

## CHAPTER

# 2

# Military Culture and Diversity

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter is written with the purpose of orienting the reader to what has been referred to as *military culture*. Culture in the military context is comprised of the values, beliefs, traditions, norms, perceptions, and behaviors that govern how members of the armed forces think, communicate, and interact with one another as well as with the outside world (Exum, Coll & Weiss, 2011). Mary Edwards Wertsch (1991), in her study of adults who grew up in military families post-World War II, described the military culture metaphorically as a “fortress” symbolizing the kind of separateness that military life entails from the rest of society. This brand of “culture” also determines how military personnel view their functioning in life, their status, and the role of the military in U.S. society.

A key tenet in the social work knowledge base today is the need for social workers to be culturally competent with regard to the target population they serve. However, most social work professionals who will be assisting military personnel, veterans and their families know little about this population (Freeman & Bicknell, 2008). This gap is particularly problematic today, given the increasing reliance on civilian practitioners to provide the needed behavioral health services to service members who are returning to their civilian lives. Among such returnees are members of the National Guard and Reserve Components who comprise almost half of the Total Force. These citizen soldiers are not full-time military personnel; that is, unless they are activated and deployed (Maxfield, 2008). Additionally, there will be veterans retiring from service or separating from active duty who may not access the traditional Veterans Affairs clinics but instead will be turning to community mental health agencies and private practitioners. Thus, it becomes essential for civilian practitioners to be familiar with the military lifestyle and its associated strengths and demands in order to offer culturally responsive services.

In addition to providing an introduction to military culture, this chapter also renders an overview of the various racial and ethnic groups that have served and continue to serve in the military, highlighting their sacrifices and their significant historical contributions to

the security of our nation. The chapter also includes sections on aging veterans and on gay, lesbian, and bisexual military personnel and the unique occupational stressors and sacrifices they have endured.

## MILITARY CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND COUNSELING

Clinical social workers and other mental health practitioners need to comprehend and take into account the client's worldviews (including culturally based worldviews), values, and experiences (Weiss, Coll, & Metal, 2011). This understanding is to "cultivate cross cultural understanding" and promote an "interpersonally close encounter" (Berg-Cross & Takushi-Chinen, 1995; as cited in Ponterotto, Gretchen, & Chauhan, 2001, p. 861). Achieving true cultural competence involves an ability to grasp the "broad worldviews of the cultural group" while examining the "individual expression of these views" (p. 87). Within the counseling professions cultural competence is brought to the forefront in the code of ethics by instructing mental health practitioners to understand the diverse backgrounds of the clients, and provide culturally competent services (American Psychological Association, 1992; National Association of Social Workers, 1999). Additionally, according to the Council on Social Work Education (2008), Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, social work students are ethically obligated to identify, analyze and implement effective practice strategies with people from diverse cultures (CSWE, Educational Policy, 2.1.10[a]–[d]).

Borrowing from counseling diversity theories, concepts such as acculturation and ethnic identity development can be implemented to understand military service personnel and veterans as a distinct culture. For instance, acculturation models explore the degrees to which immigrants assimilate and adapt to their host cultures (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2008). Ethnic identity development models examine the degree to which people of color embrace their own heritage in the face of racism and discrimination experienced in a host or majority culture (D.W. Sue & Sue). Grieger and Ponterotto (1995) offer a framework that considers the client's level of acculturation as it applies to the counseling process. They posit that the more acculturated the client is to the host culture (i.e., in terms of holding middle-class Caucasian American societal values) the more likely the client will be at ease with the counseling process. Applying these notions to military personnel and veterans allows therapists to examine the levels of acculturation and cultural identity in service members who are transitioning from the military into the civilian world. It also offers a lens by which to ascertain veteran perceptions of the counseling process.

