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Collaborative Research Between Student Veterans and Faculty in Higher Education

Jocelyn Lim Chua & Lacy Jo Evans

Abstract

As a civilian anthropologist faculty member and a then-undergraduate student and veteran of the US Marine Corps, we draw on our experiences working together on a six-month exploratory ethnographic research project to detail the process and consider its implications, both scholarly and personal. We offer observations and reflections of the amplifying possibilities that may open up when faculty researchers share control over the research agenda, process, and actions with student veteran researchers. We reflect in particular on the value of research methods that foster spaces for women military veterans to produce, share, analyze, and contest knowledge about their experiences. While the personal significance of collaboration for student veteran researchers may be varied and multiple—whether scholarly, social, political, therapeutic, or otherwise—these collaborations also have broader implications. Namely, the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented military veterans in academic knowledge production about their experiences, priorities, and concerns.

Keywords: Collaborative Research, Student Veterans, Women Veterans

Introduction

A growing phenomenon of community writing groups, oral history projects, and college writing curricula with and for military veterans is predicated on the idea that writing and storytelling can have transformative potential (Anderson, 2017; Martin, 2012; Schell, 2013; Wilson et al., 2009). Faculty, staff, and students at institutions of higher education have been important to these initiatives. For example, alongside national organizations such as Warrior Writers based in Philadelphia, and the Veterans Writing Project, which conducts workshops at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, academic writing faculty and military veterans have organized writing groups that convene in a variety of public settings, from college and university campuses to public libraries. While these initiatives can be highly varied in motivation, genre, and format, they share the ideal of creating “a space for veterans to engage in defining and representing their military experiences for themselves and for various publics,” often through first-person accounts of military and wartime experiences (Schell, 2013).

In this article, we extend these efforts in new directions by advocating for collaborative research between student veterans and academic faculty on college and university campuses. As a civilian anthropologist faculty member and a then-undergraduate student and veteran of the US Marine Corps, we draw on our experiences working together on a six-month exploratory ethnographic research project conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups to detail the process and consider its implications, both scholarly and personal. We offer observations and reflect on the amplifying possibilities that may open up when faculty researchers share control over the research agenda, process, and actions with student veteran researchers. While the personal significance of collaboration for student veteran researchers may be varied and multiple—whether scholarly, social, political, therapeutic, or otherwise—these collaborations also have broader implications. Namely, the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented military veterans in academic

knowledge production about their experiences, priorities, and concerns. Knowledge produced may in turn have wider relevance to government agencies, policy planners, scholars, and educational and clinical practitioners, while also serving to proliferate and diversify representations of veteran experiences and voices within and beyond the academy.

To provide background to this discussion, we first situate the importance of research collaboration in the current context of the pursuit of higher education by military veterans of the post-9/11 wars. We then detail our process of training and conducting research together, and each offer reflections about what we learned and gained from working collaboratively on this project. Guided by feminist methodologies in social science research and engaged models of participatory research, we designed this project to involve participants and community members in the research process and aspired to reciprocity as a core value of feminist research (Brydon-Miller, 2001; Harrison et al. 2001; Huisman, 2008; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Koch & Kralik, 2006; Strand et al., 2003). Our experiences suggest the importance of a collaborative research model predicated on the idea that military veterans are themselves “participant-observers” and analysts of US global military power and its institutions and of veteran transition experiences (Brown & Lutz, 2007). We reflect on the value of research methodologies that foster spaces for women military veterans in particular to produce, share, analyze, and contest knowledge about their experiences. Qualitative research methods utilized in our project, specifically focus groups, enabled women veteran research participants and the student veteran co-researchers to identify social, economic, political, and ideological factors that reframed their experiences in ways beyond the “personal.”

Student Veterans as Co-Researchers

To assess potential implications of research collaborations between student veterans and faculty requires contextualizing these opportunities within a broader history of military service members’ and veterans’ pursuit of higher education in the US and their presence in college campus and classroom life. With the passage of the first Morrill Act in 1862, federal government provisions have directed or supported colleges and universities to educate armed forces personnel, and more recently, to provide educational opportunities to veterans. Large-scale funding for veterans in education began with the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill, which funded training and postsecondary education for millions of military veterans following World War II. In the period between 2009, when the post-9/11 GI Bill took effect, and 2013, over a million student veterans enrolled in the pursuit for higher education. Veteran enrollment continues to climb (APSCU, 2013, p. 3).

