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Examining Myths of the Mad, Bad and Sad British Veteran in Today's Media:
A Qualitative Approach

Rita Phillips
Robert Gordon University

Vince Connelly
Oxford Brookes University

Mark Burgess
Oxford Brookes University

Previous research on British public perceptions of UK veterans has focused mainly on opinion polls and survey data. This is problematic, as the broader scope of public dialogue and discourse that informs and influences public perceptions of veterans remains largely unaddressed. To evaluate how the media frames British veterans, this study systematically assesses media discourse regarding UK Armed Forces veterans. An inductively-driven thematic content analysis of 335 newspaper articles indicates that the media frames veterans in predominantly heroic ways: Veterans are heroized by their actions during deployment, the actions of their present life, or from the growth they have experienced from their status as victims. Representations of veterans in such victimized contexts include their suffering from the costs of war, from institutional injustices and social callousness, as well as from their desperation for assistance from charitable organisations. We find that UK veterans are framed by the media in overly positive or negative terms and that factual information on them remains largely ignored. Such depictions may have negative consequences for veterans' reintegration into civilian society.

Introduction

Numerous studies in multiple countries have raised concern regarding the portrayal of veterans by the media. Research from the United States, Denmark, and Estonia, for instance, suggests that the majority of news coverage implicates veterans in violent crime and implicitly and explicitly links military service and combat exposure to negative health outcomes (Truusa, Kasearu, and Trumm 2019; Sørensen 2015; Rhidenour, Barrett and Blackburn 2019; Parrott et al. 2019; Kleykamp and Hipes 2015; Zboray and Zboray 2019). PTSD, suicidal thoughts and substance abuse have been found to be particularly common themes in how veterans are represented by the media. Such constructions of veterans as fragile and labile individuals, "broken" at best and dangerous at worst (Kleykamp and Hipes 2015), may have negative consequences for the veteran's transition into civilian life. As such, it is surprising that research has not yet produced an exhaustive analysis of how the media represent UK Armed Forces veterans.

This is particularly concerning in light of contradictory and factually erroneous beliefs among the British public regarding UK veterans. Opinion polls and surveys with nationally representative samples indicate that the majority of Britons believe veterans to be highly skilled but also as more likely to be unemployed than members of the general population (Ashcroft and KCMG 2012, 2017; Ipsos MORI 2012-2015). The majority of Britons also hold factually incorrect beliefs about veterans, including that they are more likely to suffer from

homelessness, drug abuse, physical and psychological health problems, and suicidal tendencies than members of the civilian population (MOD 2015; KCMHR 2014; BSA 2012; Ipsos MORI and KCL 2015; MOD 2018; Ashcroft 2012; Ashcroft and KCMG 2017). While it is interesting to note that similar notions about veterans exist in other countries and resonate in the international media (Sørensen 2015; Rhidenour, Barrett and Blackburn 2019; Parrott et al. 2019; Kleykamp and Hipes 2015; Zboray and Zboray 2019), it remains an open question why the majority of the British public holds such beliefs. Moreover, because most previous research used quantitative, closed-ended questions, researchers only possess basic, descriptive information on the British public's perceptions of UK veterans. In addition, the uniformity in these studies' methodological approach did not take into account the breadth of everyday discourse and dialogue that both represents and influences the public's perceptions (cf., Jovchelovitch 2001). The current study addresses this gap by systematically examining the "persuasive and saturation power of [the] mass media" (Lupton 2013, 2).