Both enlisted persons and officers in the armed forces are indoctrinated to believe that mental health issues and psychological problems are sources of weakness, and thus service member perceptions regarding counseling are ambivalent at best (although the military is currently attempting to destigmatize mental health services). This culturally driven value can serve as a potential obstacle in the therapeutic process. Clinicians need to address this issue with their clients on the first visit and validate the service member for attending therapy. According to Grieger and Ponterotto (1995), a clinician should assess the client's level of psychological-mindedness (or capacity for insight) in comprehending, interpreting, and attributing individual problems. Within military culture, service personnel are

dissuaded from considering individuality; instead, they are to follow orders from superiors and are to act as part of a group, whereby the unit takes precedence over the individual. This collectivistic standpoint may also present a challenge to mental health professionals working with veterans who highly identify with the military culture (Coll, Weiss, Draves, & Dyer, 2012). Many veterans even after separating from military service continue to lead their lives according to their military identity. Identity is defined as the process by which people define themselves, and this determines attitudes and behaviors and the manner in which they communicate that definition to others (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). This chapter's authors hypothesize that a veteran's overidentification with military culture could impact his or her ability to successfully transition into the civilian world and impinge on the ability to develop rapport in the therapeutic relationship (especially if the client's identity clashes with that of the civilian therapist). On the other hand, some veterans after completing military service choose not to adhere to the strict military identity. In other words, these individuals underidentify with the military, and for some this may be a way of easing their entry into new civilian roles (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2001). Thus, clinicians need to know that not all veterans are alike, just as intra-group variations exist within a given culture (D. W. Sue & Sue, 2008).

Cultural competence in general requires clinicians to consider their own cultural background and attitudes toward the client (Lonner & Ibrahim, 1996), and this is especially pertinent in working with military and veteran clients. For instance, the clinician may hold prejudices about military service or may harbor antiwar beliefs, and the expression of those beliefs could alienate the veteran client. Moreover, to do so would violate ethical practice in that the ethical foundation for the helping professions is formed on the premise of respect for client differences (Coll et al., 2012).

## MILITARY CULTURE: VALUES AND BELIEFS

Military culture, as stated in the introductory paragraph, is comprised of values, beliefs, traditions, norms, perceptions, and behaviors that govern how members of the armed forces think, communicate, and interact. This notion of culture also determines how military personnel and veterans view their role in life. No matter the branch of service or era of service, the common threads shared by veterans are reflected in the indoctrination or socialization of the military core values, which include honor, courage, loyalty, integrity, and commitment. These core values guide service members in the highest ethical principles through creeds such as "I will bear true faith and allegiance," "I will obey my orders," "*Semper Fidelis*," ("*Always Faithful*") (U.S. Marine Corps values; as cited in Exum et al., 2011).

The values determine the behaviors that serve as the standards of conduct for military personnel. The standards of conduct apply regardless of whether the service member is in uniform. The military as a socializing institution believes that this pervasive application of standards of conduct is necessary because members of the armed forces must be "combat ready" (Exum et al., 2011). Additionally, Daley (1999) stated that over time service personnel develop a unique identity, which he termed an *ethnic* identity. This uniqueness forms as a result of shared commonalities that individuals and families encounter on entry

into the military culture. For instance, the commonalities include the following aspects: the use of language that is unique to the military, a sense of exclusivity, status within command, branch of service, and military experience with or without combat. These are all factors that contribute to a sense of "we-ness," or a profound shared experience. Additionally, those who serve together in special operation forces can be deeply bonded to one another. This has been anecdotally referred to feel as a "tribal" experience.

## DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF MILITARY CULTURE

When attempting to understand military culture we automatically think of our own culture as a form of comparison and measurement. For instance, for many U.S. civilians there is an emphasis on the individual or on individual achievements, personal freedoms and a striving for fluid social mobility. These typical civilian cultural characteristics stand in stark contrast to the military culture where there is an intrinsic hierarchical social structure and an emphasis on the mission, chain of command (direct report), and group solidarity (Exum et al., 2011). Social status in the military is clear, in that officers hold a higher status than enlisted personnel and both officers and enlisted personnel are further ordered in status according to rank. Duties, responsibilities, pay, living arrangements, and social interactions are all determined by rank structure (which is described in the next section). Military culture provides a clear understanding to its members that an individual's purpose is to support the mission through loyalty, obedience, and honor. Individual achievement is important to the degree that it supports efficient and effective completion of the assigned task (Exum et al., 2011).