A growing body of scholarship has explored the experiences of student veterans transitioning to campuses of higher education, considering issues of identity, disability and injury, and academic and social support, among others (e.g., DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Jackson & Sheehan, 2005; Jenner, 2017; Livingston, 2009). Although less attention has been given to perceptions between faculty and student veterans, existing studies have shown that student veterans perceive faculty as judging them unfairly on the basis of assumptions about mental health issues (Elliott, 2015; Elliott et al., 2011), and have demonstrated how faculty perceptions about current military conflicts and the military may impact their work with student veterans in the classroom (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011). Student veterans have reported feeling uncomfortable when singled out by faculty as representatives of the military (DiRamio et al., 2008), and when their professors’ teaching of military history conflicts with their first-hand experience (Gonzalez, 2012). Disagreements between liberal professors and conservative student veterans can also lead students to feel misunderstood by faculty (Ackerman et al., 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008).

These findings suggest the importance of cultivating spaces for diverse interaction between faculty members and student veterans in higher education. The growing number of military veterans on college and university campuses suggests both a need – and opportunity – for faculty researchers to develop collaborative engagements with student veterans, particularly with regard to research on veteran-related issues. More than involving student veterans as research subjects alone, collaborative research engagements would enable student veterans to share in knowledge production alongside faculty researchers, while facilitating new types of interactions and reciprocities that may not be possible within the hierarchical classroom setting. Involving student veterans as core members of the research team and recognizing military veteran research participants as “co-researchers” (Heron & Reason, 2006) shares characteristics with community-based participatory research models, where participants play central roles in guiding the research agenda and actively reflecting on and analyzing the information generated (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Nelson & Wright, 1995; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011).

Collaborative engagements between student veterans and faculty in the area of research therefore remains a largely unrealized potential. But the involvement of military veterans in research also has importance for the social sciences disciplines more broadly. Until recently, social scientists, including anthropologists, paid limited attention to the voices and experiences of US military service members (Brown & Lutz, 2007, p. 322).ⁱ Yet, as illuminated by the proliferation of novels, memoirs, and collections of poetry written by soldiers and marines about the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, US service members are themselves important “participant-observers of empire,” who witness, enact, and struggle with and against the complexities and contradictions of global US military power and its institutions and moralities (Brown & Lutz, 2007, p. 322).

Involving student veterans as co-researchers is therefore not to position them as “cultural experts” or “cultural translators” whose role is to facilitate access to an enclave population and mediate between military and civilian spheres, even if that boundary work and its negotiations are likely to shape the research process itself, as it did for us.ⁱⁱ Rather, in the vein of what others have described as “paraethnography” (Holmes & Marcus, 2006), we propose a “collaborative alliance” (Hamdy, 2008), in which student veteran researchers and veteran research participants are themselves participant-observers and analysts of the broader political processes and social experiences of which they are a part.

Our Process

With funding provided by an internal research grant, Jocelyn (the faculty co-researcher and co-author of this article), issued a call for applicants for two undergraduate research positions. The positions were described as involving ethnographic data collection and analysis for an anthropological research project broadly exploring the gendered dimensions of military service and veterans’ transition experiences, with attention to mental and behavioral health. The positions were open to enrolled undergraduates and candidates with military experience, and women were strongly encouraged to apply. Research experience was preferred, but not required, as the position’s responsibilities included training in basic fieldwork methods and data analysis as a means for building undergraduate qualitative research skills. The job advertisement was circulated via department and program listservs on campus, including the listserv of the university’s student-run organization for veteran and military-affiliated students, and attracted nearly 20 applicants. After an initial screening and a round of in-person interviews, Lacy (the student veteran co-researcher and co-author of this article) was selected together with another student. Both self-identified, to different degrees and in different ways, as women military veterans: Lacy, a retired sergeant and combat veteran of the US Marine Corps who deployed to Afghanistan in 2009 and 2010; and Amanda, a veteran of the US Air

Force. Both completed CITI Basic Human Subjects Protection online training and were IRB-certified prior to conducting research.

