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Mapping the Military- Civilian Divide

Steven R. Wilson
Department of Communication
University of South Florida

News Stories on the Military-Civilian Divide

“DOD Official Cites Widening Military-Civilian Gap” (May 16, 2019)

<https://www.defense.gov/explore/story/Article/1850344/dod-official-cites-widening-military-civilian-gap/>

“Pentagon says Military-Civilian Divide Could Endanger All Volunteer Force”

(January 20, 2018)

<https://taskandpurpose.com/pentagon-says-military-civilian-divide-endanger-volunteer-force>

“‘We are at war and people don't even know': Inside the divide between the military and the rest of America that's wider than it's ever been” (July 20, 2017)

<https://www.businessinsider.com/divide-between-military-civilians-bigger-in-america-2017-7>

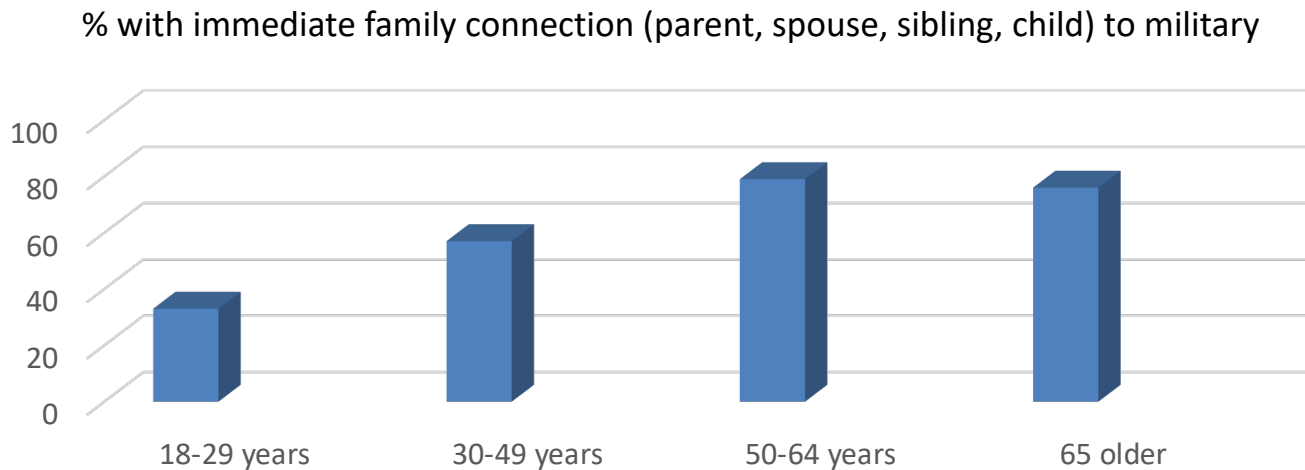
“How Veterans Can Help Bridge the Military-Civilian Divide” (Nov. 13, 2017)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/11/how-veterans-can-help-bridge-the-civilian-military-divide/545669/>

Situating Myself

- Civilian
- Military parent
- Family communication scholar (difficult conversations, intergroup dynamics)
- Purdue MFRI affiliated research scientist/USF professor

Military-Civilian Divides: Fewer Family Connections*



*“The military-civilian gap: Fewer family connections.” *Pew Research Center*, Nov. 2011 ($N = 2003$ adults)

Military-Civilian Divides: Media Portrayals*

Frames: Make some aspects of reality salient, shape perceptions of nature/causes/effects of issue

Frame

1. Charity/assistance

Examples

“Wounded at war, Army veteran gets new home”

“Disabled veterans to get property tax cut”

2. Hero

“This Memorial Day weekend is a time for family and honoring fallen veterans”

“94-year-old...veteran awarded 10 medals and distinctions for WWII service”