Perhaps the most salient difference between civilian culture and military culture is that devotion to duty in the military includes being willing to sacrifice one's life for one's country, for one's comrades, and even for an unknown person or entity, as in the case of humanitarian missions. Thus, there is an implicit understanding among military personnel, that they follow lawful orders with the full recognition that they may die or be severely injured in fulfillment of those orders (Cook, 2004). Their commitment is profound and may impact their perspective toward and, their relationship with, those civilians who have not served. Service members develop a worldview that reflects the values of military culture, and for this reason they often feel out of place on returning to civilian life. Readjustment for military personnel to civilian culture is not as simple as civilians might think. It involves much more than taking off the uniform. For many veterans, transitioning means learning a new lifestyle, language, and adapting to a new culture (for additional information please see Chapter 17 by Coll and Weiss).

## THE MILITARY AS AN ORGANIZATION

The U.S. military "is a hierarchical organization, with a system of military ranks to denote levels of authority within the organization" (Kadis & Walls, 2009, p. 1). The organizational rank structure includes three general categories: enlisted, warrant officers, and commissioned officers, each offering a unique career and leadership path that directly impacts earning potential, living environment, and military status (Daley, 1999).



The U.S. armed services are comprised of four branches (under the Department of Defense), each one with a unique mission, purpose, and subculture. The branches include the Army (which represents the main ground force of the United States); Navy (sea operations); Marine Corps (amphibious warfare); and the Air Force (air, space, and cyberspace). The Army is the oldest and largest branch and is comprised of Active Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserves. The Navy (second largest branch), is comprised of an active and reserve component. The Marine Corps (smallest of the armed forces) has an active component and a reserve component. The Air Force is the youngest branch. It was established post-World War II and has an active and two reserve components, the Air Force Reserve and the Air National Guard. It is noteworthy that the United States Coast Guard is not part of the Department of Defense (DoD), but it falls under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The role of the Coast Guard is to ensure maritime safety, security, mobility, national defense, and protection of natural resources (Center for Deployment Psychology [CDP], n.d.; Exum et al., 2011).

The total number of individuals serving in the United States Armed Services is more than 3.6 million. This includes the DoD Active Duty, Department of Homeland Security Active Duty, and Ready Reserve Coast Guard; members of the Retired and Stand by Reserve; as well as DoD appropriated (funded) and nonappropriated civilian personnel. According to DoD (2011) statistics, Active Duty and Coast Guard Active Duty members comprise the largest portion of the military force (39.4%), followed by Ready Reserve members (29.2%), and DoD civilian personnel (24.9%). It is worth noting that there are also a variety of privatized military contract firms that provide support, technical assistance, and consultation services (see Singer, 2004).

### **Eligibility: Why Join?**

The U.S. armed forces have typically been open to anyone who is a U.S. citizen or a U.S. resident (a green card holder), between the ages of 18 and 35. Requirements for joining include a high school diploma, absence of a criminal record, and relatively good health. However, there have been times when some of these requirements have been waived, specifically during times of war or shortage of enrollees (Exum et al., 2011).

Until recently, individuals who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were barred from military service. The official policy of the Department of Defense and Public Law 103-160, Section 654, Title 10, passed in 1993 was that homosexuals were excluded from military service. The Don't Ask Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010 (H.R. 2965, S. 4023) was signed into law on December 22, 2010, repealing the ban on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals from serving in the U.S. Armed Services (additional information will be provided later in the chapter).

Those who serve in uniform join for a variety of reasons. Some may join because of the opportunities for travel. Others may join to satisfy a family tradition of forefathers who have served. Still others join out of a sense of patriotism or by being a high school graduate and viewing military service as a way to learn a professional skill while saving money for college through the Post-9/11 GI Bill. For many, the military is a guaranteed employer with equal opportunities for pay and advancement as well as offering excellent benefits for their families (Exum et al., 2011).

