedagogy, with its narrow focus on student demonstration of mastery over the rote aspects of writing instruction, such as grammar, spelling, and other technical issues. Although a major part of the post-World War II student body, student veterans were measured by their ability (or inability) to fit into the pre-cut role of the traditional college-bound student.

A Meeting at Dartmouth

In 1966, rhetoric and composition scholars began to examine the rich backgrounds and diverse skills students bring to the classroom. Pedagogically, rhetoric and composition as a field was in its infancy, having begun the split from literary studies into its own discipline in the years just after the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English held at Dartmouth College in 1966 (Sublette 348). Although it is more widely recalled, the conference was actually the second conference of its kind; the first held in 1958 by the Modern Language Association entitled “The Basic Issues in the Teaching of English.” This conference was a gathering of 28 English educators who met to discuss overarching issues within English education at levels from elementary school through college. The members of that conference came up with 35 issues they collaboratively felt the English education profession needed to address. Number nine on that list was the question “*How should the basic program in English be modified for the less able student?*” The collaborative reply:

The preceding issues ... might attract the enthusiastic support of the profession if all the students were what we call “good” or “superior.” For them, some such basic program might produce a steadily increasing competence in writing and an understanding and delight in literature. But unfortunately not all students are “good” or “superior.” Teachers point out that individual differences in English ability are very marked, from the earliest grades on up. Can these individual differences be productively nurtured? It is sometimes charged that a distorted concern over individual differences in reading ability has brought all members of a class down to the level of the mediocre student instead of challenging each learner to his utmost. Is some kind of “remedial reading” for the weaker students the answer? Or “enrichment” for the better students? Is homogenous grouping desirable at any or all levels? If it is, how should this grouping be done? If it is not, what allowances for individual variation should be made? (Conference Members 5)

From examining just one of the 35 concerns of the Basic Issues conference, we can clearly see that English educators (as represented by this gathering of 28) were still struggling to understand the interplay between pedagogical approaches and the varying competence levels of the students they taught.

While instructional approaches had developed from those used in English instruction historically (what the field now calls current-traditional rhetoric), the overall focus continued to be on how “remedial” instruction was to be incorporated into the classroom, if it was to be done at all. By the time the Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English (the Dartmouth Seminar) convened eight years later, the focus of educators had noticeably shifted. Albert H. Marckwardt, a linguist at Princeton University, gave the following address at a meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in New York in late 1966:

“Between 1958 and 1966 there were profound shifts in the educational scene, one philosophic, one social, and one political...

The social event to which I have referred, to put it bluntly and perhaps overdramatically, was the rediscovery of the American lower class. During this period a number of events combined to disabuse us of the notion that we were simply one vast and relatively undifferentiated middle class—with gradations within it certainly, but essentially middle. I need merely mention them. The increasing

incidence of school dropouts, reaping its harvest of unemployment and juvenile crime. Racial conflict especially in the urban centers, fixing our attention upon miserable living conditions and lack of both educational and employment opportunities. Our realization that various kinds of aptitude and achievement tests appear to be middle-class oriented and thus unfair to children from culturally deprived surroundings is just another instance of our heightened awareness of the extremes of the social spectrum. And as a part of our exploration into the various facets of the lower sector of our society, we learned how sharply differentiated our class dialects were—an intriguing discovery to the linguistic geographer, but a shattering one to the social ameliorist. (Marckwardt 10-11)

While we may bristle at Marckwardt's language choices (his description of cultural and economic differences as indicative of the "lower class," "culturally deprived," and "lower sector of our society"), we see, for the first time, recognition that English pedagogical approaches were not meeting the needs of all students and that drastic changes were pressing if teachers wanted to help students of all proficiency levels succeed.

In its various time periods, the matriculation of students who, by instructors' opinions, were "ineducable," has been identified in professional publications as a literacy crisis, with blame for students' lack of skills cast in all directions. As educator Karen Spear writes in 1997 in *The Review of Higher Education*,

Interestingly, each successive literacy crisis in American higher education parallels the infusion of large numbers of new kinds of students into colleges and universities: the town and farm children of the post Civil War period, returning soldiers in both World War periods, children of immigrants in the 1930s, the first wave of inner-city students in the 1960s, and the current wave of multicultural students. (321)

Spear puts it succinctly: "So long as there was a fixed curriculum taught to a very homogenous student body by a very homogenous faculty, there was no literacy crisis. *The concept of universal literacy made sense when the universe was relatively narrow*" (321 emphasis mine). Finally writing educators became aware that the responsibility for the various literacy crises lay not with the students' inability to learn, nor with secondary education's failure to prepare them, but within the traditional English composition

curriculum. Robert P. Parker, Jr., educator and Dartmouth attendee, writes that the Dartmouth conference,

proposed that students be seen as persons in their own right, constantly active in their own forms of learning, who bring to school resources of their own in language, experience, knowledge and strategies for learning and living. The effect of this was to change the entire view of the students 'status as learner' to acknowledge that 'his own abilities become intrinsic to the knowledge being grasped'. (Parker 320)

We have come so far in this endeavor that his view seems to be a statement of the obvious. Yet the impact of this revelation cannot be understated; it served to change education in all forms.

Once the ideas from the Dartmouth conference began to spread throughout English departments, the field of rhetoric and composition responded quickly and powerfully. The process movement, previously a marginal pedagogical approach, quickly mounted as an opponent to current-traditional pedagogy before exploding into subdivisions that include expressive, cognitive, social, and epistemic approaches. The movement was marshaled by names that stand today as giants in the field: James Britton, Peter Elbow, Janet Emig, Lester Faigley, Ken Macrorie, James Moffett, Donald Murray, and Mina Shaughnessy, to name a few. Some of these participated directly in the research explosion of the late 60s and 70s, while some laid the theoretical groundwork in previous decades, which the researchers of the time period drew upon and adapted according to their need (a process that continues today). The NCTE, at their annual meeting in 1974, established a position statement, entitled "Resolution on the Students' Right to their Own Language," in which they stated they had become:

concerned in the early 1970s about a tendency in American society to categorize nonstandard dialects as corrupt, inferior, or distorted forms of standard English,

rather than as distinct linguistic systems, and the prejudicial labeling of students that resulted from this view. (n. pag.)

English scholars responded to the new pedagogical paradigm with fervor as a juggernaut of ideas for research developed. As Lad Tobin writes in *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, “Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, hundreds of scholars in the field began to publish studies of writers writing. The scope and breadth of this scholarship were stunning: researchers began to focus on writers at all stages of their education, at all stages of the process, at all levels of ability, and in all sorts of environments” (8).

The momentum of this time period continues unabated today, as researchers continue to explore all facets of writing, both in the classroom and out, which positions my research study to be well supported by previous studies of various communities that comprise our student population. Additionally, the way is open for my examination of student veteran identity construction to add to our ongoing exploration into the ways our language choices construct a rhetorical picture of our students.

Basic writers were the first group to receive their due recognition as able, capable, and—most importantly—educable. Many veterans throughout history have come into the classroom as basic writers, so this important research affected the way educators looked at student veterans. But while the field of rhetoric and composition has gone on to recognize the importance of feminist theory, queer theory, Native American theory, Latino theory, and expanded the field of basic writing theory immensely, veterans as a distinct sociological group have yet to undergo examination in the field of rhetoric and composition.

In 1977, Mina Shaughnessy’s research into what she termed “basic writers” in *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* led to revelations of

basic writers as those who “write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes” (390). In this way, the study of non-historical college attendees began to create an identity for its research subjects, one quite strikingly positioned from a positivist viewpoint—that some students who sat in higher education classrooms might not be inculcated into the standardized forms of English, yet they brought a rich base of knowledge, thought, and ideas to the classroom. *Errors and Expectations* was followed in 1979 by Sondra Perl’s article, “The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers” and in 1980 by David Bartholomae’s article, “The Study of Error.” Before long, feminist studies, powered by the political and cultural struggles American women were facing, spawned research projects.

In “Feminist Pedagogy,” Susan C. Jarratt writes, “What makes feminist pedagogy distinctive is its investment in a view of contemporary society as sexist and patriarchal, and of the complicity of reading, writing, and teaching in those conditions” (115). Feminist approaches to teaching composition explored the traditional relationships of power between genders, how those relationships were manifested historically, and how the male/female dynamic influenced the workplace. The focus on the distribution of power and the ways power overtly and subtly influences a person’s potential and achievement was also demonstrated in ethnographic research into African American, Native American, and Hispanic cultures, as well as research of Appalachian residents, deaf students, abused women, adult students, second-language students, first-generation students, and GLBTQ members, among others.

Within this review of relevant research, the emergence of non-historical college attendees in the academy is evident. At the same time, the creation of the field of rhetoric and composition as well as the emergence of a focus on various cultural communities within our classrooms illuminates the need for a focus on the veteran community in higher education—and, more specifically in writing pedagogy. In the next chapter, Chapter Two, I construct frameworks that justify the methodology used to select and sort the research data as well as identify those theories that contribute to my analysis of the data.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

In this chapter, I construct frameworks that justify the methodology used to select and sort the research data as well as identify those theories that contribute to my analysis of the data. In the Theoretical Framework section, I draw upon James Berlin's research in the implications of foregrounding all rhetoric as inherently ideological and review Marguerite Helmers' work on the rhetorical construction of "the student" as found in the "Interchanges" column of *CCC* journals. Then, I explore how David L. Wallace's work helps situate my own; he argues that scholars of rhetoric and composition need to more overtly examine the ideological lenses, background experiences, and individual sociological identities they bring to cultural studies and to deeply examine the ways those lenses and experiences impact their interpretation of those communities. The methodology then draws upon the work of Thomas Huckin, a linguistic scholar who has developed a method for discourse analysis that is both qualitative and quantitative. The key foundation of Huckin's methodology is the holistic categorization of the data, which I drew upon in my own category constructions. Finally, the Methods section outlines the steps I took in selecting the study data and creating the body of data for analysis.