The media is considered to play a pivotal role in forming public opinions as it conveys societal discourse and thereby connects the personal lives of individuals to the broader culture (Beardsworth 1980). In this way, a chain of culturally shared experiences constitutive of public perceptions and opinions is created (Jovchelovitch 2001). Supplementing personal experiences with social realities, the media may play a particularly important role in representing veterans since veterans comprise only about four percent of the United Kingdom's population (MOD 2017; ONS 2015, 2018; Royal British Legion 2014). As a result, many Britons may not necessarily know a veteran personally. Individuals who have no or little contact with veterans may utilize media depictions of veterans to form their opinions and perceptions of them. Similarly, it may also be the case that individuals who know veterans or who are veterans themselves may rely on media depictions of veterans to form an understanding of the "veteran population" as a whole. This notion is supported by previous research that outlined the role of the media in shaping public perceptions and the opinions that people held about such things as AIDS and HIV (i.e. Lupton 2013; Beharrel 1993; Berridge 1991; Clift and Sears 1989; Wellings 1988; Watney 1987; Pratt 1986), asylum seekers (Lido et al. 2006), and individuals with mental illness (Dietrich et al. 2006). Therefore, the media may have a similarly important role in shaping the public's perceptions of veterans.

The present, exploratory project aims to understand how UK Armed Forces veterans are represented in British social discourses by drawing on media depictions of British veterans. Since little is known about the representation of the British Armed Forces veterans in news, the present project analyzes newspaper articles with an inductive Thematic Content Analysis (cf. Jovchelovitch 2001; Farr 1993). In so doing, this study provides an overview of the ways in which veterans are commonly represented and offers a critical, interpretative discussion of that representation.

Method

Literature Search and Sample

A wide-ranging literature review was conducted by reference searching the databases Google News and UKPressonline. The database Google News[1] was selected as it is a widely distributed, free, and easily accessible news aggregator. Google News represents a continuous flow of articles, aggregated from a wide range of sources (i.e., *Daily Mail*, *Sun)* that are filtered in accordance to location. The database UKPressonline[2] was selected as it contains archives of the most influential UK newspapers (i.e., *The Telegraph*, *The Independent).*

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[1] http://news.google.com

[2] http://www.ukpressonline.co.uk

A variety of terms were utilised in order to grasp broad representations of veterans. Articles were included that comprised a combination of the following search terms in their headline and/or subtitle: A reference to a British veteran individual or a group of British veterans ("Veteran"/"veteran", "Veterans"/"veterans) or a reference to a nationality or location in the UK ("UK"/ "British"/ "Britain"/ "Scottish"/ "Scotland"/ "English"/ "England"/ "Ulster"/ "Northern Ireland"/ "Welsh"/"Wales"). The timeframe was limited to articles published between May 22, 2011 and February 2, 2018.

A total of 335 articles were identified and downloaded from the databases. From these 335 articles, 284 articles (85 percent) were drawn from the online news aggregator Google News and 51 articles (15 percent) from the online print-press archive UKPressonline. Articles that were accessible in both print and online formats were only counted once.

Instrument

Content Analysis is a commonly used method in media analysis to examine the influence of media on public perceptions (i.e., Morant 1998; Jovchelovitch 2001; Schmitz, Filippone and Edelman 2003; Washer and Joffe 2006; Joffe 2012). Bauer and Gaskell (2000, 132) justify the "interest in Content Analysis (CA) and its techniques" by understanding it as "the only method of text analysis that has been developed within the empirical social sciences." In this sense, CA translates specific features of texts (i.e., "kinds," "qualities," and "distinctions" such as different types, features and excerpts) into numerical descriptions. This allows researchers to qualitatively analyse quantitative textual data, permitting large amounts of data to be distilled into short descriptions of different types of text. In the current study, Thematic Content Analysis--that is, the investigation of recurring themes and patterns (Jovchelovitch 2001)--allowed us to examine recurring themes in the representation of veterans in the media.

Results

Development of Categories

To develop and define recurring themes, fifty randomly selected articles were deconstructed, simplified and reconstructed. This process was accomplished by a non-psychology postgraduate student and an undergraduate psychology student. The articles could be differentiated between thematizing veterans as heroes, victims, perpetrators or as other representations. Each of the fifty articles was allocated to *one* theme. The distinction between "hero," "victim," "perpetrator" and the "other" category was found to be clear-cut and unambiguous. An initial Code Book was generated; category memberships were defined and example-articles were provided. Given the low number of articles that were within the "perpetrator" (fifteen articles, representing 4.5 percent of the total) and the "other" categories (eleven articles, representing 3.3 percent of the total), these categories were not investigated in detail. Instead, the initial Code Book was further developed by refining contextual patterns regarding whether veterans were represented as heroes and victims. Three sub-themes emerged for each of the "hero" and "victim" categories that justified the veteran's membership in the "hero" or "victim" category (cf. Table 1). After sub-themes and inclusion criteria were defined, the remaining articles were categorised and the inter-rater reliability was checked. Categorizing 25 percent randomly selected newspaper articles, the three raters had concordance scores of 94 percent, 96 percent and 92 percent. As outlined in Table 1, the proportion of articles that