Women join the military for some of the same reasons that men join. The advent of the all-volunteer force removed the previous 2% quota, which had restricted the number of women who could serve on active duty ultimately increasing the number of career

opportunities for women (see Chapter 3 on women in the military). Hall (2008) noted, "there are probably as many reasons to join the military as there are military service members" (p. 41). In addition to the above reasons, Hall included more psychological ones, such as desiring to have the identity of a warrior, wanting to flee from problems at home and in their personal lives, and so on. Hall urged civilian counselors to explore reasons for joining when working with service members and their families.

## COMBAT READINESS: MISSION OF THE U.S. MILITARY

It is important for practitioners working with veterans to recognize the various conflicts or wars in which our veterans have served, to comprehend the historical, social, political, and cultural implications of military service, as veterans are not "a one size fits all." Historically, the U.S. military has provided four justifications for overriding the "noninterference clause" of international law (regarding the justifications for war). The first justification is the invitation to intervene in a state that has been besieged by another. The second justification is intervention by right of treaty in which case the United States would intervene based on a prior agreement for mutual defense of the state in question. The third justification is the protection of the lives and property of U.S. citizens in foreign states (as was the case during the invasion of Grenada in 1983). The final justification and the one that seems to best represent the principles of the "just war" doctrine is to engage in war as part of a humanitarian intervention (O'Brien, 1984).

The relevance for mental health practitioners has to do with how the military interprets the use of force to carry out its mission. The last congressionally declared war was World War II. Most U.S. military operations are not technically classified as "wars," and there are many veterans who have served in military operations that have received little or no media coverage. However, these "nonwar" operations were nevertheless dangerous and high risk, and probably involved loss life for both civilians and military personnel alike. Social workers need to understand that when troops are deployed to an "authorized military engagement" such as Operation Enduring Freedom (i.e., Afghanistan) they are being deployed to a war zone. The experience will change them. Accordingly, when they transition back to civilian society they will need to adapt or attenuate their combat responses to a "new normal." Hoge (2010) explained, "'transitioning' home from combat does not mean giving up being a warrior, but rather learning to dial up or down the warrior responses depending on the situation" (p. x). Hoge provided the LANDNAV acronym to assist veterans in this transition (we believe that most of the psychotherapies for combat stress are implicitly based on the elements provided in this model):

- **L = Life Survival Skills**—Defines the veteran's need to understand how the body responds to stress and combat (as survival mechanisms).
- **A = Attend**—Describes how veterans need to pay attention to and modulate their psychological (emotional and cognitive) and physiological reactions.
- **N = Narrate**—Emphasizes the need for combat veterans to narrate their war stories.
- **D = (Learn to) Deal**—Expresses the need for veterans to come up with alternative (positive) coping skills.

- **N = Navigate**—Where the veteran and his or her family members need to learn how to navigate the complex veteran health care and service systems.
- **A = Acceptance**—Relates to the importance of veterans reaching a point of acceptance in their lives with regards to their losses and experiences.
- **V = Vision, Voice, Village/Community and Victory**—Veterans should celebrate what is good in their lives within the context of community/family and have hope for the future.

## MILITARY CULTURE AND CIVILIAN SOCIETY

As noted earlier, military life is fundamentally different from civilian life. Military society is characterized by its own laws, rules, customs and traditions—including numerous restrictions on personal behaviors, or the lack of personal freedoms, which would not be acceptable in the civilian world. Military culture does broadly conform to constitutional norms of individual rights and liberties, but “derives from the functional imperative [battlefield success] and . . . values collective over individual good” (Hooker, 2003, p. 6).

Therefore, the extraordinary responsibilities of the armed forces, the unique conditions of military service, and the critical role of unit cohesion require that the military community, while being subject to civilian control, exist as a separate specialized society (Davenport, 1987). Hence, as Davenport (1987) noted, it is civilian ambivalence about the military’s power plus the military’s obsession with unit cohesion that serves to keep both cultures in potential conflict. Hooker (2003), however, stated that the psychological distance and so-called estrangement between military culture and civilian society have been exaggerated. He suggested that the large number of veterans and reservists that live and comele in civilian society have contributed to a greater understanding both from a psychological perspective and from physical proximity, between these two segments of the U.S. population. Although military culture embraces and imposes a set of values that more narrowly restricts individual behavior, civilians seem to accept the military’s rationale for having a “conservative outlook that emphasizes the group over the individual and organizational success over personal validation” (Hooker, 2003, p. 16).