Theoretical Framework

James Berlin, in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," examines three theoretical approaches to composition pedagogy: cognitivist, expressionist, and social-epistemic. He starts from the position that "instead of rhetoric acting as the transcendental recorder or arbiter of competing ideological claims, rhetoric is regarded as always already ideological" (19). He fronts social-epistemic rhetoric over the other theoretical approaches as

an alternative that is self-consciously aware of its ideological stand, making the very question of ideology the center of classroom activities, and in so doing providing itself a defense against preemption and a strategy for self-criticism and self-correction (20).

This idea is central to my study, for although the direction I sought was not to directly engage in issues of classroom activities, I work to illuminate how the rhetorical choices made by English instructors as they describe veterans in their scholarly work might be read. In order for our conversation to become more than politically correct lip service, Berlin's recommendation that we engage in "self-criticism and self-correction" (20) is essential. The growth of such a conversation has further reaching implications (via rhetorical theory) that the ways in which we share our view of student veterans with our colleagues is a lens that reinforces certain ideas while editing or disregarding others. The first—and major—step in this type of work is to find the edges of that lens, to measure its thickness, and begin to define the ways it is currently employed in our conversation about student veterans. This study aims to serve as but one step toward this definition, for as Berlin so clearly expresses,

... no position can lay claim to absolute, timeless truth, because finally all formulations are historically specific, arising out of the material conditions of a particular time and place. Choices in the economic, social, political, and cultural are always based on the discursive practices that are interpretations, not mere transcriptions of some external, verifiable certainty. (20-21)

Marguerite Helmers, in *Writing Students*, performed a critique that serves as the primary example for my study. Using a qualitative approach, Helmers examines the "representations of students in the context of written practitioner lore" and finds that our attitudes about our students "dot the pages of professional journals with the tropes of literacy that have been affirmed by the academic community: tropes that emphasize the stupid, beastlike, and childish aspects of college writers" (1). She turned to the professional journal *CCC* for her study, specifically the "Interchanges" section of the journal, which is a casual, "Letters to the Editor"-type forum where scholars can respond to other articles and writers. Within this column she found that, as a whole,

educators tended to focus on “the student” as a sort of myth, a constructed character who is lazy, fails to perform with due diligence, tries to get out of assignments, and doesn’t belong in college.

She writes,

In testimonials, the student and the teacher are stock characters and the plot is determined by a discursive history of familiar storytelling patterns that reiterate dominant professional concerns and locate practitioners in a matrix of imperial control that has transcended composition’s paradigm shifts. (2).

Helmets traces this perception back as far as the 1500s, using textual examples of instructors who write of students using language many consider inappropriate for scholarly work. This tendency to rely upon the student as a stock character was conceived in America via the expansion of higher education access to new types of students in the late 1800s and, unfortunately, continues to appear in various forms in our own scholarship.

She writes that the way we rhetorically construct students owes much to elements found in fiction writing; and that “students enter the text as if they simply *are*, and frequent appeals to shared experience with deviant students among teachers indicates there an essential, trans-historical student” (2). She places some of this phenomenon within the history of social, cultural, class, gender, and race conflicts we have experienced as a nation in the last centuries, noting that

While educators hold to the democratic ideal of equal education for all, we find that constructions of racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic students serve to divide students into groups of those who are always already deserving of education and those who need education to make them proper citizens. (11)

While it is common to construct a generalized representation of a rather diverse group of people for the sake of efficiency and abstraction, doing so exposes a yet-unclosed chasm between our classroom practices (which openly recognize students as rich bodies of prior knowledge) and our professional sharing (which continue to construct “the student” as a cliché).

Sociological Lenses

My ethical challenge comes from being a member of the populace I am studying. This is often true of many researchers, and they draw from their own experience in guiding the research questions and methodology, which usually serves to enrich the complexity and depth of their research. I am concerned, however, about my enculturation into such a selective group of participants and afraid that I carry resentment at the way the popular culture treats those who currently serve as well as those who have in the past. As a military veteran, I have a personal knowledge of the experience of leaving the military enclave and stepping onto the college stage. And as a First-Year Writing instructor, I have a personal knowledge of instructing those who are fresh from active military service entering their first years of college instruction. Yet, while I *was* on active duty during the Persian Gulf Conflict, I *was not* involved in the military operations there and have no combat experience.

David L. Wallace, in “Transcending Normativity: Difference Issues in *College English*,” calls for an approach to diversity that accounts for the various multiple lenses we as scholars use when analyzing and speaking of difference. He asserts that, as a whole, rhetors and compositionists pay lip service to the ideologies that influence how we perceive the information we read, write, and research, as well as filter our perceptions of *Other*. He calls for the field to “make a substantive accounting for difference”—rather than merely mentioning whatever our positions of power or oppression might be, he urges us to address those lenses deeply and systematically and to develop an underlying theoretical framework that we can build upon (503). He writes,

As authors speaking to and for the profession in the pages of scholarly journals, we face the task of framing our arguments with a new awareness, a multiplicity that acknowledges and transcends what has been taken as normative, that gets beyond the presumption that the way we have always done things is more or less neutral and well enough informed to be adequately inclusive. (503)

This approach particularly influences my study of student veterans because I am a student veteran and cannot hope to remove that lens from my perceptions of the tenor and tone of the conversation that rhetoric and composition is having about student veterans. Wallace writes that my ability to account for the ways in which I am different from others who are reading my research “depends not only on the recognition that my perspective is always limited by my experiences, and thus can never be taken for normative, but also that I must take initiative in educating myself if I hope to understand difference and speak about it responsibly” (503).

Wallace also adds we can no longer assume that our disciplinary discourse is neutral, but that we speak from many and various subject positions, not just that of the “straight, white, male, middle-class, Christian, physically and mentally abled” (504). He also addresses that our discourse to our peers acts as though we write for “a unitary audience composed of people who have all arrived at some kind of new, mutually shared multicultural literacy that ensures inclusiveness” (504). He says it is not enough to merely acknowledge our sociological lenses, but to “speak as honestly as possible from our individual positions and shifting interpellations” (504). As well, he tells us that if we are members of one community that has been marginalized in some way that we cannot assume we understand every experience of every member of that community, for our backgrounds are as varied as our fingerprints. Additionally, our idea of “difference” is constantly undergoing change, which means that we cannot hold static or unchanging beliefs about what difference means in any given situation.

Methodology

Thomas Huckin’s “Context-Sensitive Textual Analysis” serves as the methodological framework for my study. While this article was printed in 1992 and the field has undoubtedly

developed in the intervening years, this approach is straightforward and is an effective way to help shape my approach to this study.

Huckin begins by situating text within a sociolinguistic setting, acknowledging that writers “have socially influenced purposes and goals, they borrow language and ideas from other people—in short, they live and perform in some multi-variegated, sociocultural *context*” (85). He also says, “Sociolinguistic research has shown that communities are created and maintained largely by their language-using practices” (85). So to put this into an applicable perspective, the contributors to *CCC* and *TETYC* are influenced by their social and cultural communities, and they borrow language and ideas from places inside and outside of the university discourse community. This allows for the popular media’s portrayal of American military members, veterans, and student veterans to influence university writers’ “purposes and goals.” Add the political nature of the Executive Branch’s use of the military in foreign policy actions, the perceived religious and political orientation of many military members, the perceived predatory practices of military recruiters upon low-income and minorities, the impact of exposure to a combat theatre of operations upon physical and mental health, and the various scandals military and veteran members have been involved in, and the rhetorical construction of our discourse about student veterans becomes increasingly complex.

Huckin recommends more than just holistic textual analysis, advising the use of multiple coders and progressing to statistical calculations, but that was beyond the scope of my project (aside from presenting some of the statistics found in the data group). He finishes the article by reminding the reader that, because textual analysis is subject to interpretation by the very ideological, social, and cultural lenses that by their very existence create discourse communities,

“one should never consider a textual analysis to be fixed and conclusive. There is always room for reinterpretation” (99).

Data Selection Process

The data I examined came from two journals published by the NCTE that focus exclusively on teaching English at the college level: *College Composition and Communication* and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. *CCC* was included because it is widely acknowledged as the flagship publication in our field. *TETYC* was selected for two reasons: the journal devoted an entire edition in May 2009 to “Teaching English in the Two-Year College in a Time of War,” which seemed a valuable source of data to evaluate; and because of my own experience attending college while on active duty. Military tuition assistance paid a flat percentage of the fees for a class, regardless of the cost per semester hour. Because of the structure of funding for tuition assistance, many of my fellow student soldiers chose to attend the local community college, as the class fees were less than those at the local university. Once the keyword search for the journals was examined, *TETYC* returned almost as many hits as *CCC*, which I further felt added balance to the evaluation.

I selected five keywords to search for within the articles from each journal: Iraq, Afghanistan, military, veteran, and war. The keywords were selected for their general, yet close, relationship to military life and were based upon my experiences both as a military member, veteran, student, and reader of many articles from various college rhetoric and composition journals.

The ProQuest Central database served as the sole research database for this study. This database allows for further refinement of search results, including multiple keyword search, specific date range selection, sorting by most recent or oldest search result, as well as full text

entries of each article that fell within the identified research parameters. The most helpful feature, however, is keyword highlighting within those full text entries, which is where the excerpts from the relevant research material is taken. The following is a short explication of my data selection method:

After selecting for the specific journal I was examining, I then accessed the ProQuest database, which took me to a search engine pre-programmed to restrict searches to only the *CCC* journal. I then entered my keywords and included the Boolean “OR” operator in order to identify each and every appearance of the keywords within the journal. After the ProQuest database delivered these results, I refined the date range for the search results, first restricting the search to the decades from 2000 through 2012 and receiving those results. Selecting for a certain decade then enabled a tool to fine tune the date range, allowing the selection of individual years, and I chose 2001-2012 as my chosen search parameter; 2001 was chosen because of its relationship to the data I am examining, which lies between September 11, 2001 and the present. I then sorted the results according to oldest date first. Six entries were published in 2001 prior to September 11, 2001 and were therefore discarded. Restricting the search in this way returned 196 articles from *CCC* that contained at least one of the keywords. I then selected the Full Text option for each entry, which opened a hypertext document with the entire text of each article present in one continuous page.