characterize the veteran as a hero (40.3 percent) were comparable to the proportion of articles that characterize the veteran as a victim (46.8 percent).

Table 1.

Definition of Sub-Themes and Overview of Frequencies – Refined Content Analysis

Category	Theme	Definition	Total Number of Articles in Sub-Theme (proportion within category) [overall proportion]	Total Number of Articles in Category (proportion within category) [overall proportion]
Hero	a) Veterans represent heroism, justified by their past actions	The time in service induces the present perception: Special efforts during time in service serves in some occasions as justification for heroism. In other instances, heroism was justified by partaking in a deployment and serving the country in times of need.	94 (65.7%) [26.5%]	143 (100%) [40.3%]
	b) Veterans represent heroism, justified by present actions	The veteran has an "honorable carer:" The heroic image is based on special communal deeds – most often – for other veterans (contribution to social life, selling poppies, offering a place in which the need for belonging is answered, etc.)	26 (18.2%) [7.3%]	
	c) Veterans represent heroism, justified by growth from a victim state	Veterans are active agents in successfully adapting to the "costs of war" (the disadvantage). They accomplish extraordinary deeds and are represented as highly respectable and capable individuals, able to overcome even the most challenging life-situations	23 (16.1%) [6.5%]	

Victim				
	a) Veterans suffer from the cost of war (e.g., physical, psychological disabilities)	The veteran becomes associated with the victim-state by representing the "cost of war" as the result of physical or psychological damage.	43 (25.9%) [12.1%]	
				166 (100%) [46.8%]
	b) Veterans suffer from institutional injustices and social callousness	The veteran is represented as a victim, suffering from social discrimination, or from a lack of services that veterans would need	70 (42.2%) [19.7%]	
	c) Charitable organizations that need to help the victim-veteran	The veteran is suffering from the cost of war and/or institutional injustices and social callousness. However, the veteran's neediness is/will be addressed by charitable campaigns that minister to the victim veterans needs.	53 (31.9%) [14.9%]	
Perpetrator	The Perpetrator	Veterans as brutal, evil perpetrators, doing harm to individuals in public and to social systems more generally	15 (100%) [4.5%]	15 (100%) [4.5%]
Other	Other	Any other theme; e.g., veterans vote against Brexit	11 (100%) [3.2%]	11 (100%) [3.2%]

The Veteran as a Hero

Hero a) Veterans Represent Heroism that is Justified by Their Actions in the Past

   The basic notion of how a veteran representation becomes intertwined with the hero representation was exemplified by newspapers focusing on the veteran's past. A discursive sanctification of veterans emerged based upon exaggerations of the "evil," inhumane other and the "good," morally superior veteran (cf. also Gibson 2012). Here, the morally superior veteran represented the morally superior Britain, even justifying actions that could be considered as amoral or immoral.

   An example of this would be violence and killing. Although killing is generally considered wrong and immoral by Western core values (McCulloch 1995), it can became acceptable (even admirable) when it is part of a fight between "good" versus "evil." When referring to ISIS, a newspaper article discussing the killing of ISIS members stated, "Inside the compound more than 100 men, women and children had reportedly been tortured and murdered by the terrorist commander and his henchmen" ("Hero SAS Sniper Records 100th Kill After Battling ISIS in Iraq and Afghanistan," *The Sun,* 4 Decemeber 2016). *The Mirror* also characterized ISIS members similarly: "They [ISIS members] have encouraged a nightmare of rape, public beheadings and sex attacks on female captives" ("Hero British Army Veteran Taking on Crazed ISIS Jihadists High on Drugs in Syria and Iraq," 30 May 2015). Another comparable example is represented in *The Express*. Here, ISIS's amorality is highlighted by reporting on "increasingly frequent chemical attacks against Kurdish forces and selling young female sex slaves to foreign mercenaries for the same price as a packet of cigarettes" ("Hero Brit Fighting Evil ISIS Reveals Beleaguered Fighters Are Taking DRUGS on the Battlefield," 31 December 2015).