The first meeting of the full research team centered on collective discussion around issues raised in the individual hiring interviews. Namely, what attracted each of the researchers to the project, what they hoped to achieve from the experience, their perception of academic research on veteran-related issues, and their hopes for what this exploratory project might achieve. Discussion of the latter included initial brainstorming of means, audiences, and venues for disseminating our research findings once the project concluded. Weekly meetings thereafter involved a combination of discussion of assigned readings, methods training, and interview preparation, data analysis, and reflection (all discussed in greater detail below).

Weekly meetings began with an informal check-in to discuss interviews planned and completed, as well as to open the floor to any concerns, research-related or regarding personal impacts of the research. Jocelyn made clear at the first meeting, and periodically reminded Lacy and Amanda, that she was standing by and available to meet individually as requested. Such meetings did occur with regularity, often when a member of the research team wanted to “process” particular interviews or to discuss reflections on how the research was impacting her personally. Many of these conversations were highly positive and offered opportunities for all three of us to reflect together on the obligations, challenges, and significance of asking others to entrust their stories and experiences. Jocelyn also made clear to the student co-researchers that if at any point while observing or conducting interviews they felt distressed, they could recuse themselves without penalty and that campus and off-campus resources were available as needed. This did not occur during the course of the research.

The Politics of Location

During the first month of research, our team devoted time during weekly meetings to discussing the politics of location as theory and methodology, including how it relates to the practice of anthropological fieldwork. The archetype of fieldwork based on participant observation has traditionally defined anthropology as a discipline (Clifford, 1992), and has come under critical scrutiny by anthropologists in recent decades (Amit, 2000; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Robbins & Bamford, 1997). Efforts to reshape ethnographic conventions have called out the “exoticist bias” (Amit, 2000, p. 5) of anthropological orthodoxies that have positioned anthropologist as knowledge-producer and the research subject as passive informant. They have problematized the dichotomous positions of “insider” versus “outsider,” “field” and “home,” upon which these orthodoxies are built (Narayan, 1993; Visweswaran, 1994).

In their discipline-defining edited volume *Anthropological Locations*, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) depart from the notion of cultures as fixed entities that inhere in particular spatial locations and communities, reconceiving the anthropological fieldwork tradition as a form of “location-work.” Location-work requires “an attentiveness to social, cultural and political *location* and a willingness to work self-consciously at shifting and realigning our own location while building epistemological and political links with other locations” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 5, authors’ emphasis). Guided by the feminist literature on the politics of location (Rich, 1984; Anzaldúa, 1987; Spivak, 1988; Haraway, 1988; Lorde, 1984) and Gupta and Ferguson’s rethinking of fieldwork as “location-work,” we explored the ways research would bring each of us in contact with diverse experiences, social backgrounds, ideologies, and political opinions, including those contrary to our own. We agreed on the value of reflecting on our own individual ideological, cultural, and social locations as an important first step in the research process, for as England (1994, p. 84) puts it, “We

do not parachute into the field with empty heads and a few pencils or a tape recorder in our pockets ready to record the ‘facts.’”

Toward this effort, at the end of the first team meeting, we each agreed to engage in two reflective exercises. The first was for the student co-researchers to write a one-page reflection about what their military service and experiences signify to them today. Jocelyn reflected on the significance of being a middle-class, Asian-American woman and civilian academic conducting research with US military servicemembers, veterans, and their families. The second exercise was to listen to and then informally record reactions to recordings of two interviews that Jocelyn had conducted the month prior: one with a veteran who fully embraced his military service and veteran identity, and the other with a veteran and social worker highly critical of US military interventionism, the Iraq war, and the military itself.

We agreed that we would not be required to share our reflections, but that we would use both activities as opportunities to reflect on and identify our own social, political, and cultural locations. These two exercises became the basis for dynamic conversations about our distinct experiences and values—as well as the forms of expertise and knowledge—each of us brought to the research team. It also prompted us to consider how our experiences might inflect and shape the research we do and how we do it. Guided by Donna Haraway’s (1988) notion of “situated knowledges,” we committed ourselves to a feminist ethic whereby only through locating ourselves do we have the opportunity to make responsible knowledge claims.