The keywords included in the search parameters were automatically highlighted within the text, allowing easy identification of which keyword(s) was used, how often the keywords appeared in the text, and in what way they were used. I copied the bibliographic information for each article into a spreadsheet. I then copied each keyword along with its corresponding contextual data (i.e., how it appeared within the text; paragraph, bulleted item, bibliographic

entry, etc.) and pasted it into a corresponding column in a master spreadsheet. Each singular instance of a keyword received its own row within the spreadsheet, thereby allowing me to examine each keyword appearance individually, yet allowing an overview of keyword occurrences within a particular article. I then repeated the data collection procedure for the second journal, *TETYC*.

Statistically Speaking

The results of the keyword search initially yielded 329 articles within the chosen chronological parameters. I electronically culled those articles for each keyword instance, which then I placed in context in its own row within a data spreadsheet. This resulted in 887 instances of the appearance of one or more keywords. Of those, 530 resulted from articles published in *CCC*, and 357 resulted from articles published in *TETYC*. The percentage breakdown is presented within Table 2.1, below. While a simple percentage calculation is included with the study results, it is not my aim to undertake a statistical analysis of the pattern of appearance of the keywords, nor to closely identify the precise statistical nature of each entry.

Table 2.1: Results of Total Hits from Keyword Search

	Amount	% of Total
Total Hits from Keyword Search	887	100%
Hits from <i>College Composition and Communication</i>	530	59.8%
Hits from <i>Teaching English in the Two-Year College</i>	357	40.2%

A holistic review of the keyword instances revealed that the data fell into many categories, the largest of which contained propositional statements of value or judgment. Of these categories, the articles that make direct references to student veterans are the focus of my

critique. Of the initial study corpus (329 articles), 19 articles contained direct references to student veterans, or 5.7% of the total; these articles are listed in Table 2.2, below.

Table 2.2: Articles in the Study Corpus

Date of Publication	Article Title	Author and Bibliographic Information
2002/09	“Nonstandard quotes: Superimpositions and cultural maps.”	Schneider, Barbara. <i>College Composition and Communication</i> . 54. 2 (Dec 2002): 188.
2004/05	“The Role of Ethnography in the Post-Process Writing Classroom.”	Sinor, Jennifer and Michael Huston. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 31. 4 (May 2004): 369-382.
2004/06	“Becoming Literate in the Information Age: Cultural Ecologies and the Literacies of Technology.”	Hawisher, Gail E. and Cynthia L. Selfe. <i>College Composition and Communication</i> . 55. 4 (Jun 2004): 642-692
2004/09	“TYCA-Midwest Report from Leslie Roberts.”	Roberts, Leslie. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 32. 1 (Sep 2004): 123.
2007/03	“Of ‘Indians,’ History, and Truth: Postmodernism 101 for First-Year Students.”	Willey, Nicole. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 34. 3 (Mar 2007): 271-278.
2007/05	“Getting Personal: Responding to Student Self-Disclosure.”	Lucas, Janet. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 34. 4 (May 2007): 367-379.
2007/05	“Us and Them: Joyce Carol Oates and the Stories Students Tell.”	DeGenaro, William. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 34. 4 (May 2007): 380-393.
2007/12	“Resurrecting the I-Search: Engaging Students in Meaningful Scholarship.”	Klausman, Jeffrey. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 35. 2 (Dec 2007): 191-196.
2008/03	“Supplementing Tribal Culture Using Technical Writing Basics.”	Tichenor, Stuart. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 35. 3 (Mar 2008): 266-271.
2008/09	“On Paying Attention: Flagpoles, Mindfulness, and Teaching Writing.”	Kroll, Keith. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 36. 1 (Sep 2008): 69-78.
2009/03	“Grading the War Story.”	Burdick, Melanie. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 36. 4 (May 2009): 353-354.
2009/05	“Twenty-Two Anti-Tank Mines Linked Together: The Effect of Student Stories on Classroom Dynamics.”	Wallace, Robert. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 36. 4 (May 2009): 365-367.
2009/05	“Transformations: Working with Veterans in the Composition Classroom.”	Leonhardy, Galen. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 36.4 (May 2009): 339-353.
2009/05	“Casualties of War: Combat Trauma and the Return of the Combat Veteran.”	Kiely, Denis O; Swift, Lisa. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 36. 4 (May 2009): 357-364.
2009/05	“Gladly Teach and Gladly Learn.”	Holladay, Sylvia. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 36. 4 (May 2009): 368-378
2009/12	“TYCA-Pacific Northwest Report from Eva Payne.”	Payne, Eva. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 37. 2 (Dec 2009): 211-212.

2009/12	“Reading for Metaphor Using Angela Carter.”	Crachiolo, Elizabeth. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 37. 2 (Dec 2009): 189-192.
2010/09	“‘The Expression of Wise Others’: Using Students’ Views of Academic Discourse to Talk about Social Justice.”	Kurtyka, Faith. <i>Teaching English in the Two Year College</i> . 38. 1 (Sep 2010): 47-60.
2010/12	“Rethinking the Fourth C: Call to Action.”	Valentino, Marilyn. <i>College Composition and Communication</i> . 62. 2 (Dec 2010): 364-378.

I examined these articles carefully, reading for rhetorical patterns and tropes, all the while considering the overarching goal of the research—to reveal the ways we rhetorically construct various veteran identities. At this point in the study, I began to apply Huckin’s holistic approach, reading the quoted material as well as the surrounding content and sometimes revisiting the entire article. While there is an abundance of ways in which the study corpus data could be organized, the organizational method I chose is one that heuristically emerged after many hours of studying the individual data entries. Once the 19 articles were reviewed, sorted, and interpreted, six potentially problematic relationships were revealed:

- WWII—A Common Historical Trope
- Student Veteran as *Other*
- Veteran as Psychologically Damaged
- Education Changes Perspectives
- The Student Veteran Contextually
- Writing of Trauma—A Continued Contact Zone of Discomfort

After compiling the corpus for this study, I chose to focus on representative examples from within each category that best illuminate the rhetorical moves I am analyzing. The following chapter, “Chapter Three: Data Analysis,” presents selections of the categorized data along with my analysis, which serve as examples of the types of rhetorical tropes we sometimes draw upon when writing about student veterans.

CHAPTER THREE: DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I analyze representative examples found in the data that indicate the various ways our field has constructed student veterans from an undesirable position. Our rhetorical language has the power to place veterans as outsiders the academy and leave them without the respect of their instructors and peers, without inclusion in the classroom community, and without our efforts to recognize them as individuals and as students. As Thomas Huckin asserts, “Sociolinguistic research has shown that communities are created and maintained largely by their language-using practices” (85). Huckin’s assertion is an important one in this study, because the ways in which we construct the student veteran identity in our printed scholarship has the effect of maintaining that construction, potentially restricting our viewpoints from evolving to acknowledge and respect our student veterans’ backgrounds.

By looking closely at how we describe student veterans in this way, we can begin to overtly identify the sociological lenses we all carry, how those lenses may view student veterans, and what other lenses may interpret from our language. Susan C. Jarratt defines feminist pedagogy by “its investment in a view of contemporary society as sexist and patriarchal, and of the complicity of reading, writing, and teaching in those conditions” (115). My work in this chapter begins to define some of the ways we view student veteran identity, an initial step in research that should seek to expose how that view influences “reading, writing, and teaching in those conditions” (115).

These representative examples, when taken individually, may not seem to construct an obvious or overt problem. Cumulatively, though, these examples begin to present a collective picture of student veterans that is potentially problematic. As David Wallace asserts,

We face the task of framing our arguments with a new awareness, a multiplicity that acknowledges and transcends what has been taken as normative, *that gets beyond the presumption that the way we have always done things is more or less neutral and well enough informed to be adequately inclusive.* (503, emphasis mine)

My analysis in this chapter seeks to practice Wallace's directive; I present an interpretation that begins from the standpoint that our discourse about student veterans is neither "more or less neutral" nor "well enough informed to be adequately inclusive" (503). While this chapter contains the work of many outstanding scholars in our field and my analysis of problematic areas within that work, I do not seek to condemn or disparage those whose published articles appear here, nor do I wish for any of those who have written about student veterans to take personal offense at my conclusions. Because the scope of my study naturally restricts how much data I can examine, I focus on what I deem to be the problematic areas within the data; this in no way is meant to dismiss the important work of these excellent and hard-working scholars in the community of student veterans that our field so urgently needs.

Before examining key articles that highlight the main themes for which I coded the data, I'll turn to one recent example that demonstrates some of the language moves I'll be exploring in this data. Marilyn Valentino's remarks urge 2010 attendees of the College of Composition and Communication Conference (CCCC) to embrace the fourth C—communication—in their interactions with students, each other, higher education administrators, and state and federal governments. Early in her speech, she says, "I would like us first to reflect on ways we use language to clarify perceptions and develop relationships in our writing courses" (365). She goes on to ask, "How often do we critically analyze our own responses?" and then mentions a study

by California State—Fresno¹ that “found that race and gender seemed to affect the types of comments written by teachers” (366). She reiterates that “You and I know that messages on paper or mediated online, spoken or gestured, carry many layers of meaning that, we hope, can reinforce to our students all that writing encompasses” (366). In the interest of taking Valentino up on her charge for us to “reflect on ways we use language to clarify perceptions and develop relationships” (365), I read her speech and the other articles that make up the data filtered through the sociological lenses that most strongly influence my perceptions of the construction of student veterans—those of a former military service member and a former and current college student. There are rhetorical moves present in her speech – and in our scholarship as a whole – that illuminate the sometimes unreflective ways in which we categorize veterans.