   The analysis shows that ISIS becomes a representative category in which all those who accepted its "ideology" were subsumed. ISIS, a particularly pertinent threat to UK society through terrorist attacks, embodied inhumanity, injustice and cruelty and thus made these abstract concepts more tangible. This is exemplified in *The Mirror's* interview with a British veteran: "The people we're fighting against are coming here to rape and murder women and children. That's why they joined ISIS" ("British Former Soldier Fighting ISIS Warns There Are 2,000 UK-Born Jihadis in Middle East," 21 April 2015) In this quote, no differentiation was made between the "organization" of ISIS and its "members." Instead, the enemy is a representation of evil and viciousness, entirely dissociated from what it means to be a good civilian (cf. Said 1978). ISIS fighters were characterized as opposing Western values by having few moral standards, little self-discipline, and being violent and sexually promiscuous (McCulloch 1995). This is further evidenced by an article in *The Mirror* that reported a British veteran's account of how ISIS jihadists sold underage girls as sex slaves for cigarettes, enjoyed public rapes and beheadings, and used chemical weapons and drugs to increase their fighting ability. According to the article, "A former British soldier fighting with the Kurds against Islamic State has revealed the chilling truth about the bloody struggle. Sniper Allan Duncan told how heavily armed extremists are high on drugs as they go into battle. … And they sell young female sex slaves to foreign mercenaries for the price of a packet of cigarettes" ("Hero British Army Veteran Taking on Crazed ISIS Jihadists High on Drugs in Syria and Iraq," 30 December 2015). Given such depictions, killing the ISIS enemy becomes the necessary elimination of a non- or sub-human, one that represents socially despicable ideologies and does not deserve to live. The words of a veteran illustrate this well: "When I look at IS prisoners, I see them as animals because of what they do to people" (ibid). In this way, those who fought for dehumanizing ideologies, for which ISIS symbolically stands, became dehumanized themselves and justified the use of force (McCartney, 2011).

Because "killing" also came to refer to the "killing" of an ideology, rather than an individual, it became not only acceptable but even commendable. An example of the dehumanization of an ISIS fighter from *The Sun* stated: "The soldier, a veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, killed the 'high value' target during the fierce fight for the ISIS stronghold" ("Hero SAS Sniper Records 100th Kill after Battling ISIS in Iraq and Afghanistan," 4 December 2016). This quote demonstrates how ISIS fighters became reduced to an object or a target that could be eliminated for the mission's success, which justified cruel descriptive details of the killing to be related: "The bullet went through the driver's skull and lodged in the passenger's neck, killing them both" (*Daily Mail,* "SAS Sniper Hero Killed an ISIS Terror Leader Who Was About to Incinerate Hostages with a Flamethrower by Shooting Its Fuel Tank from 1,500m," 12 September 2016). Another such example stated, "He [a British veteran soldier] took the shot and the bullet almost cut the terrorist in half. He was dead before he hit the floor" (*Daily Star*, "Hero SAS Sniper Racks Up His 100th ISIS KILL after UK DRONE-BOMBS Compound," 4 December 2016). In the second quote, a comparison between the unrighteous enemy and the righteous British troops emphasized the superiority of British social values.