Although the dynamic tensions that teeter between civilian and military cultures may be suboptimal, “they are far from dangerous” (Hooker, 2003, p. 16). The relevance of this contrast (between the military and civilian worlds) for social workers and other mental health practitioners is that individuals are highly influenced by their environment; that is, every human being goes through some form of socialization. Therefore, helping professionals need to evaluate their own socialization via a self-assessment of their personal attitudes and views towards whichever diverse population they may be encountering (O’Neal, 2012)—in this case, the military and veteran populations. Furthermore, professionals need to expose themselves to various perspectives and multiple realities even within a particular population. Keeping this in mind, professionals need to familiarize themselves with historical and multicultural contexts and policies that have impacted individuals in their respective environments.

This leads us into the next segment of our chapter, which discusses ethnically and racially diverse groups in the military (as the military has long been used as an agent of

social progression and change). The discussion provides a historical overview of the different ethnic groups and their contributions to the U.S. armed forces, to provide the context necessary for social workers delivering services to a multiethnic military population. We begin our discussion of diversity with Hispanics/Latinos.

### Hispanics/Latinos

Hispanic/Latino(a) military personnel have served through every major conflict in the history of the United States, often receiving recognition for their achievements while their ethnicity has not always been noted. During the Mexican-American War, for example, Native Mexican descendants became contracted scouts for the U.S. Army. During World War I, although allowed to serve and given the opportunity to achieve the highest ranks, Hispanics were still mostly relegated to segregated units throughout the military. During World War II, Hispanics were integrated into most units; however, segregated units still existed that were predominately scattered across the globe, and most were tasked with defending the Caribbean islands from Japanese invasion. The war in Vietnam saw a host of changes and issues resulting from the conversion of the military from an all-volunteer force to a mandated draft. The draft affected Hispanics and African Americans disproportionately as compared to Whites, who were more likely to be able to afford college and avoid service. Forced service created undue hardships for Hispanics who served during Vietnam. Prevalent racism combined with a lack of community support from within the military is believed to be one of the reasons that Hispanics were so heavily affected by posttraumatic stress disorder during and after this conflict (Pole, Best, Metzler, & Marmar, 2005). During the initial invasion into Afghanistan, three of the first soldiers to be killed were Hispanics who were not yet citizens (e.g., Marine Lance Corporal Jose Gutierrez, a recent immigrant from Guatemala). President Bush recognized the efforts of documented as well as undocumented immigrants serving in the military and signed an executive order granting posthumous citizenship for those immigrants who were killed in action. This order, though hailed by some, was viewed by many as an insult to the sacrifices made by those men and women who gave their lives for a country that had not yet accepted them as their own (Estrada, 2009).

### African Americans

African Americans served in the military during the Revolutionary War and the Civil War when the continental Army or Union recognized the need for service people and viewed freed slaves as an asset for service. Unlike White soldiers, Black soldiers were not permitted to remain in the Army after serving in combat during the Revolutionary War and after the Civil War were permitted to remain but typically were stationed in distant outposts isolated from the rest of civilian society. The treatment of African American soldiers was typically demeaning in nature by White military officers and enlisted soldiers, harboring racist and ethnocentric beliefs (Trudeau, 1998). During World War I African Americans were once again called to serve and allowed to serve worldwide given the scope of the conflict. As many as 350,000 served in uniform during World War I; however, many were placed in support roles, such as cooks and laundry personnel. The need for service people dictated the utilization of African Americans in combat operations in which they performed



with valor and distinguished themselves in combat. One such soldier was Sergeant Henry Lincoln Johnson of the New York all-Black 369th Infantry Regiment, who was the first African American to receive the French Croix de Guerre. Johnson received posthumously the Purple Heart in 2003 and in 2004 was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Their performance served to help change the public opinion that supported the social movements to expand the rights and establish equal rights for Black minorities in the United States (Barbeau, Henri, & Nalty, 1996).