The first of these categories that emerged from my data, WWII—A Common Historical Trope, encompasses examples that reference war as a historical trope. In these examples, references to the original 1945 G.I. Bill constructs current student veterans as an anachronism in history, which might work to restrict our field from examining today’s students in today’s classrooms. The second category, Student Veteran as *Other*, reveals the ways in which we sometimes begin from a position that rhetorically situates student veterans outside the classroom community. The third category, Veteran as Psychologically Damaged, shows that our rhetorical constructions of student veterans’ psychological issues may inadvertently reinforce mental health issues as a spectacle, sharing anecdotes that seem to support popular media stereotypes without

¹ Valentino seems to be referencing Inoue, Asao, et al. “‘Shit-plus,’ ‘Awk,’ ‘Frag,’ and ‘Huh?’: An Empirical Look at a Writing Program’s Commenting Practices.” *College of Composition and Communication Conference*. Session B 19, Continental Ballroom, San Francisco, CA. 12 Mar 2009. Conference Presentation.

explicit understanding or acceptance. The fourth category, Education Changes Perspectives, presents an underlying assumption some instructors might have about student veterans: that they have a singular shared understanding of global politics THAT can be changed through access to proper education, transforming student veterans into educated citizens. The fifth category, The Veteran Contextually, offers examples of the ways we textually place examples and anecdotes about veterans in contexts that might serve to reinforce common military stereotypical ideas about military life or draw upon associations of the student veteran from a negative perspective. The sixth category, Writing of Trauma—A Continued Contact Zone of Discomfort, reveals what appears to be discomfort with student veterans who choose to write about traumatic experiences and lack of any agreed-upon pedagogical approaches to reading and responding to narratives that include traumatic events.

WWII—A Common Historical Trope

Despite the continued presence of student veterans on college campuses for more than 70 years, historically situating student veterans in the WWII-era is a common move in our writing. While the presence of so many WWII-veterans on campus stimulated sweeping changes within English departments (ultimately leading to the creation of rhetoric and composition as a field), continuing to refer to this era casts student veterans as part of a historical moment that passed generations ago, thus rooting our conception of veterans in an era that's long gone. For example, Galen Leonhardy, in presenting a number of pedagogical approaches that have worked for him in "Transformations: Working with Veterans in the Composition Classroom" begins with the general premise that other than paying heed to "the lessons garnered from the post-World War II education rush by veterans" and "the lessons of open admissions and the contributions of

countless writing and assessment theorists,” the best way we can ensure we are meeting our student veterans educational needs is through our pedagogical choices (345).

Marilyn Valentino, in “Rethinking the Fourth C: Call to Action,” her 2010 CCCC chair address reprinted in *CCC*, draws upon this trope in her speech, saying,

Ironically, two types seem the same as those entering college when our organization began. After WWII, waves of first-generation college students and returning GIs overflowed freshman courses, which necessitated course revisions and professors trained specifically as compositionists. (366)

There is nothing rhetorically in either statement to pause for, except that we continue to draw upon this time marker in our speech and writing but never seem to move past it. In doing so, we fail to incorporate the research that’s been done on student veterans in the decades since WWII.

The reference to this time marker does more than just lock student veterans in the past; G.I. Bill veterans are often mentioned in combination with references to open admissions, which continues to be a point of contention in our field. Like our language about student veterans, the rhetoric that surrounds the history of open admissions carries an undertone of resentment at having to teach students who are not prepared for academic work. The veterans who came onto campus in the years following WWII lead the way to open access for many: basic writers, older students, those who couldn’t afford to attend, minority students, women, and more. But while many of the groups that followed veterans onto campus have received acknowledgement and respect in the intervening years, student veterans continue to be examined as a sort of curiosity, an *other*; a sideshow. The use of this trope signals that we have yet to recognize that veterans sit in our classrooms every day—that we are instructing them *now*. It’s time we acquaint ourselves with the base of research and theory we have already developed since that time period—research

that will show us how to move past mere *rhetoric* about student veterans. I offer a few suggestions of possible avenues for this approach in “Chapter Four: Conclusion.”

Student Veteran as *Other*

As Marguerite Helmers found in her research into instructors’ conceptions of students, a careful analysis of the professional writing about student veterans printed in *CCC* and *TETYC* reveals that we also sometimes slip into viewing students in a categorizing way: traditional students and *others*. Helmers asserts that *othering* can be problematic because her research finds the pages of our professional journals littered “with the tropes of literacy that have been affirmed by the academic community: tropes that emphasize the stupid, beastlike, and childish aspects of college writers” (1). The use of these tropes in our professional journals does more than signal our displeasure with imperfect students: the nature of our displeasure lies in our perception of a gap between the students we expect and the students we receive. This incongruence creates a dichotomous tension that then sorts students into one of two categories: smart, civilized, and mature or stupid, beastlike, and childish.

In my research, the data provides several examples that seem to expose a dichotomy in which one category situates student veterans as *other*. For example, Leonhardy appears to acknowledge the field’s tacit understanding of the student veteran as *other* when he emphasizes that the best way we can ensure we are meeting our student veterans’ educational needs is through our pedagogical choices, writing, “good pedagogy in the composition classroom is good pedagogy for all students” (344-5). He adds, “Veterans make up a fair number of potential students. It is important to understand them, even if we do not agree with the politics of the War on Terror, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)” (340). His

comment seems to foreground an unspoken knowledge that we as a whole disagree with governmental decisions regarding Iraq and Afghanistan and that we have to be reminded of the importance of understanding student veterans. This, from a veteran himself, points to how scholars (consciously or not) align themselves and/or distance themselves from veteran students.

In her CCCC speech in 2010, Marilyn Valentino includes a section entitled “Communicating with New Types of Students” and says, “Each fall, we look forward to those traditional students with writing skills, who will become, with some guidance, more skillful during the semester,” which could mentally construct another group in readers’ minds—a non-traditional group that perhaps we don’t look forward to (366). She then speaks of “new types” of students who represent a “serious and immediate challenge” to prepare for, including veterans, who “need our attention particularly at this time” (366). These new students, she says, are partially “lure[d]” by increased financial aid, are “first-generation freshmen, who had no intention of going to college (or even finishing high school). ... Several are academically underprepared and utterly overwhelmed, often struggling within a vortex of family and work responsibilities” (366). After providing anecdotes about a few of her own students, a bit later she says,

I’m not done. In my class, next to the veterans and immigrants, sit some fifteen-year-old Early College students, dual credit high school students, and previously homeschooled students.... Really, just getting them all talking to each other will be somewhat short of a miracle. (366)

In this speech, then, student veterans seem to be collectively linked to images of being enticed to enter college although they had no previous desire to attend and images of being overwhelmed and underprepared. Their identities are homogenized into another group that isn’t socialized to the academy (just getting them to talk to others in class would be a miracle).

Sylvia Holladay, in “Gladly Teach and Gladly Learn,” shares experiences and ethnographic research from her student veterans. She writes,

As I am working with such students, I often ask myself, why do young people who have gone through experiences like these come to college? Are they seeking refuge and sanctuary? Are they seeking escape? Are they seeking understanding? (375)

While it may be common for an instructor to wonder *why* students enroll in college, this set of questions could allow an alternate reading, one that creates a strong perception of student veteran as *other*. As Holladay has presented her thoughts within this essay, she seems to assume that student veterans must be seeking refuge, sanctuary, escape, or understanding. Holladay goes on to write,

Through my discussion with them and through responses to the questionnaire, I have discovered that they are primarily seeking an education, and they look to us to help them become educated and achieve their goals in their lives, similar to their nonmilitary classmates. (375)

Her conclusion is a good one; it offers us information about the reasons student veterans attend college. But she also reveals what could be read as a pre-conception with her first question, wondering why people who have experienced military service or combat would come to college. Viewed through my former servicemember lens, what she seems to be asking is how someone with experiences “like these” would *even think of* coming to college. The language she uses seems to foreground an assumption that they *need* refuge, sanctuary, escape, and understanding.

Both of these articles contain language constructions that carry strong connotations of *other*: Valentino uses the term “the veteran” and Holladay writes of “such students.” And within our professional writing examples like these are far from rare. In the sociologically advanced world we live in that claims to accept difference and diversity into the academy without reservation, the use of these language combinations potentially works to erase student veterans’ individuality and lump them together into an indiscriminate and devalued category. When the

academy speaks of other cultures and communities, it is far from acceptable to refer to individual members in this way; we would collectively consider it intolerant to write of “the Latino” or “the basic writer” because it works to undo the hours of study and research spent learning about the rich worlds of experience and knowledge all communities contain. Although we commonly—and perhaps mistakenly—attempt to distill new information into categories in our efforts to comprehend and synthesize what we have learned, there is no single conception of “the veteran.” Those who join the military come from every possible background and experience military service in highly individualized and unique ways; to refer to them with language choices such as these works to reinforce the construction of student veterans in a way that strongly situates them as *other*.

Janet Lucas, in “Getting Personal: Responding to Student Self-Disclosure,” journeys through an experience as a writing center tutor with Stephen, a navy veteran of the Vietnam War, who came to the writing center for assistance with a personal narrative assignment. This essay is partially a combination of Lucas’ reflection on the experience as well as an internal monologue of her thoughts while she discussed Stephen’s essay with him. Lucas seems to have written this piece to reveal her personal experience, emotions, and discomfort in this situation with the intention of furthering our field’s research and understanding of student veterans. She reveals many personal and emotional details of her semester of visits with Stephen—details that honestly address her internal monologue of complicated thoughts about Stephen. My purpose here isn’t to dissuade other educators from honestly sharing the same types of experiences, but to offer some alternate readings of Lucas’ work.