Such comparisons--ones in which the unrighteous enemy contrasts with the moral superiority of British troops--were not exclusive to recent deployments. Any enemy that opposed the British could be depicted as inhumane, evil and morally reprehensible by today's newspaper articles. For example, the characterization of the Nazis as evil was so ubiquitous that the Nazi enemy came to be represented as unable to show empathy. This is exemplified in an article describing a British veteran's experience when interrogating Nazi Germans. According to the article, "[T]he [concentration] camp's commander Josef Kramer […] was known as the 'The Beast of Belsen.' He [the veteran] described the notorious commander as a 'bully' who showed no remorse for the thousands of deaths he was responsible for" (ITV, "British War Veteran Tells ITV News of the Horrors He Saw at Bergen-Belsen Camp 70 Years On" 14 April 2015. Interestingly, the enemy's malice was represented as independent from gender. Female enemies were represented as equally cruel as their male counterparts: "Irma Grese […] tortured female prisoners at the camp. 'I [veteran speaking] asked her four times (whether she had any regrets over her actions) when she suddenly leapt to her feet and with a salute called out at the top of her voice 'Heil Hitler' and sat down again. We never got another word out of her.'" (ibid).

The reprehensibility of "the enemy" was not only unrelated to gender but also to ethnicity. Instead, "the enemy," whether a German Nazi German or a Nazi collaborator, was characterised by moral depravity. For example, the Japanese were commonly described as violating the Geneva Convention. This is exemplified in an article that describes the Japanese mistreatment of heroic British POWs, exemplifying the enemy's inhumane misuse of power: "Random beating and torture was meted out at will by sadistic, brutal and unpredictable captors" (BBC, "VJ Day: Surviving the Horrors of Japan's WW2 Camps" 12 August 2015).

Such quotes demonstrate that the media's depictions of the enemy's inhumanity is neither a recent trend nor a phenomenon exclusive to ISIS. Instead, the veteran-hero, representing the absolute "good," necessarily draws on exaggerations of the enemy as representing the absolute "evil." Therefore, the killing of the immoral ISIS enemy is represented as being a socially acceptable and righteous act but so too is the killing of the immoral Nazi enemy: "Both Kramer and Grese were tried and hanged for their crimes" (ITV, "British War Veteran Tells ITV News of the Horrors He Saw at Bergen-Belsen Camp 70 years On," 14 April 2015).

In conclusion, when characterizing the veteran as hero through past actions, the media draws on representations of the virtuous "us" versus the evil "others." However, the tendency to glorify one's "own" by drawing upon the reprehensibility of the "other" is a common

phenomenon in both modern and past societies. Indeed, gaining a positive sense of one's in-group and of one's identity through comparison with negatively valued groups, peoples and cultures can be traced to the early ages of history. For example, fifth-century BC Athenians enhanced their own positive self-evaluations through identification as members of a civilized culture, in contrast to their barbaric non-Greek neighbors (Joffe 2007). Similarly, a critical examination of the historical evolution of the *bourgeoisie* indicates that it defined itself in contrast to what it marked as low, dirty, repulsive, noisy, ill and contaminating (Stallybrass and White, 2014). Thus, media representations of a veteran's heroic achievements are often based upon implicit symbolic representations: The veteran is presented as possessing British (Western) values--order, reason, moral standards, discipline, sexual continence, self-control and altruism (McCulloc, 1995)--while the enemy stands as the symbolic antithesis of these values.

In this sense, participation in a war of values may associate one's involvement in that war with purity. The veteran becomes separated from the past and future but serves as a timeless representation of a moral framework that is worthy of defending and dying for. In this way, the veteran's voluntary decision to risk his or her own life in military service qualifies him or her as a hero for life. This is exemplified in articles such as "Stalybridge D-Day Hero Norman Coleman Dies at the Age of 92" (*Manchester Evening News*, 3 February 2015) or "93-Year-Old WW2 Hero Achieves Biggin Hill Spitfire Dream" (*The Bromley Times*, 28 September 2016). By reducing the veteran to the war experience, the veteran becomes "good," as he or she is willing to sacrifice his or her own life for higher ideals--British norms and values--during a time of need. For example, "'They [British veterans] paid the price. They are the heroes,' said Melnikoff, of Cockeysville, Maryland. … In all, 19 world leaders, more than 1,000 veterans and many others have gathered to honour the troops and civilians who fell in mighty battles that helped bring Europe peace and unity" (*Daily Mail*, ''I Look at that Beach and I Can Tell You Where Each was Lying ... I Can Still See Their Faces': Tears of D-Day Veterans as They Return to Normandy to Honour Their Fallen Comrades,''12 June 2014). A similar sentiment appeared in another *Daily Mail* article: "Age may finally have wearied them but the courage and sacrifices of Second World War servicemen who helped rid Europe of the tyranny of the Nazis were remembered on the 71st anniversary of D-Day today" ("D-Day Heroes' Courage Remembered," 6 June 2015).