Training, Researching, Analyzing, Reflecting

Our collaborative process integrated four key components: training, data collection, thematic analysis, and reflection. Because neither of the student co-researchers had worked on research projects before and only Amanda had introductory exposure to ethnographic methods, Jocelyn suggested articles and book chapters on collaborative research and semi-structured interview and focus group methods, as well as readings on feminist research methods in the social sciences.ⁱⁱⁱ The student co-researchers were also provided copies of two recently published anthropological monographs based on fieldwork with military service members, veterans, and their family members: Kenneth MacLeish’s *Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community* and Erin Finley’s *Fields of Combat: Understanding PTSD among Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan*. The student co-researchers contributed to the training process by sharing resources on military culture and institutional life, as well as scholarly articles on topics including military sexual trauma and PTSD that they discovered in the course of their own reading. By developing a shared archive of literature in this way, we pooled our knowledge and learned from one another. The first month’s meetings were largely devoted to discussion of these texts, with significant time given to exploring how ethnographic methods differ from the research methods that were more familiar to the students, and to the question of how feminist and participatory approaches might inform our interviews with military and veteran participants. Time spent reading and then discussing these texts as a group was documented as part of the students’ work hours, as this training was understood to be an integral component of the collaborative potential of the project and thus of the position’s responsibilities.

Given that Lacy and Amanda had never conducted interviews, during the first two months of the research project, Jocelyn took the lead conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups, while the students observed and took notes on content, format, and style. In our weekly meetings, we discussed the students’ observations of what they felt worked well and what didn’t, what questions could have been adjusted, and what they noticed about Jocelyn’s interviewing style, demeanor, and approach. The students also agreed to interview each other during the first month to get a “feel” for the process. Gradually, Jocelyn ceded control of leading interviews to the student co-researchers, as

each felt comfortable. Once Lacy and Amanda began working more independently, Jocelyn provided support in keeping with each student's preference and comfort level: in some cases, by attending interviews as a silent observer taking notes or as a joint interviewer; in others, supporting the student to conduct interviews on her own. Lacy and Amanda were encouraged to listen to the recordings of each other's interviews – both to get a sense of a different interviewing style and to affirm the shared nature of the research endeavor. Jocelyn also continued to conduct interviews on her own, with Lacy and Amanda invited to attend and participate as schedules permitted. Jocelyn took the lead in guiding the first three focus groups; Lacy led the final focus group.

While the student co-researchers had limited exposure to research design prior to this project, all members of the research team were able to contribute to the design of the research project's methods in important ways. Jocelyn generated initial interview guides for the semi-structured interviews, which were modified based on feedback from the student co-researchers. Given their particular interest in the potential for new and important kinds of interactions to emerge in the space of the focus groups, Lacy and Amanda played a central role in designing the interview script and inclusion criteria for the focus groups. They were critical to the decision to make our focus groups gender-specific, and to make one of the two all-men focus groups limited to male combat veterans. Because thematic analysis of interview transcripts began during data collection, all three of us were able to identify emergent themes and information gaps that we believed warranted revisions to the interview guides. Proposed modifications and additions to the interview guides were discussed as a group and adjustments were made accordingly.

In this sense, the exploratory nature of the pilot project enhanced the collaborative potentials of the research. First, it enabled greater flexibility in the research design and allowed us to pursue emergent themes and questions as we became attuned to them in the course of concurrently conducting interviews, focus groups, and data analysis. As research progressed, the student co-researchers became more attuned to particular thematic concerns emerging from the interviews with veterans: Lacy was especially interested in the experiences of women combat veterans and Amanda, in the gendered impacts of military service on family members. In the final two months of the research, Jocelyn provided guidance as Lacy and Amanda each worked to clarify their specific hypotheses regarding these two subpopulations and worked with them to revise and modify their interview guides to reflect these particular foci. The student co-researchers then devoted most of the remaining research time on interviews exploring their respective hypotheses, reporting their findings back to the group during weekly meetings. Since the intention of the exploratory project was to broadly assess gendered dimensions of military service and veteran transition experiences, the pursuit of these different yet allied agendas enabled a broad-based vision from which we were able to refine future research questions.