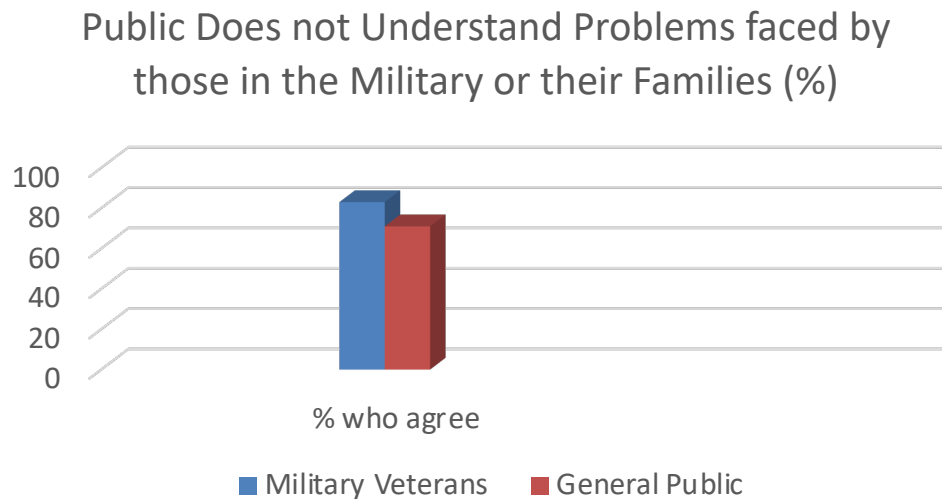
3. Victim

“Suicides of young veterans top those of active-duty troops”

“Veterans struggled to find jobs in Michigan, where unemployment is 2nd in nation.”

*S. Parrott et al. (2019). “Hero, Charity Case, and Victim: How U.S. News Media Frame Military Veterans on Twitter, *Armed Forces and Society*”

Military-Civilian Divide: Perceived Lack of Understand*



- “War and Sacrifice in the post 9/11 era”, *Pew Research Center*, Oct. 5, 2011
(*N* = 1853 Veterans and *N* = 2003 General Population Adults)

Military Divides: Multiple Levels (Behavioral Health)

- 1. Media:** “victim” frame can create the impression that “all veterans struggle with PTSD” (stories of resilience less common)
- 2. Family:** military/civilian divides shape disclosure, privacy, perceived understanding in families (e.g., “I want to understand but I can’t totally understand”)
- 3. Healthcare/Legal:** civilian providers/judges can lack cultural competence (Star Behavioral Health Providers, Veterans Treatment Courts)

Military-Civilian Divides: Consequences

- Concerns *about ability to recruit/sustain* All-Volunteer Force
- Military families *feeling disconnected* from civilian communities in which they live (Blue Star Families, 2017)
- Civilians *not understanding/feeling invested* in military

Key Premise

- U.S. military does not have a visibility problem; it has a conversational disconnect with civilian society

Dialogue as a “Bridge”

Dialogue occurs when *participants from distinct social groups share and listen* in order to:

- **Understand (rather than change) each other’s perspective**
- **Reflect on their own assumptions (learn about self as well as other)**
- **Learn what makes the other party unique (branch, MOS, other social IDs)**

Dialogue presumes that *military and civilian communities are both responsible* for bridging divides (communication problems rarely arise from only one party)

Intergroup Contact as a Bridge

- Intergroup contact: 70 years of research show increased contact with “outgroup” members typically results in more positive attitudes not just for individual outgroup members but the entire outgroup
 - True for contact with different racial/ethnic groups, ages, sexual orientations...
 - Contact has stronger effects when occurs in situations where members have common goals, equal status, support by institutions
 - Contact increases empathy/role-taking, perceived norms, de/recategorization

Dovidio, J. et al. (2017). Reducing intergroup bias through intergroup contact: Twenty years of progress and future directions. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 20, 602-620.

Mapping the Divide

- Studying/Critiquing **Media Coverage** of military/veteran families, as well as the military/civilian divide itself
- Creating/Evaluating Effects of **Dialogue**: Military/Civilian Communities
 - Outcomes: perceived understanding, levels of bias/stereotyping, perceptions of common interests/responsibilities