In addition to World War II, more recent wars also imply this "purifying" aspect related to the veteran's willingness to serve. For example, one media source conveyed the following: "'So to everyone who served in the Falklands - those who are here today and those who aren't - I say on behalf of the British people that we are proud of you and we salute you. We will always be in your debt. Freedom is only won, and peace is only kept, because there are exceptionally brave people willing to travel to the other side of the world and lay their lives on the line.'" (*Daily Mail*, "'We Will Always Be Here in Full Force': War Heroes and Islanders Brave Freezing Weather to Mark 30th Anniversary of Falklands Liberation," 14 June 2012). According to another article, "We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all who serve in our Armed Forces and especially to those on the front line in dangerous places such as Afghanistan." (*The Telegraph*, "Armed Forces: Sacrifices That Must Never Be Forgotten," 9 November 2012). As both quotes illustrate, the veteran became the symbolic protector not only of British values but also of the British people and, at the individual level, of a symbolic "me," making him or her a lifetime hero. To this end, two articles, "Hunstanton's Harry Was a Hero" (*Lynn News*, 9 November, 2016) and "Farewell, Fred: D-Day Hero Gets a Fitting Send-Off," (*Express*, 2 September 2016) illustrate how the symbolic property of "freedom" and, more specifically, European freedom, become associated with the veteran. Indeed, the term "veteran" is so closely related to the word "hero" that it often has come to substitute for that term. This is demonstrated by the following article, which was not included in the analysis, since it was

not focused on a human veteran: "He was a real veteran: Brave medal-winning military mule Jimson is among the HERO army animals of the British Raj celebrated in a new exhibition" (emphasis in original; *Daily Mail*, 3 April 2017).

Hero b) Veterans Represent Heroism, Justified by Actions in the Present

The representation of the veteran as hero through his or her present actions was closely related to his or her representation as hero through his or her past actions. Specifically, in this set of articles the veteran's heroism was depicted as having been achieved in the past but confirmed by the veteran's present behavior, as well as by their expected behaviour in the future. Depictions of veterans were therefore based upon emphasizing altruistic behaviour and superior morality in post-war circumstances occurring within the realm of daily life (e.g., *The Scotsman*, "Former Scots Soldier Sets Up Fishing Charity to Help PTSD Veterans," 5 June 2016) or within the realm of an extreme situation (e.g., *Daily Mail*, "British War Veteran, 42, Abandons His Bid to Scale Mount Everest Just 500m From the Top to Turn Back and Help a Stricken Climber," 3 June 2016).

Such depictions of the veteran as hero through actions in the present highlight how the inherently selfless veteran continues to do good in post-service life by helping those in need. Articles assigned to this theme commonly presented the veteran as one who initially gave up his or her own life to protect Britain, British values and the British people. In post-service life, such a veteran continues to make sacrifices. For example, veterans were commonly represented as helping the ex-service community by assisting others during their transition to civilian life or by financially contributing to charities. This is exemplified in the *Cambridge News* interview with a veteran who raised funds for the British Legion. According to the article, "He [veteran] added: 'I'm just giving something back. … People who leave the army, some of them haven't got anywhere to live and the Legion helps them'" ("Veteran Pensioner Raises over £1,000 for British Legion by Collecting Outside Iceland Supermarket," 2 December 2016). Similarly, another veteran's extraordinary care for others was depicted in the *Huffington Post*. The article, "86-Year-Old Veteran Raised Over £100,000 For Charity After A Chance Meeting On A Train," included an interview with a veteran who raised funds to help the ex-service community, making the following point that "[t]he JustGiving page has since received donations from over 15,000 individuals sending the total skyrocketing from £300 to £108,000 in just 24 hours. When Jeffrey [the veteran] heard the news from a friend in Bradford, he cried: 'What can I say, words are inadequate here'" (2 November 2017).