In the course of data analysis, the research team also had a number of informal, sustained conversations with key research participants who offered periodic feedback as the interviews unfolded and analysis was undertaken. Two research participants were particularly critical in this regard. Over lunches, they asked about the themes we saw emerging in our data. They served as important sounding boards for our analyses as they unfolded and provided feedback on preliminary drafts of talks and presentations. We also organized an informal get-together with the women from our first focus group in response to the enthusiasm they expressed for another opportunity to meet. In addition to allowing the women to connect further with one another, the meeting gave us an opportunity to share preliminary analyses from the first focus group and receive feedback. Through collaborative theorizing with our participants, we learned that "relationships do not end with fieldwork," but rather that negotiations of meaning and of ensuring trustworthiness continue through analysis and later accounts of research stories (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001, p. 324).

Together with training in ethnographic research methods, data collection, and data analysis, continual self-reflection emerged as an important component of our collaborative work. Guided by feminist scholarship that asserts the importance of personal experience to academic knowledge production (England, 1994; Foss & Foss, 1994), each of us came up with individualized means for reflecting on the impacts and experiences of research. While encouraged, formal or recorded self-reflection was neither a required component of the research position nor did any of us feel we were required to share our reflections with the research team, though the time spent engaged in these endeavors was compensated as part of the students' work hours. Journal writing, poetry, voice recordings of reflections, impressions raised by particular interviews – and the research experience more broadly – and informal notes were some methods that we drew on to process and reflect over the course of the six months. Ultimately, many of these reflections were voluntarily shared among the members of the research team during long, informal conversations over meals.

The entanglements between the personal and the scholarly were therefore not incidental to the research, but rather were understood to be fundamental to the research process itself. In the next section, we each share our broader reflections on what we learned and gained from being co-researchers on this project. While these reflections focus in the main on Lacy's experiences as a concerted effort to make space for underrepresented perspectives in academic knowledge production, Jocelyn also offers some insight into what she gained in order to highlight the mutual learning and teaching that characterized the collaborative research process.

Impacts of Student Veteran Research: Lacy's Reflections

“Let us pay attention now, we said, to women: let men and women make a conscious act of attention when women speak; let us get back to earth – not as a paradigm for ‘women,’ but as place of location.”

- Adrienne Rich, *Notes Toward a Politics of Location* (1984, p. 214).

A senior undergraduate student at the time of the research project, Lacy joined as a co-researcher with a strong interest in women's military and veteran transition experiences. Her lens onto these issues is profoundly shaped by her own location as a woman veteran of the Marine Corps who deployed to Afghanistan. As will be discussed, her experiences interviewing men and women military veterans were impactful in different ways for these reasons. Her commitment to the gendered dimensions of military service was also framed and marked by the historic decision by the Pentagon to permit women to officially serve in the combat arms of the US military – a change in policy that was brought into effect in January 2016 – halfway through the research project.

Having served several times as a volunteer research subject prior to her involvement with this project, Lacy had long been staunchly committed to the importance of research on veteran-related issues, particularly with regard to women veterans' experiences. This, however, was the first time in research that she was not the subject but rather the producer of knowledge about military service and its impacts. We share her reflections, both personal and professional, on the implications of this research experience as conveyed in written reflections during fieldwork and voice notes recorded after the research was completed.

“There needs to be knowledge about women in uniform”: Social Space, Self-Knowledge, and Critical Consciousness

“Of course, doing the research changed me dramatically. I always knew I wanted to do veteran research. It has changed me in a lot of ways. It's made me more aware of issues and experiences affected those of us in military service.” Lacy was particularly impacted by the opportunity to interview women military veterans one-on-one and in focus groups. She valued the

importance of ethnographic research to illuminating the diversity of women military service members' and veterans' experiences. The process of conducting research was also itself a feminist undertaking and a kind of social intervention. Lacy was particularly struck by how a research method like focus groups could not only create a social space for women veterans, but a space of visibility, recognition, and belonging. Research has suggested the historically low levels of social cohesion among women veterans (Wessel, 2016).

In a recent study examining women veterans' low utilization of service member and veteran service organizations, women veterans reported not feeling welcome (Thomas, Haring, McDaniel, Fletcher, & Albright, 2017). The women's focus groups created "a safe space for women veterans" that Lacy felt did not otherwise exist in her immediate social and academic environment. By bringing together women from across military branches and ranks, the focus groups were designed to emphasize elements of shared concern and experience rather than reproduce the institutional hierarchies and power relations that often keep women separated and divided within the military (Herbert, 2000).