World War II brought significant changes for minorities in the military. Although African Americans were still mostly relegated to support roles, during World War II they served in the frontlines. By 1945 the U.S. Army integrated the Army Officer Candidate School. This marked the first time that African Americans and Whites were housed together. That summer, African-American troops were sent to reinforce White companies in Western Europe, and the positive experience served as a model which was supported by President Truman, who in 1948 signed Executive Order 9981, which led to the desegregation of the military (Evans, 2001).

### **Native Americans**

Native Americans participated in the American Indian Wars and the Revolutionary War. From the beginning, the service of Native Americans in the military would coincide with their fight for equal rights (DoD, 1996; NHHHC, 2012;). Having distinguished themselves throughout multiple conflicts in the young American nation, Native Americans were included in the development of the U.S. Army Indian Scouts in 1866. During the 1898 Spanish-American War these Indian Scouts would serve alongside Teddy Roosevelt, fighting as a part of his famed Rough Riders in Cuba (DoD; NHHHC). During World War II Native Americans would again show their unbridled patriotism toward the United States. Though eligible for the draft, 99% of those Native Americans enlisted ahead of selection; this percentage qualified them as having been the highest represented ethnic/racial group in the war. At the onset of the Vietnam War, Native Americans were again called to arms. This time, along with being drafted in numbers disproportionate to Whites, they also volunteered in disproportionate numbers to serve in a war that was discriminatory toward them throughout the conflict (DoD; NHHHC). More than 42,000 Native Americans served in Vietnam, of which 90% volunteered ahead of being drafted. It was noted that those of Native American descent were most likely to be sent on perilous scouting missions behind enemy lines because they were perceived to be inherently able to perform these duties in a more efficient manner. These incursions behind enemy lines were said to be trips into "Indian Country." Native Americans continued their established trend of honorable military service during Panama, Grenada, and Desert Shield and throughout the latter part of the 20th century (Cross, 2005).

### **Asians and Pacific Islanders**

Asians and Pacific Islanders (API), like many identified racial and ethnic minorities, have played an integral role in the development of the United States and have served bravely in the U.S. military. Although their loyalties were questioned by the U.S. government through World War II, APIs have consistently demonstrated a willingness to

serve in the military (DoD, 2012). Even from the beginning of their immigration into the United States, APIs have experienced racism and discrimination. By the middle of the 19th century APIs became the first ethnic group to be prohibited from being eligible for U.S. citizenship even if they had served in the military. As with other minority groups, it was the outbreak of a major world war, in this case World War I, which provided APIs an opportunity to serve in greater numbers and within a wider scope, but most importantly it established citizenship for APIs. The establishment of military bases in the Philippines and in other API countries would bring young U.S. service members into contact with APIs in their host countries and provide them with the opportunity to become familiar with their culture (Nash, 2010). Unfortunately, the United States again set discriminatory policies toward APIs post-World War I with laws such as the Tyding-McDuffie Act of 1934, which identified Filipinos as being ineligible for citizenship and with the continued support of the Alien Land Law Act of 1910, which dictated that anyone ineligible for citizenship could not own land (Wing, 2005).

With the threat of war looming across Europe in the 1930s President Roosevelt called for the covert observation of people of Japanese descent across the West Coast, primarily in Hawaii (DoD). General Patton also saw the Japanese in Hawaii as a threat and began compiling a list of prominent Japanese and Japanese-American community leaders and businesspeople in Hawaii during the same time frame. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, followed by the War Relocation Act of 1942, which identified resident Japanese and Japanese Americans as "enemy aliens" and established internment camps across the United States where Japanese and Japanese Americans were sent for the duration of the war (DoD, 2012).

However, more than 35,000 second generation Japanese Americans, or Nisei, chose to support the United States and entered the military and served in the European front. The dedication and patriotism displayed by APIs during World War II has been credited in tearing down the API exclusion efforts in the United States (Yenne, 2007). Ironically, with the end of World War II, Nisei soldiers who had fought so fiercely went back to life in an America that only months earlier had labeled them as the enemy.