In addition to depicting veterans as individuals who collect extraordinary sums of money to assist fellow members of the ex-service community, other typical depictions of veterans as heroes with altruistic motives highlight innovative ideas of assistance, as exemplified in the article "Ex-Soldiers Set Up a Company to Help Veterans Make the Transition from Military to Civilian Life." Here, the story of two veteran brothers who successfully set up a business that helped former members of the Armed Forces launch careers in civilian society was related: "[M]ore recently the brothers identified a gap in the market for a company able to translate military qualifications into civilian ones, and they have now formed The British Training Board, which works with accredited awarding bodies such as Agored Cymru and the National Open College Network to help individuals gain full credit in civilian life for training they have completed in the military" (*Wales Online,* 15 September 2015). Another article, "Former Scots Soldier Sets Up a Fishing Charity to Help PTSD Veterans," similarly characterizes veterans as individuals who utilize extraordinary strategies to help others after having successfully overcome their own challenges. According to the article, "Now 51, Mr Wilson, of Arbroath, Angus has turned to helping others who were struggling to deal with the turmoil of war and that all too difficult return into society after service. Mr Wilson, who himself has suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), has taken his love of

fishing and the physical and mental benefits that it brings and set up Fishing for Veterans, the only organisation of its type in Scotland" (*The Scotsman*, 5th June 2016). The heroic character of the veteran based upon his or her selfless care for other veterans is presented as having emerged from the fact that he or she has encountered difficulties of his or her own during the transition to civilian society. However, the veteran's concern for others also extends to the civilian community. For example, veterans' intrinsic motivation to protect people was exemplified in the article "HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT Elite Ex-Army Soldiers are Hiding Among Pop Concert Crowds to Keep Us Safe from Manchester Arena Style Terror Attacks" (*The Sun*, 18 July 2017) and in "British War Veteran, 42, Abandons His Bid to Scale Mount Everest Just 500m from the Top to Turn Back and Help a Stricken Climber" (*Daily Mail*, 3 June 2016). Such depictions that portray the veteran as concerned for the innocent public seem to highlight an important personality trait.

Hero c) Veterans Represent Heroism, Justified by Growth from Victim-State

The third way in which articles justified the veteran's heroism was by emphasizing the veteran's management of service-related injuries. Specifically, the veteran's success in overcoming and managing disabilities that served as visual manifestations of the "costs of war" was framed within the light of extraordinary physical achievements. For example, "Hero British Amputee Soldiers in Amazing #22kill Push-Up Challenge to Combat Military Suicide" tells the emotion-laden story of two British veteran amputees who decided to do twenty-two push-ups for twenty-two days in a row (*The Mirror*, 27 June 2016). Both veterans, themselves triple amputees, gave detailed accounts of how they have managed to adapt to their new circumstances. While the "push-up-challenge" refers to the factually incorrect belief that twenty-two UK veterans commit suicide each day, the two veterans highlighted in this article represent "victims" who have overcome their war injuries to do good for society. Similarly, the article "Afghan War Hero Paul Jacobs to Start Charity Walk in Huddersfield" describes the story of a veteran who lost his eyesight during his military service but who turned his loss into a positive contribution to others. Specifically, Paul was represented as a "brave blind … mentally scarred" man who, by overcoming his health problems, serves as an example of how psychological problems may be overcome through extraordinary willpower (*The Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 14 June 2016) .