Lucas writes,

Stephen and I were in a highly asymmetrical power relationship—I was a teacher and he was the student. I was educated, he had a GED; I was sober, he was sober too but an exjunkie; I had never been in trouble, he had been in more trouble than the vast majority of people ever encounter in a lifetime. Probably several lifetimes. (377)

The way these identities are opposed reveals a potentially problematic dichotomy at work. The language contains terms that could rhetorically situate Stephen in a less validated—therefore less accepted—position. She begins by mentioning that she is the teacher and Stephen is the student, which alludes to the traditional power relationship between teachers and students where an instructor’s power over a student comes from the assignment of grades. Lucas’ role in this instance, however, as Stephen’s writing center tutor, doesn’t involve grades. However, she does have expert knowledge, which Stephen is seeking access to. While she writes of herself as “a teacher,” or rhetorically *one of many*, Lucas constructs Stephen as “the student,” a term Helmers found to be loaded with a rich history of negative stereotypes (Helmers 2). In the next set of terms, the text places educated versus GED, although the word “educated” doesn’t find its opposing term in “GED” but in “uneducated,” which might be interpreted as a bias against students who pursue this alternate diploma—that perhaps despite achieving this degree, they are still uneducated. Lucas goes on to write that she was “sober” and that Stephen was “sober too but an exjunkie.” Her inclusion of “but an exjunkie” might be read as a judgment of Stephen’s past decision to use mind-altering drugs that seems to outweigh his present sobriety. Lucas finishes her listing by referring to Stephen’s criminal history; we read in the article that he reveals he spent time in prison for murder after he returned from Vietnam. Lucas writes that she “had never been in trouble” while Stephen had “been in more trouble than the vast majority of people ever encounter in a lifetime. Probably several lifetimes.” The inclusion of “vast majority” and “several lifetimes” seems to work to exclude Stephen as an accepted member of society and place him in an isolated and rejected position among other outcasts. What the language here

doesn't seem to offer Stephen is any recognition of his efforts in life: he earned his GED, successfully fought a drug addiction, and enrolled in college as an older student despite a prison sentence.

Lucas isn't wrong in her assessment of her relationship with Stephen—they *are* in an asymmetrical power relationship. But this relationship is arguably one that Lucas constructs. The different life experiences between her and Stephen might have been presented in a way that allowed room for recognition of Lucas' experiences in life as *different* than Stephen's, but what we seem to read here is a construction of Lucas' experiences as *better* than Stephen's.

Robert Wallace, in "Twenty-Two Antitank Mines Linked Together: The Effect of Student Stories on Classroom Dynamics," shares with us his student D-Mon, a National Guard soldier about to be deployed to Iraq for a third tour, and the sole veteran in the class. Wallace writes:

The Army fatigues that he wore were supposed to help him blend into a desert landscape, a tan-and-brown world of sand. In the classroom, however, the uniform just made him stand out among the jumble of jeans and t-shirts. A uniform is meant to suggest standardization and membership in a group, but D-Mon's uniform seemed to have the opposite effect. It isolated him and confirmed that he didn't seem to belong to this group. (365)

As this quote suggests, Wallace begins his work by overtly establishing D-Mon's status as an outsider in the classroom, a rhetorical move intended to contrast this position against the acceptance Wallace believes D-Mon receives in the end. This rhetorical choice, however, seems to concurrently construct a uniform classroom of traditional students that erases individuality and diversity along the way, a move that works to distance D-Mon from his classmates.

Wallace describes D-Mon's class as mostly antiwar in its attitude, and some of D-Mon's classmates compose poetry containing sentiments that speak out against the war. Wallace tells us that D-Mon mostly listens to the work of his fellow students without comment; he writes,

If someone asked D-Mon's opinion of an antiwar poem, he usually said something like, "It's good to me." If I pressed him on what was good, he might say something like, "The whole thing." My feeling was that D-Mon already felt disconnected from the class because of his uniform; he wasn't going to do anything else to set himself further apart from the other students. (365)

Rhetorically, Wallace draws upon D-Mon's outsider status to offer a reason for D-Mon's resistance to elaborating on his opinions of the poetry. And D-Mon's token status as the only student veteran would certainly place him in a position to resist sharing his feelings. Yet Wallace seems to position D-Mon's response as resistance without reflecting upon the way his own actions, that of "press[ing]" for a response, might be influencing D-Mon's behavior. The study data shows that some student veterans express difficulty in connecting with their fellow classmates because of the life experiences they bring into the classroom. One of Holladay's veteran students writes,

I feel as though they can never understand what I have seen or done. They cannot understand what it is like having to face death on a daily basis. Most of them hold value on what I consider inconsequential, and with different values, it is hard to relate to others. (376).

Wallace, however, doesn't seem to explore other possibilities for D-Mon's reluctance to share his opinion. He goes on to tell us that D-Mon changed the ways he and the students thought about the war. He writes:

D-Mon's presence in the classroom highlighted the reality of the war in Iraq for me and for the other students. His presence made it real, not just something that people on television reported on or argued about. But it is more difficult for me and for the students in that class to turn away from what is happening in Iraq. For us, it is an important failure because we met D-Mon and he shared his story with us. (367)

For Wallace and the other students in D-Mon's class then, the war in Iraq is "an important failure" because of their newly learned knowledge of D-Mon's war experience. But this rhetorical choice now seems to place D-Mon in another outsider position: one that views him as manipulated by the military and seems to evoke a sort of pity. The students and instructor, by

comparison, seem to have used D-Mon to reinforce their antiwar attitudes. Within this article, what seems to be strongly constructed is Wallace's identification of D-Mon as the sole outsider of the group. There may have been many communities and cultures within Wallace's class, yet there is no textual acknowledgment that D-Mon was not alone as an outsider. Within the rhetorical choices Wallace makes, we seem to see Wallace as someone who allowed a military uniform to construct certain stereotypes within his mind that D-Mon was unable to undermine by his performance in the classroom.

Othering is present in more than just our rhetorical discourse about student veterans. A young student in Leonhardy's class, knowing he is a veteran, asks him if he'd ever shot or killed someone. Leonhardy, who had not actually shot anyone, answered the question, recounts the experience and says, "I consider it my duty to be honest and to support such investigations" (346), but seems to miss addressing how someone who has actually shot (or killed) someone might feel about having done that and/or the potential consequences of acknowledging it to a classroom full of peers that do not share their non-traditional background. While Leonhardy considers it his duty to be honest, his language here doesn't acknowledge the possibility that a student who had killed someone might have a vastly different notion of the necessity to share this experience with anyone, much less a classroom of new acquaintances. Rhetorically this example seems to privilege the young student's need to know over the consideration of someone who may have actually killed in combat. Leonhardy goes on to admit the student's question, "does seem to push the limits of propriety" and that instructors might inform their students of this "in a way that does not stifle curiosity" (346). This example, presented as one way to allow for student veteran inclusion in the classroom, doesn't seem to consider how admitting to killing someone might further distance a student in a class, but suggests that we should allow such questions

under the guise of sharing, simultaneously constructing the student veteran and her experience as a curiosity that we shouldn't stifle interest in, while appearing to lack recognition of a student veteran's right to privacy.

Yet Denis Kiely and Lisa Swift, in "Casualties of War: Combat Trauma and the Return of the Combat Veteran" write about how ancient texts such as *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* can develop student knowledge about war and veterans, saying, "Veterans talk of being unable to share their war experiences with their spouse and family, fearing disgust, revulsion, or outright rejection" (362). If veterans are unwilling to share their combat experiences with their families or close friends, our inability to recognize the significance of sharing such an experience with an instructor and classmates works to add to the evidence with which we could construct the student veteran as *other*.

Veteran as Psychologically Damaged

From asking to be excused from class during a reading of war literature (Holladay), abusing drugs (Lucas), having anxiety attacks (Holladay), being emotional distance (Kiely and Swift), carrying a weapon, (Holladay), sitting with their backs to the classroom wall (Holladay), writing about necrophilia (Holladay), to drinking cough syrup while in Iraq to go to sleep (Leonhardy)—the examples of student veterans as psychologically damaged in some way are hard to miss.

Janet Lucas, in her article about a writing center appointment with student veteran Stephen, speaks of Stephen and his fellow shipmates' "collective death wish, at one point cheering for the mortal release of some shipmates whose plane crashed on the deck," "rampant" drug use, both during military service and after, and "stints in prison," all incidents he recounts in the personal essay she is assisting him with (374). She goes on to say,

He gets this little nostalgic smile on his face and tells me that when they were off duty, he and his friends took LSD and dangled each other by the ankles upside down over deep shafts on the ship. That they slept off raging drunks in torpedo tubes. That they cheered for pilots who missed the flight deck and sank in their jets in the Pacific or crashed in balls of fire. Better to burn out than fade away. (374)

She continues,

I was taken aback at the idea that a shipload of Navy men spent their off-hours playing Russian roulette; it was just so foreign to my experience that I could not quite comprehend the reality of what I was hearing in spite of having read plenty of war literature. Although my surprise was not judgment, it may have come across to Stephen as such. (374)

Lucas' internal reflection reveals an important point to address. Her honesty about her meeting with Stephen is an important one, for it is precisely the kind of honesty our field needs in order to advance our research on student veterans. In the first quote, Stephen is recounting some of the ways he and his shipmates were struggling to emotionally deal with the impact of military conflict. These incidents are incredibly sad and foreign to those who have not experienced this type of despair. Yet Lucas seems to go astray in how she understands Stephen's story; she seems to measure Stephen's experiences against her own and finds herself unable to "comprehend the reality of what [she] was hearing in spite of having read plenty of war literature." And Lucas' reaction is, perhaps, a common one. But what isn't addressed within this article is an attempt to understand that Stephen's experience shouldn't be viewed through a personal lens, but through cultural and historical lenses. To forward our efforts to allow rich cultural backgrounds and experiences to add diversity, understanding, and learning to our classrooms, we must recognize that we need to foreground difference as the place to begin. If, perhaps, Lucas had expected Stephen's story to be radically different from anything she had experienced, she may have found herself more prepared to process the topics in his writing in a way that helped Stephen to gain effective writing skills, which was his goal when visiting the writing center.