President Clinton acknowledged the wrongs committed against APIs by way of a formal apology for the interment of the Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II (Nash, 2010). President Clinton also identified APIs as an underserved population and directed the funding of programs aimed at developing resources for APIs in the United States. During the onset of the Global War on Terrorism in 2001, President Bush announced and recognized the various generations of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans who have proudly served the United States during times of conflict. In the next section, we will provide a case vignette of an Asian-American social work officer as an example of the generational influence of military service as well as the clashing of cultures (i.e., civilian versus military).

### Case Vignette: Alice

Alice is a 31-year-old Asian American social work officer (Captain) in the United States Air Force. Her 33-year-old husband Robert, who is Caucasian, is currently unemployed. Alice describes Robert as a patient man with a good sense of humor who is generally supportive of Alice and her military career. Alice loves her job and is highly regarded by her

superiors. However, Robert has been unhappy lately since their transfer to yet "another military base" (every 2 to 3 years), and he has not been able to find work due to the current lack of employment opportunities in the area. He enjoyed his engineering career and feels resentful that it has been so challenging for him as a military spouse with the constant moves and his not being able to remain in a steady job. Robert feels like he is "drowning" in the military culture and does not feel part of the military community.

Alice has experienced some issues in her military career. Her last assignment was supposed to be at a career-enhancing military base overseas but it was without spousal accompaniment, so she turned it down and instead she and her husband are at a military installation on the mainland. Alice is determined to stay in the military but also wants to salvage her marriage. Her family of origin includes a legacy of proud military veterans, many of whom have served honorably since World War II. She fears disappointing her family if she were to separate from the military (as her husband has asked her to do), and she has dreams of becoming the first Major General Social Worker in the U.S. military. She feels that her husband needs time to learn to love the military like she does.

### Case Vignette Discussion Questions

This case exemplifies some of the notions expressed in this chapter with regard to the distinctiveness of military culture versus the civilian culture. Here we see the importance that honor and service represent in Alice's life. She comes from generations of veterans and thus is deeply connected to her military roots and identity—so much so that she does not envision herself not being part of the military. Yet, for her husband, the military is a foreign element in his life, and he cannot identify with what it means to be a service member. The questions provided below can serve as a point of discussion with regard to this vignette.

1. In what ways do Alice and Robert differ from each other regarding their views about living a military life?
2. What are their perceived strengths and challenges associated with the military lifestyle?
3. What are some of the ways that a social worker can help this couple understand each other's differing points of view?
4. How would you, as a civilian social worker, feel about working with this case? What aspects of this case may be difficult for you or other civilian social workers to relate to?
5. How do military culture and ethnicity (Asian American) intersect in the case scenario?

### Gays in the Military

Little has been written about gays during the early development of the U.S. military (Ells, 1996). Prior to World War I there were no specific policies addressing homosexuality in military; instead, it was addressed at the lower command level by those in charge of specific units or vessels.

Homosexuality was targeted in 1942 as a means of screening out service members by the draft board. Service members being inducted were evaluated through a psychiatric examination, whereby those who were perceived to be homosexuals (i.e., demonstrating "feminine-like behaviors") would be deemed ineligible for military service.

Although the military was desegregated in 1948, an informal caste system based on racial/ethnic identity and sexual orientation developed among the ranks. The military stepped in to protect their last bastion of segregation in 1950 with the development of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, or UCMJ (Evans, 2001). Under the UCMJ, homosexuality was targeted in Article 125, which specifically prohibited sodomy, which included sexual contact between members of the same sex. This illegalization of homosexuality in the military would be used to discriminate against homosexuals, and anyone accused of being a homosexual would be penalized with a prison sentence and a dishonorable discharge.

In 1965, a rule was established by the DoD that allowed for the right of service members accused of homosexuality to defend themselves in front of a panel of superior officers (Evans, 2001). Prior to the passage of this rule a service member could be discharged based on allegations without a right to defend themselves against the accusation (Evans, 2001). Despite the 1971 development of the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, which provided training on issues of equal opportunities, any steps taken toward acceptance of homosexuals in the military were erased in 1981 with the Department of Defense issuance of Directive 1332.14, which specifically outlawed homosexuality in any form (Evans, 2001). Prior to this policy a command had discretionary authority to discharge homosexuals, as it does with any other violation of the UCMJ. This policy led to the discharge of more than 17,000 homosexuals during the 1980s and created a spotlight on the military's exclusion of homosexuals (Evans, 2001).