The two women's focus groups we conducted, each with six women, were composed primarily of student veterans, both undergraduate and graduate, who were enrolled at our home institution. The majority of the women did not know each other prior to the focus groups. During the focus groups, we heard women talk about how affirming it was to come together—indeed, to visibly register the presence of women veterans and to do so in a space that opened room for discussion of their veteran identities, as differently inhabited. The need for a space for these particular women veterans was clear after our first focus group: after a two-and-a-half-hour interview, all the women participants and the co-researchers went out together to a nearby restaurant for more informal socializing and discussion.

As a research method, focus group interviews have been of great value in conducting and developing feminist research (Wilkinson, 1998, 1999). Feminist researchers have noted the appeal of focus groups because they enable participants to exercise some degree of control over their own interactions (Callahan, 1983; Malhotra, 1984; Mies, 1983; Montell, 1999). Furthermore, because they are interactional and facilitate the co-construction of meaning between people, focus groups have the potential for collectivizing women's experiences by allowing women to identify and name shared experiences (Fine, 1992; Herbert, 1989; Kitzinger, 1994; Nichols-Casebolt & Spakes, 1995; Schlesinger, Dobash, R. E., Dobash, R. P., & Weaver, 1992). In this way, focus groups may work to help enable "women to overcome their structural isolation" (Mies, 1983). Recognizing commonalities in what had earlier been understood to be "personal" and "individual" problems can also lead to participants identifying the social, economic, and political factors that shape experience, and can potentially create desire to change them (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 115). As such, Montell (1999, p. 44) notes that focus groups "can be both consciousness-raising and empowering for research subjects, as well as the researcher."

We saw this in our experiences conducting the women's focus groups. One prominent theme that emerged organically from the discussion in the first women's focus group was the challenges of negotiating military environments and institutions defined and structured as masculine. While contributions to the discussion were initially framed at the level of personal experience, several women started making connections and noting recurrent patterns and themes among their experiences. For instance, they noted the broader role that gender and sexuality play in maintaining a masculinist, male-defined military, and how gender ideologies are sustained and reproduced in part by creating divisions among women themselves (cf. Herbert, 2000). To both undergo and observe this process as a co-researcher was transformative for Lacy: "As women in the military, we are turned against each other, we don't talk to each other, and then when we get to the civilian world and it's the

same way. Women are made to compete with each other. Conducting the research made me more sensitive to these things.” In this manner, Lacy allowed herself to be moved by the research in several senses of the term, permitting it to shift her location and realign her own location vis-a-vis others, in part through the collectivization of experience.

The Politics of Recognition and Visibility

As a woman veteran of the Marine Corps who engaged in combat on deployment in Afghanistan several years prior to the policy shift permitting women in the combat arms, Lacy has not had access to the same social, medical, and bureaucratic benefits awarded to male peers who are officially recognized as “combat veterans” of the US military. (Lacy once recounted in a focus group how she went to her local VA hospital for medical care, only to have staff assume she was the spouse of a veteran.) Women in our research who served in various branches in a variety of capacities more broadly, shared the view that there are far fewer acceptable means, embodied markers, and opportunities for women to visibly identify as military veterans to the public and to other veterans than are available to men (cf. Thomas et al., 2017). Many also spoke of being on the receiving end of skepticism and disbelief toward the fact and nature of their military service and expressed concern that the relative invisibility of women’s military service has consequences for research, policy, and the broader sphere of women veterans’ well-being.

For Lacy, interviewing male peers from the position of a researcher and as a woman veteran whose role in combat was not officially recognized, involved subtle negotiations of recognition and visibility. These could be productive, as the genre of the research interview and its grounded, face-to-face interaction sometimes allowed both Lacy and her interviewee to identify, confront, and complicate assumptions in ways not easily attained in other conventional spheres where male and female veterans might encounter one another. Attention to reciprocity has emerged as a concern in qualitative research and in feminist research in particular (Huisman, 2008; Oakley, 1981; Ribbens, 1989). Reciprocity in method may include the “judicious use of self-disclosure” (Harrison et al., 2001) as a means of producing research that is characterized by give-and-take and mutual benefit. Through selective self-disclosure of her own military service and veteran experiences, Lacy established a “knowledgeable stranger” position (Evans, 1979) with her male interviewees. The opportunity to lead our final focus group, composed exclusively of male combat veterans, was symbolically powerful for Lacy and her emergent social identity as a woman combat veteran, allowing her to claim her military service in new ways through the act of mediating the focus group discussion itself.