One female student veteran of Galen Leonhardy's wrote an essay describing her combat participation in Iraq where she fired upon enemy positions to cover her unit's movement. He describes her:

Brown-eyed, stone-faced, systematic in her acquisition of skills, she passed the class and made it into the nursing program. Just recently, I saw her in the Testing Room at our school. She was pregnant and in a wheelchair. Refusing to accept a "C," she drove, even though she had been ordered to bed rest by her doctor. She did not ask for an extension: she just achieved the objective. (342)

In this example, Leonhardy accesses his own knowledge of military mindset—one that continues to work toward the goal under difficult situations—to construct this female veteran as a focused and dedicated student. Because this student veteran is no longer in a situation that requires that kind of drive, this anecdote seems to construct her not as a dedicated, driven student, but as a detached "stone-faced, systematic" person obsessed with following the rules despite possible harm to her unborn child (342). The goal that Leonhardy has (he calls her a "proud woman warrior" in the lines that follow) seems to be undermined by the language used here, which might work to reinforce the assumption of veterans as psychologically damaged (342).

Holladay tells us about one of her student veterans who went off his prescribed medication and "went berserk in class discussion" (369). Yet in that same issue, Kiely and Swift tell us, "The caricature of the berserk soldier has long been a staple in popular entertainment, but it negatively influences how some civilians see soldiers and how some soldiers see civilians." (361).

Like Kiely and Swift assert, my data also reveals we often link the student veteran with popular media images of psychiatric instability. Instead, genuine efforts to begin to educate ourselves to the reality of life after war—including familiarizing ourselves with the most recent research into PTSD and other psychological trauma—might enable us to work to change our

perception of PTSD, understand *how* PTSD realistically affects student veterans (without allowing our fear or discomfort to keep traumatized students at a distance) and those in our classrooms who may have it. Additionally, we need to familiarize ourselves with the potential obstacles barring student veterans accessing the psychiatric help they may need. Military members share no patient confidentiality with any medical personnel, neither mental health professionals nor medical professionals (*U.S. Army Regulation 340-21*). Whether this is an appropriate policy is irrelevant; the lack of confidentiality is a perception that may not end once military service has. These factors, alongside a lingering stigma in America against mental health treatment, are important issues to keep in mind when considering how psychological issues may impact student veteran performance in higher education.

Education Changes Perspectives

A portion of the data reveals an underlying assumption that student veterans have one shared set of understandings of world politics, which the instructor then helps them change through the course. This assumption is neither new nor unique to student veterans who are merely perhaps the most recent group to receive acknowledgment of this unfortunate practice in higher education; we see that Helmers' research from 1994 describes this effect:

While educators hold to the democratic ideal of equal education for all, we find that constructions of racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic students serve to divide students into groups of those who are always already deserving of education and those who need education to make them proper citizens (11).

The data contains two emblematic anecdotes of student veterans who emerge from their classrooms with a different perception of their place on a global scale. Leonhardy foregrounds his example with his personal experience as a young student veteran: "Through writing," he tells us, "the oppression that I had witnessed moved me into the civic discourse of my nation" (339).

He says that veterans have the opportunity to understand their individual roles in American foreign policy and how they can use their military experiences for civic betterment, writing, “It is interesting to watch vets in my classes move toward their own understanding of global interactions and what some come to see as the abhorrence of American imperialism” (345). Within the rhetorical construction of his statement about his student veterans—that students “move toward their own understanding of global interactions” (347)—we might interpret his statement to mean that he has his “own understanding” of global political dynamics. He then seems to transfer the importance of his personal experience to that of student veterans within his phrasing, “the abhorrence of American imperialism” (345), where the rhetorical strength of “abhorrence” and “imperialism” might lead us to one perception of his teaching perspective. He acknowledges that students can and should move to their “own understanding,” but what seems to be unexplored is how a student might be free to come to a very different understanding of “global interactions” than what Leonhardy holds.

Nicole Willey, in “Of ‘Indians,’ History, and Truth: Postmodernism 101 for First-Year Students,” details her experience with students who come to realize “truths are not fixed,” includes the example of “one memorable case, acknowledging a personal mistake, when a veteran regretted voting for Bush after his experiences in Iraq” (275). The construction of this sentence is fairly neutral, or lacking rhetorical choices laden with strong connotations, except for “one memorable case.” Willey’s inclusion of this phrase potentially indicates deeper layers of meaning. While she doesn’t explicate why this example is “memorable,” students routinely write of coming to understand various life experiences as mistakes. So if that aspect of the anecdote probably isn’t what Willey refers to, we are left to interpret the remainder of the example as

memorable: that perhaps a veteran regretted helping to place a president who subsequently sent him to war.

In both of these examples, these researchers make rhetorical choices that may allow for a reading that says education leads students to a new understanding of global politics and development of detest for American foreign policy. Another reading might be that experience in war changes personal political beliefs so they no longer support the party that supports war. It may be true that some students come to hate American imperialism, or that some veterans regret voting for George W. Bush, but these statements also might presuppose that those who participate in military service or vote for a certain presidential candidate would not do so *if only* they were educated as to the consequences of their choices, thereby, as Helmers writes, making them “proper citizens” (11). If we begin with the assumption that student veterans as a whole share one set of ideological beliefs that can be changed through proper education, we might miss an opportunity to learn from those with beliefs that don’t wholly match our own.

The Veteran Contextually

Within this corpus, what I’ve called “contextual” references raise another set of issues for us to consider. Contextual references place student veteran references alongside those that reinforce the common stereotypical constructions of veterans so commonly seen in news stories, films, photographs, and other forms of media—namely that veterans are unstable, uneducated, minority, conservative, manipulated, forced into uniformity, and many others. The placement of two items together contextually serves to solidify these stereotypes in the minds of readers much in the way the rote memorization works to reinforce connections between data sets of information.

Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe (“Becoming Literate in the Information Age: Cultural Ecologies and the Literacies of Technology”), as part of their research into the impact of military life on women’s digital literacy education, write: “military culture, in which technology is just a part of everyday life for women as well as men, may work in women’s favor,” before adding, “as far as information technologies are concerned” (669). This language rhetorically suggests that military culture *does not* work in women’s favor in other aspects, although their in-depth research into the life of this student veteran doesn’t appear to reveal areas in which military culture works against this woman’s experience.

The military provided her father, a high school dropout, with a high school degree and a college education, promoted him to the officer corps, and sent their family overseas while Melissa was in secondary school (an act Melissa describes as beneficial to her education). Melissa joined the Army, met her husband (also a soldier), left the service and used her veterans’ benefits to attend undergraduate and graduate school, attaining digital literacy along the way. In describing portions of Melissa’s life, Hawisher and Selfe include language that could construct subtle signs of bias against military life for a reader, writing, “When asked about moving so much, both in the United States and in Europe, she says that she accepted her many moves throughout school ‘with a grain of salt—and that the transitions weren’t so bad.... I don’t remember too much stress [from moving]’” (650) and “Melissa first attended a community college (in the town where her husband's military career finally deposited them)” (653). It is accurate and commonly known that military members do transfer to new assignments routinely and that sometimes the military does treat its members as its physical property. However, in this case, Hawisher and Selfe frame their writing with what might be read as bias: that Melissa was “moving so much” (650) despite her perception that moving wasn’t a problem. Additionally,

their choice to describe Melissa's current home as a place where her husband's "military career finally deposited them" (653) might work to reinforce the stereotypical idea that military families are government property with little control over their lives, instead of presenting Melissa's life as she recounted it to them.

In "Reading for Metaphor Using Angela Carter," Elizabeth Crachiolo writes of student reactions to a short story. She notes, "One [student] had been in the military, and she had been stationed in coastal Japan at a time in her life when she felt isolated and depressed" (191). The short story Crachiolo refers to speaks of a beach in Japan during winter, characteristics this student veteran could relate to. Within Crachiolo's context for this student example, which identifies student reactions to an assigned reading, her inclusion of the student's military background seems merely the addition of interesting detail. The inclusion of this detail in context with isolation and depression, however, may work to reinforce the pairing of military life and psychological issues (a popular media topic) as well as suggest that military members are subject to involuntary placement in isolating areas, which leads to depression.

Marilyn Valentino, in her 2010 *CCCC* address, presents statistics from a study performed by the Association of Higher Education and Disabilities that found that nearly 35% of male veterans and almost 11% of female veterans reported "psychological disorders—that is, posttraumatic stress disorder, hyper-arousal, depression, or psychosocial disruption" (368). She refers to the fear that higher education instructors and officials have about people with psychological illnesses performing acts that threaten, injure, or kill those around them, saying, "This is not to say that all or even most who suffer from psychological issues are at risk. I am saying that those without proper treatment are. And it only takes one... in Virginia or Ohio or Arizona to be catastrophic" (369), referencing three college campus school shootings.

Contextualizing student veterans with psychological illness alongside those who have indiscriminately murdered on college campuses seems to work to reinforce the stereotype of veterans as dangerous and psychotic, which is a, all-too-common media trope. One of the shootings Valentino references, at the University of Arizona in 2002, was committed by a student veteran of the Persian Gulf Conflict, but a quick and informal personal review of campus shootings in the last decade reveals it to be the only such incident involving a student veteran; the many others in the last ten years were committed by students, workers, or those with no connection to the universities and colleges.