Subsequently, in 1993 President Clinton, in an effort toward reaching a compromise, signed into law the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy, which prohibited the military from screening for homosexual behaviors. Once in, service members could not be asked if they were homosexual, and anybody suspected of homosexuality could not be forced to reveal their orientation. This also meant that the person in question could not reveal him- or herself as homosexual under punishment by dishonorable discharge. This policy was implemented against the cries of both homosexuals and those who stood against them (Halley, 1998).

Recognized as an unfair policy, the U.S. public cried out for justice and the U.S. government listened, as finally demonstrated by the 2010 repeal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy (Public Law No. 111-321). Though it would not take effect until September 2011, the repeal of DADT was seen as a landmark achievement in the fight for equality for homosexuals. Initially intended for the repeal to take immediate effect, the military requested and received a 10-month grace period to develop, test, and implement policies designed to protect the newly included sexual minorities into their ranks.

### **Aging Veterans**

In 2010, approximately 40% of veterans were 65 years old or older. Thus, it is important to recognize that those who served in earlier wars such as World War II, Korea, and Vietnam will face challenges that differ from those who have served in more recent conflicts (Chatterjee, Spiro, King, King, & Davison 2009).

As veterans age, we notice differences in their opinion regarding medical utilization. For instance, those veterans between the ages of 70 to 79 are less likely than younger veterans to ask for medicine and are willing to suffer in silence through pain caused by arthritis and other natural ailments associated with aging (Appelt, Burant, Siminoff, Kwoh, & Ibrahim, 2007).



A study conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs noted physical and mental health issues among aging veterans that are not noticeable among the nonveteran aging population. However, among active veterans, or those who regularly exercise, physical health is reported to be substantially better than their civilian counterparts. On the other hand, sedentary veterans were found to be in significantly worse health than the civilians with whom they were compared (Peterson, Crowley, Sullivan, & Morey, 2004). Furthermore, those who served as officers were found to be in much better health both physically and mentally than their enlisted counterparts. Although this study did not identify the reasons for these differences, it did find that those who served four years or fewer as an enlisted service member had standards of living on par with their civilian counterparts (Peterson et al., 2004).

Aging veterans may find that they have either late-onset posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or have been living with PTSD for the past 50 years postcombat. For many, the symptoms of PTSD may increase with age. The Veterans Administration has recognized the following four antecedent contributing factors (<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/ptsd-older-vets.asp>):

1. Retirement, when the veteran has more time to think of the trauma and less time to keep him- or herself occupied or distracted from previous memories.
2. Multiple medical problems, which may contribute to the veterans perceptions of vulnerability or that they are not as strong as they use to be.
3. Watching bad news and current conflicts on television may bring back unwanted memories.
4. If a veteran has been suffering from chronic PTSD and there has been a major change in coping mechanisms; for instance, if a veteran had used alcohol to cope and if there is a sudden decrease in alcohol use or in the absence of an alternative coping mechanism, PTSD symptoms may heighten.

It is important to understand that no matter the age of the veteran, PTSD can stand in the way of allowing the veteran the opportunity to address other challenges in life or live life to its fullest (Veterans Administration [VA], 2012).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to provide civilian practitioners more insight into the culture and worldviews of their veteran clients and to enhance their historical understanding of the contributions of different ethnic groups to the U.S. armed forces. A case was depicted that exemplified an Asian American service member's commitment to the military as well as the influence of her family tradition and ethnic heritage in promulgating her desire to serve her country. The case was not of a deployed combat veteran suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder; instead, it offered a less dramatic depiction of the inculcated values of loyalty and sense of duty in a female social work officer who aspires to be a leader in her professional role to assist fellow service members in need and to continue to impart to others the values, the dignity, and the pride associated with serving in the U.S. military.