“They keep me humble and sensitive”: Encountering Diverse Experiences

In light of stereotypes about veterans that hold sway in the media and in American public life, Lacy emphasized the importance of research to diversifying representations of veteran experiences. But as Lacy confessed, it has also been important for her to challenge her own stereotypes, including those about the different branches of military service. It encouraged her to rethink her own assumptions, as well as to think in critical terms about how dimensions of difference such as class, gender, and race may shape the diversity of people’s experiences during and after military service.

For instance, a key element in Lacy’s narrative of her military service is that she joined for love of country. As she recounted it, it was purely out of duty to the nation that she enlisted in the Marine Corps. Lacy said that prior to the research project, she would often harshly judge others who joined the military for other reasons. But since conducting interviews and speaking with others about their life trajectories in and out of the military, she has come to recognize and respect the diverse and

complex factors that shape people's entry into the military, including economic and family-related factors.

Students' involvement in fieldwork may also impart to them practical and transferrable skills through the process of experiential learning (Kneale, 1996; Pawson & Teather, 2002). Conducting fieldwork, for example, is an important means for learning, performing, and disseminating interviewing skills and the "embodied skills of listening" (Driver, 2000, p. 267). The act of learning to listen as a researcher to diverse stories shared by diverse speakers is both a skill and ethic that Lacy carries with her after the completion of the research. She reports that it drives and informs her current veteran support work with a number of organizations she has helped to found and run since graduating from university, and in her current employment in the VA system. Finally, the affective dimension of being involved as a co-researcher in a study in which students are personally invested should not be underestimated. Studies of the integration of fieldwork into classroom curricula have demonstrated how conducting fieldwork can have positive affective implications for students (Boyle et al., 2007). Responsibility to other people's stories was itself impactful for Lacy in ways that continue to have a life beyond the research.

Impacts of Collaborating with Student Veterans: Jocelyn's Reflections

In a discipline where it is widely assumed and expected that doctoral students will cut their teeth as anthropologists by being principal investigators of their first fieldwork projects, working with co-researchers for the first time was a refreshing experience for Jocelyn that made for exciting kinds of dynamics and possibilities. After several years of university teaching, where her relation to undergraduate students was exclusively as instructor and mentor, this project represented Jocelyn's first time working with students in a collaborative research capacity. "It challenged me to balance multiple and shifting positions – colleague, teacher, faculty member, mentor, learner, sister figure, and friend," observed Jocelyn. While navigating multiple positionalities and relations of power is inherent to anthropological research and its many encounters, Jocelyn experienced this differently in a co-researcher capacity. Collaborative work required attunement to when to step forward, when to step back, and most of all, when to travel alongside; it also demanded a new kind of practical facility in co-managing a research team.

While feminist methods remind us that the micropolitics of interaction between co-researchers and research participants are important sites for reciprocity and knowledge production, working on this project also meant remaining aware of how research activities "do structure" in the field by enacting relations and structures of inequality, power, and access (Irwin, 2006). Lacy and Amanda's suggestion to make the focus groups gender-specific, in part to raise the visibility of women veterans in scholarship as well as to support the creation of social spaces for these women to come together around shared issues of concern, was in several respects an important learning moment for Jocelyn. Her involvement in collaborative research has also encouraged her to find ways to prioritize student research, in part by utilizing her capital as a published scholar to increase the visibility and impact of student work. She hopes to magnify these lessons learned as she continues to work with undergraduate and graduate students on research projects, including in more traditional mentoring capacities.

This project represented Jocelyn's introduction to a new area of study and set of institutional and social networks. Her earlier work had been based in south India on the topic of suicide, and while her spouse's family has military connections, her immediate family does not.

Even then, I came into the project with strong opinions and views about US militarization, the inadequacy of moral arguments about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the cultural politics of military suffering and sacrifice. Much of this is

...tied up in my personal history as the daughter of immigrant parents who intimately experienced war violence themselves.