In her TYCA-Pacific Northwest Report from *TETYC*, Eva Payne writes, “It is not unusual to have students in an online course who are on active duty serving in Iraq and Afghanistan and others who are incarcerated” (211). She goes on to list others who engage in online learning: those who need alternative schedules because of work or parenting obligations as well as those who simply choose an online environment. While it is important to understand the opportunities that online classes offer to a wide-range of students who may be unable to otherwise attend, the placement of military students contextually alongside those who are incarcerated—even when done with good intentions—can serve to reinforce those two concepts in the reader’s mind. The associations between the military and incarceration are readily identifiable: military contracts are largely unbreakable, a bit like jail sentences; in the past some judges sentenced young offenders to military enlistment rather than jail; being deployed to a war theatre isn’t an option, again, much like a sentence. But to avoid contextually pairing military students with those who are imprisoned, thereby resisting easy clichés, it might be beneficial to consider other types of students who might be limited access to a physical classroom: those who live in areas without a

nearby college campus, students who live overseas, or students who are seeking a certain course that might not be available at a nearby location.

Within these representational examples, we see student veterans situated in potential rhetorical places that lie adjacent to sociologically negative examples. We see student veterans mentioned in contexts that can be read to include subtle references to military culture as anti-women; the military controlling its property as it sees fit, leaving military families with little choice; foreign assignments as isolating and depressing; seeming concern about student veterans' needs on campus contextualized with recent campus school shootings; and military members in online courses alongside prison inmates. These examples, when taken individually, may not seem to construct an obvious or overt problem, yet, as an aspect of the research data, comprise another part of our field's overall tendency to refer to student veterans in problematic ways.

Writing of Trauma—A Continued Contact Zone of Discomfort

In the final category, the data reveals that our encounters with traumatic military experience essays raise challenges and doubts that uncover our discomfort with this type of work in the composition classroom. As instructors describe working with unsettling writing, their language points to an area of need within our field: how to address traumatic writing in what Valentino names as an “ethical” and “responsible” way.

The research data shows that merely reading traumatic essays has an impact upon instructors, creating still more impetus for the field to identify well-constructed and well-defined methods for addressing traumatic writing. Melanie Burdick, in a highly personal account of reading and responding to student veteran narratives (“Grading the War Story”), writes,

This week, as I completed my first read-through of my fifty-some rough drafts, I felt myself slipping into a profoundly melancholy state. When I finished reading, I couldn't

decide whether what I needed was a hot bath, a good cry, a stiff drink, or maybe all three at the same time. Many of the stories that my students told were connected to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. (353)

She adds, “My mind spins wondering how to critique these writings in just the right way, without becoming lost in depression” (354), “without losing totally losing myself in the weight of the rage and despair of these voices” (354), and “I must overcome my fear and my despair at the tragedy of these stories” (354). Burdick, then, is deeply influenced by her students’ writing. She not only does not know how to respond but also finds herself emotionally overwhelmed at the stories themselves. Her honesty, however, reveals what I believe is another principal reason that our pedagogy has failed to move forward despite years of reading traumatic essays; we are personally troubled by trauma, which has understandably—but regrettably—blocked us from progression.

Our discomfort about traumatic narratives bleeds over into our discourse about what we are supposed to *do* with the information contained in the essays. Valentino, in her comments about pedagogical approaches to traumatic writing, says, “I have always espoused that we are not trained therapists; however, we do have an ethical obligation to react responsibly” (369). She goes on to quote from *Trauma and the Teaching of Writing*: “While it is crucial we do not mandate writing trauma, it is equally crucial we do not silence it... we need to create spaces... [to] discuss or write about trauma... [and learn] rhetorical strategies for engaging in and understanding these discourses” (369). But Valentino seems to use different language when speaking of those she terms “teen immigrants” who are “leaving behind poverty” or “fleeing war or oppressive dictatorships,” writing that, “We need to tell their stories and find effective methodologies for these struggling students as well” (369). Burdick seems to echo Valentino, writing that, despite her difficulty reading their essays, her student veterans are contributing “important work: these are stories that should be told,” and, “I must make my attempt so that my

students' voices can be heard and the truths in their stories can be heeded" (354). It's not clear, however, who we are supposed to tell and what truths need to be heeded. These references, perhaps, reflect back to another theme that emerged within the study corpus, that of education changing the shared ideological beliefs of student veterans.

An interesting contrast emerges from Valentino's comments about students' traumatic stories. When speaking about student veterans, she speaks of "ethical obligation" and reacting "responsibly," both of which can be interpreted as abstract ideals. But her language seems to embrace the stories of those who are emigrating from poor, war-torn, or oppressive countries, urging us to "tell their stories." One reading of Valentino's remarks are that the stories of those who are posed as victims could be seen as stories "we need to tell," while those of student veterans—stories from trauma victims who are perhaps concomitantly *creating* trauma victims—seem to require us to react ethically and responsibly. This seems to speak to a deeper discomfort that perhaps underlies not just our college classrooms but our nation: that America's militaries are perhaps no different than other militaries, militias, and fighting forces around the world, that perhaps it is only our nation's dogma and doctrine that allows our country to consider our military campaigns as good, righteous, and just.

Returning to Janet Lucas and her writing center appointment, she writes that Stephen's essay doesn't "seem any more self-disclosing" than one Richard E. Miller shared at CCCC about a student who wrote about a trip to San Francisco where he and friends used hate speech toward gays and beat up a homeless man.² She says, "Miller calls [the hate speech essay] 'a voice from the margins that seems to belong there'" (377). The general impression (from conference attendees and others) believed that the student should be removed from school and sent to a

² See Miller, Richard E. "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone." *College English*. 56.4 (1994): 389-408.

counselor or the police or that the instructor should address the essay structurally without commenting on the content. Others suggested using the [hate speech] essay to instruct the class about the power of language and how language “is regulated socially and legally” (377).

While I resist the contextual placement of Stephen’s essay alongside one that contains anti-homosexual hate speech and unprovoked violence, the point Lucas offers is highly appropriate for our discussion. The communal response to the hate speech essay demonstrates the difficulty we have as a field in determining what an appropriate response should be. If, as Valentino does, we consider it our duty to react ethically and responsibly, we are left with options that include removal from the classroom and referrals to counselors or law enforcement. If, as Leonhardy suggests, we address the mechanical aspects of the writing but not the content, we are perhaps left feeling we were less than ethical or responsible and perhaps more than a bit afraid we made the wrong decision. If, as other responses to the hate speech essay suggest, we use the article to instruct the class about the power of language and how “language is regulated socially and legally,” we face the prospect of turning classroom opinion against the writer, even if we think we are providing anonymity.

Building a Picture of Veterans: The Overall Rhetorical Effect

Within the representative examples presented in this chapter, we see rhetorical constructions of student veterans joined with anachronistic references to their initial appearance on campuses more than 60 years ago, a reference that seems to identify them as a relic of a time long past; we see anecdotal experiences that seem to divide student veterans from more traditional students, placing them outside the classroom community; and we see references to student veterans with psychological illnesses and challenges that seem to focus on the

sensational aspects of mental health issues without appearing to offer helpful and factual information for instructors to use in their classrooms.

As well, we see examples that can give the impression that student veterans have a single viewpoint regarding political affiliation, global dynamics, and American foreign policy that a proper education changes and realigns; we see contextual examples of student veterans alongside others that carry a potentially negative perspective, possibly working to reinforce common stereotypical ideas about military service; and, finally, we see instructors sharing significant questions about and discomfiting experiences with student veterans who write about traumatic events as well as the lack of our field in advancing pedagogical approaches to reading and responding to narratives such as these.

When examined piecemeal, these examples are innocuous and easily missed—or dismissed. And it is certain that the researchers mentioned here harbor no enmity toward student veterans. Yet it is more difficult to ignore the composite picture the data constructs. The field of rhetoric and composition has work to do if we wish to embrace our growing student veteran population with all the inclusion, hospitality, and respect we have devoted to other communities on our campuses. My final thesis chapter, “Chapter Four: Conclusion,” offers some final thoughts and suggestions about potential approaches we might consider.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

I begin this chapter by returning, briefly, to the project's theoretical influences. As applied to the overall picture presented by the data, Thomas Huckin's assertion "that communities are created and maintained largely by their language-using practices" (85) is an issue for the field of rhetoric and composition. Our community faces a "serious and immediate challenge" (366) (if I might borrow Marilyn Valentino's phrase) to begin to overtly examine our individual beliefs and ideas about student veterans, consider the ways those ideas are currently affecting the ways we view our student veterans, judge the rhetorical textual choices we make when writing and speaking about them, and then re-examine what we write and say with a new awareness of ourselves and our students. We must, as David Wallace has called to do, acknowledge just how diverse "normative" truly is and begin from a place that refuses to assume what we have written, taught, said, or thought was "more or less neutral and well enough informed to be adequately inclusive" (503).

Marilyn Valentino was correct when she asked us to "first reflect on ways we use language to clarify perceptions and develop relationships in our writing courses" (365). This is a difficult task, yet it is the cornerstone of any attempt to understand any community we seek to know more deeply. Every research endeavor that rhetoric and composition has undertaken into various communities in the last 50 years has begun with a realization—usually from a member of that very community—that we were failing to give proper recognition and respect. We began by recognizing the ways our own language practices were influencing our relationships with those

communities on a group and interpersonal level, and the journey into deep and effective research into student veterans requires nothing different.

Primarily, merely carefully evaluating the messages we receive in the popular media about the military and military members is a good practice to begin. Regardless of our individual feelings about military service, our nation's participation in global conflicts, or our government officials, we might do well to actively consider that the popular news and entertainment media looks for stories that lie on the outer reaches of the continuum of human experience and don't represent the whole of experience. Without doubt, a percentage of military members and veterans encounter certain experiences of military life. Skewing our thinking—and teaching practice—toward that percentage does a disservice to the remaining veterans who do not share that same experience. For example, the National Center for PTSD (run by the Veterans Administration) says that between 11—20% of veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan have PTSD (“How Common is PTSD?” n. pag.). This is a troubling statistic, by any measure. But to apply that diagnosis to every student veteran in our classes would be a mistake. Just as Autism Spectrum Disorder measures a wide range of issues, so does a PTSD diagnosis. Staying aware and mindful of the ways PTSD can affect college participation is important, without doubt. But as each student non-veteran brings his or her own strengths and challenges into the classroom, so does each student veteran. Our job remains the same: to get to know each student through his or her writing and class participation and dovetail our teaching to that student.

