

Abstract

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VETERAN IDENTITY FORMATION AND
PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF STUDENT
VETERANS

Steven L Dashiell, Doctor of Philosophy, 2020

Directed By:

Carole McCann, Professor, Department of
Gender and Women's Studies

This dissertation examines how men who were previously in the military, collectively known as veterans, modify their practices in unfamiliar social situations like the university. In some instances, there are elements which impact their existence on campus, such as the lack of mental health support necessary for re-integrating into society after the mental conditioning of the military.

In this research, I discuss how exposure to military practices and reassociation with the civilian world creates a veteran masculinity, and this set of practices presents opportunities and complications for those who inhabit the identity. My research draws on 23 semi-structured interviews with male student veterans to demonstrate specific compensations men enact in their formation of veteran masculinity, and how the veteran masculinity and identity are constrained by the influences of military and civilian factors. I demonstrate how these men gain a sense of being disconnected, a "stranger," due to their practices of veteran masculinity malfunctioning in the university setting (Simmel 1921). An inability or resistance to shift practices of masculinity to something more functional on the college campus permeates these feelings, indicating what I call a constrained masculinity. These strategies stretch out to the larger social world and configure a specific veteran experience that is often viewed through civilian and military lenses.