At times, research participants projected assumptions onto Jocelyn. One male combat veteran of the Marine Corps began their interview with an aggressive provocation: “You’re not some angry feminist bent on arguing that women should be in combat roles, are you?” In this regard, Jocelyn learned an invaluable lesson from observing Lacy navigate a wide spectrum of positions and experiences in the course of research, including experiences and opinions that could be upsetting, angering, or disturbing. Jocelyn learned that research is not about denying the excitement, hopefulness, sadness, anger, and revulsion that research – and even interviewees – may generate in us. Rather, it is about embracing ambivalence as a strategy that allows us to be drawn – if only momentarily – into the multitude of directions research participants pull us with their stories, experiences, and words (Kierans & Bell, 2017), in the hopes of producing more nuanced and complex accounts when we emerge on the other side.

Conclusions

For military veterans, homecoming is less a discrete event of return than a process of “social becoming,” wherein veterans navigate resources, identities, and expectations to define for themselves and others their place within the civilian social world (Sørensen, 2015). This can involve a search for new social existences and the consideration of and experimentation with different possible identities. In this article, we have explored possibilities for collaborative research between student veterans and faculty researchers as one space of action and knowledge production in the broader process of social becoming navigated by military veterans in higher education.

Drawing on our experiences and reflections, we have suggested the personal and scholarly implications that can emerge from collaborative research. Such collaborations have other ramifying effects. For instance, by integrating training and research, collaborative research relationships can offer undergraduates training in data collection and analysis, supporting the development of undergraduate research skills that can be carried forth into future research work. This research has also provided material that the faculty member has integrated into course instruction, thus strengthening both the integration of research and teaching and the visibility of student-driven research on campus. Research conducted by student co-researchers could also provide the springboard to co- or self-authored student publications and senior honors theses.

We acknowledge that our experiences working together on a qualitative ethnographic project will not be generalizable to all research collaborations. Furthermore, there are challenges and limitations to note, as there are for all research methods and projects. The actual process of collaboration was as much dependent on factors that could be planned as much as those that couldn’t: factors from the ebbs and flows of faculty and student obligations that competed for our time, to personal chemistry. Moreover, the exploratory nature of this research project was also significant to allowing us the space for the student veteran co-researchers to pursue emergent interests and evolving lines of inquiry, and thus to exercise greater control over the research process and agenda. Yet in disciplines such as anthropology, the faculty researcher’s home discipline, funded collaborative research is not always easy to come by, particularly in the initial stages of research. Differences in funding sources and structures, as well as in scholarship standards (e.g., research and publication conventions, faculty tenure criteria), may have significant implications on how available, viable, and appealing such collaborative research opportunities may be to academic researchers.

Yet, the potential value of such collaborations remains. The inclusion of traditionally underrepresented military veteran researchers in academic knowledge production about their experiences, priorities, and concerns can have wide-ranging implications. Faculty researchers’

connections with academics, clinicians, and public health officials can further help to facilitate the dissemination of research findings to produce relevant publications and workshops, while student veterans themselves are connected with social networks that can help to circulate research findings in spaces not traditionally targeted by academic publications. Research collaborations can produce knowledge of critical importance to veteran organizers and advocates, while also providing significant and potentially transformative opportunities for researchers themselves.

Notes

- i. In recent years, however, there has emerged a rich and growing anthropological and medical anthropological scholarship among military service members and veterans, including work that explores the everyday labor and embodied experiences of producing war. See, for example, Finley, 2011; Gutmann and Lutz, 2010; MacLeish, 2013; Messinger, 2013; Scandlyn and Hautzinger, 2014; Sørensen, 2015; Wool, 2015.
- ii. Nor is the status of “insider” a fixed or simple matter, since there are many ways of being “inside” or “outside” just as there are multiple ways of defining a community (Hurstun, 1935; Bell et al., 1993; Narayan, 1993). This is evident in debates about gender integration in the military, for example.
- iii. Readings included selections from H. Russell Bernard’s *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Robert Emerson et al.’s edited volume, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, and Shulamit Reinharz’s *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, as well as Kim England’s article, “Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research.”

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Jocelyn Lim Chua

Associate Professor of Anthropology
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
jlchua@email.unc.edu

Lacy Jo Evans

University of North Carolina Chapel Hill
Lacyjoevans@gmail.com