Why should we educate ourselves about student veterans? First-year writing is required on many campuses; therefore the vast majority of incoming students will enroll in one or more sequences of our series. Also, student veterans are present on campuses all across our nation. There is no certain geographical area where instructors will be more impacted by the presence of

student veterans. They are on every campus, all across the country. Whether our campus enrolls a high number of student veterans or a low one, we will encounter student veterans in our classrooms. As we prepare and educate ourselves for students who speak English as a second (or more) language, students who are the first in their families to attend college, students who have disabilities that are lessened or mitigated by alternative approaches, and students who are returning to school after many years in the world or workforce, we should prepare ourselves for our student veterans. They deserve no less.

One approach to discarding use of WWII as a rhetorical trope may have been provided for us in the form of the updated G.I. Bill. A long-overdue revision, the new version of the G.I. Bill provides vastly more generous benefits to a wider range of veterans than ever before. This new bill may prove to remove many of the barriers that may have prevented veterans from matriculating before, offering rhetoric and composition a perhaps unique opportunity to examine new communities, develop new pedagogies, and undertake new research projects.

Regarding our possible tendency to divide our students into non-veterans and others, a larger issue at work here might be that of our tendency as individuals to do this sort of dichotomous thinking with all of our students. Marguerite Helmers' work reveals that our griping about or irritation with our students reveals itself in our professional writing, which, as Huckin tells us, only serves to reinforce those negative ideas when we share them with our colleagues. This is a difficult task, without doubt. But more attention to the alternate readings of our writing is a good place to begin, as is acceptance of some measure of humility and recognition that each of us just might be participating in this sort of thinking.

Education, as a force of change, has the power to move mountains. But sometimes those mountains don't move in the ways we think they will. The June 2011 *CCC Interchanges* includes

a back and forth exchange between Paul Lynch and Matthew Abraham. Abraham's commentary on one of Lynch's earlier articles was placed first, with Lynch's response immediately following.

In this response, Lynch shares the following experience:

I vividly remember the class I taught the day after the launch of the Iraq War. The night before, a group of maybe two hundred people staged an antiwar demonstration in front of the campus bookstore. The police showed up in riot gear and used tear gas to disperse this unthreatening group of peaceful protestors. When we talked about it the next day, my students made it clear that they were on the side of the police. As I remember the conversation, it wasn't so much a pro-war argument as an anti-demonstration argument. They didn't like the idea that political activity could disrupt what seemed, at least where we were, a normal evening.

The most striking appeal to pathos I heard that morning was that because the demonstration took over one corner of a large city thoroughfare, the disruption had made it hard for people to drive home after work. In hindsight, I should have recognized how powerful this argument was, especially on a campus with so many first-in-family college students. But I was so perplexed by their overall response that I immediately took the other side. Predictably, the ensuing conversation served only to harden both our positions, and I'm not sure it helped that I was clearly arguing what I myself believed to be true. That is, my honesty was unpersuasive; in fact, it seemed to have the opposite effect. Had I had a better idea of *metis*, I might have managed to separate myself from the argument I was making—thus making it less a matter of my power than the argument's own. (745)

Perhaps Lynch's experience with his students can help us to recognize that no matter the strength of the intellectual argument that undergird our personal beliefs, we should remain open to opposing viewpoints and intellectual debate regardless of the subject material.

Regarding contextually examples of student veterans in problematic ways, I have little to add that I haven't covered in the opening paragraphs to this chapter. I would like, however, to share one last example. Thomas Thompson and Richard Louth, in "Radical Sabbaticals: Putting Yourself in Danger," write of their respective experiences while taking sabbaticals from academia to spend time in the non-college world. Louth, writing about how vastly different the world seemed outside the halls of higher education, writes,

“As both Hemingway and Andre Coudrescu suggest, something profound can happen when anyone (especially a writer or teacher) leaves the known world behind. And our teaching should be more concerned with the profound than the mundane. Academia can be isolated, self-serving, redundant; there is a world to learn from outside of schools. Our city streets are full of beggars, bartenders, street punks, veterans, exotic dancers, artists, con men, convicts, dropouts, chefs, dentists' wives, and pink-haired teenagers wearing Old Navy sweatshirts.” (169)

While my keyword search returned this entry because of its use of “veteran,” it didn’t make the final study corpus because it fails to mention student veterans specifically. However, it contains what I hope will be an example for thoughtful consideration. Louth includes an intriguing and mysterious entry in his list of the types of people upon our city streets, that of dentists’ wives. How he came to include them in a list of “beggars, bartenders, street punks, veterans, exotic dancers, artists, con men, convicts, [and] dropouts,” among others, is, I suspect, either an inside joke or an interesting story. Perhaps Louth was going for a mix of daily pedestrians you might encounter on the streets of New Orleans, where his sabbatical takes place. If so, the list isn’t populated with quite the right mix of people in my mind, for instead of painting a busy city corner, I muse over his specific choices and wonder at his rhetorical purpose here. Inside joke or not, dentists’ wives are out of context within this list—as are chefs and veterans. Perhaps this is a strange example, but I hope you’ll consider my point: contextual references to student veterans alongside others work to construct a mental picture. Our job is to ensure we are representing them accurately and appropriately.

Finally, allowing student veterans to write about traumatic experience is far from accepted practice within the classroom. Kiely and Swift urge us to remember that our role is not to engage in quasi-therapy sessions with our students (359). Valentino agrees and additionally asserts that our field needs to create a way for traumatic writing from all sorts of students to be acceptable in composition and for us to make the effort to learn “rhetorical strategies for engaging in and understanding these discourses” (369). Yet, as Valentino notes, merely

acknowledging that we are not therapists doesn't go far enough. We have been discussing the proper approaches to traumatic writing since veterans first came onto campus after WWII, yet we have not focused sufficient and sustained attention on this topic to move the subject from the fringe of teaching theory to that of well-defined practice. Scholars within the field of creative non-fiction writing have done important work in this area, yet their knowledge has largely failed to impact first-year writing praxis. The stakes here are high; in 2010, a student veteran at a community college in Baltimore wrote an essay entitled, "War is a Drug," later published in the campus newspaper. The college suspended him from classes pending a psychological evaluation by the Veterans Administration, which he had previously (and successfully) undergone. Continuing difficulties between the school and student led him to decide not to return to campus (Walker n. pag.). This example demonstrates that more is at risk than a passive attitude to traumatic writing accommodates.

Additionally, responding to traumatic narratives is an unresolved issue within our field. Galen Leonhardy offers us insight from his own experience as an undergraduate writing about traumatic events, acknowledging that the topics of his essays presented challenges for his own writing instructors, yet wanting them to treat the writing seriously. He expresses his feelings unequivocally, writing,

How greatly I abhorred teachers who did not care to help me grow as a scholar. And then there were the feelings of being humiliated by comments that, in their superficiality, devalued or dishonored the effort of writing about painful important experiences—such as watching a 14-year-old girl sell her body to military comrades or not being allowed in 1983 to return to Lebanon after the October 23rd Beirut barracks bombing.

What I wanted, as a younger vet-scholar, were comments that would allow me to gain authority, comments pointing to errors in my reasoning as well as in my spelling, comments that would let me tell others about my experiences in the military in ways that would allow my ideas to facilitate the creation of a better world, a place where children could be free from the horror of commodification and rape. (350)

Leonhardy's experience, while not applicable to all student veterans, provides us a place to start. He wanted his writing to be an educational experience for him and his audience; he sought to learn about where and why the narrative worked and failed, about mechanical errors, about how the writing as a piece of literature could be made stronger. He tells us that he was humiliated by superficial comments, which in his mind took away from the work he was trying to do.

Leonhardy, perhaps in hindsight, wanted his writing to help make the world better. And perhaps some students write for this aim. But while he expresses this goal, and other instructors in the study corpus have accessed this idea, only our students know why they choose what they write about. It remains our role to facilitate their growth as writers and scholars.

Janet Lucas writes that Stephen's essay, a series of vignettes that seemed to have no central theme to tie them together, was about his life in the Navy during the Vietnam War and the years afterward and contained details of drug use, prison, and a strong desire to die. Lucas, working her way through her approach to her student and his paper, writes,

Stephen, however, because he brought risky issues to the table, might get a less-than-adequate response because it seems, and according to many teachers it might be, inappropriate to ask about such personal matters. [A] young college woman's matters [about leaving home and moving to college] were personal as well, but those matters, of course, were not surrounded by societal guilt, condemnation, and fear that a prison stint, a death wish, and substance abuse bring. (376)

This assertion reveals an important truth, and I again praise Lucas for her honesty. While Lucas identifies societal guilt, condemnation, and fear with criminal behavior, mental instability, and drug abuse, I assert that the underlying relationship is more deeply rooted to military service than we would like to admit.

Our nation has a long and troubled history of engaging in armed conflict on foreign soil, and, despite often fervent demonstrations of protest, those campaigns have largely gone ahead as planned. As instructors, we are the ones who face our own version of "collateral damage"—in

the bodies of student veterans in our classes who are living in the aftermath of combat experience. Lucas' words here are apt; for some, military service is wrapped in societal guilt, condemnation, and fear, yet there is little avenue for expressing or negotiating these feelings. We are to "Support the Troops," yet simultaneously feel free to oppose war. It remains to be seen how are we to do so within the maelstrom of truth, myth, and stereotype that surround the military. Reconciling those feelings is part of the difficult work we face if we are to move toward acceptance and inclusion for our student veterans within our classroom walls.

AFTERWORD

Soldier. ~

Yes, I was. ~

But not only that.

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