With such depictions, veterans become motivational figures for civilians. For example, "JUST OAR-SOME: Hero Para Ben Parkinson's Epic 120km Arctic Kayaking Challenge a Decade after Being Blown Up on Afghan Mission" tells the story of Ben, who lost his legs, broke his back and suffered brain damage in Afghanistan. Ben perceived his recovery as having come about through sheer "willpower," which enabled him not only to recover successfully but which also challenged him to achieve something that even most civilians are unable to achieve: a 120 kilometer Arctic kayaking challenge (*The Sun*, 19 September, 2016). Such depictions turn the veteran into an iconic idol of heroism. Similarly, "Medal of Honour: Cyclist Jon-Allan Butterworth Becomes the First British Serviceman Injured in Iraq to Win Paralympic Gold Nine Years after He Lost his Arm Following a Rocket Attack in Basra" (*Daily Mail*, 11 September 2016) implicitly identifies invincibility with the veteran's character. Another article, similarly describes the veteran in such superhuman terms: "Great Britain's Military Paralympians Ready to Go in Rio After Demonstrating Incredible Powers of Recovery" (*Daily Mail*, 8 September 2016). In this statement, "incredible powers" may be understood as emphasizing the veteran's ultimate self-efficacy to turn anything that life might dish out into something positive, an ability that may be unattainable for "ordinary" civilians.

The Veteran as a Victim

Victim a) Veterans Suffer From the "Cost of War"

The theme of veterans as victims who suffer from the "cost of war" appeared in articles that represented veterans as symbolic reminders of these costs. As exemplified in the article, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is the Invisible Scar of War," published in *The Telegraph*, articles that fell within this theme included detailed descriptions of the "horrors of war," as illustrated by the following quote: "Isolated bases came under constant attack from enemy assaults, mortars and rocket fire. Patrols were close-combat affairs in high-standing crops, where the Taliban could often be heard moving in the next stand of maize prior to the start of a firefight. The increasing sophistication of roadside bombs became an enduring dread." In addition to the obvious physical dangers, this article also highlights the more implicit psychological stressors associated with war. Isolation, as it is used here, may lead the reader to conclude that soldiers were left to their own devices to defend their lives. Moreover, the soldiers' awareness of the enemy as it prepared to fight may point to an additional stressor: the uncontrollable, idiosyncratic nature of warfare. Lastly, the article also makes a more explicit reference to the psychological horrors of war by referring to "the loss of close friends and comrades, combat fatigue, the constant stress of facing death or serious injury" (13 May 2014).

Negative social conceptualizations of war (cf. Sarrica and Wachelke 2010) may have been objectified by representing physical and psychological health problems as normal consequences of the war experience. This was exemplified in *The Telegraph* on 2 November 2014 when it called on readers to "remember the consequences of wars," particularly such physical impairments such as "badly scarred skin, amputations, [and] reconstructed bodies" ("Bryan Adams: 'Remember these soldiers and the consequences of war'"). Similarly, other articles represented psychological ill health as a normal outcome of war exposure. For example, one article argued that a "a significant number of veterans who serve in the Armed Forces continue to relive the horrors they experienced on the frontline or during their time in the Armed Forces" (*The Telegraph*, "Afghanistan Veterans Seeking Help over Mental Health Is on the Rise, Says Charity," 11 May 2014). Still others reported on the need to "help the rising toll of traumatised servicemen and women who are abandoned after returning from serving their country in war zones" (*The Mirror*, "Tragedy of the British Troops Who Cannot Live with the Trauma of PTSD," 22 September 2016).

Victim b) Veterans Suffer from Institutional Injustices and Social Callousness

Articles assigned to this theme of veteran suffering focused on two types of suffering: suffering from psychological and physical harm as well as suffering from social injustice and callousness. For example an article entitled "Afghanistan War Veteran Has to Remortgage Home to Fund Limb Surgery" focuses on the inadequacy of the British government and the National Health System (NHS) to address the needs of injured ex-service personnel. While the veteran is presented as an angry, suffering victim of war, the British government and the NHS are depicted as unhelpful and uncaring institutions that let veterans down. According to the article, "[F]or the last 12 months he has been virtually housebound while waiting for the NHS to fit new casts" (*The Telegraph*, 27 December 2015). Yet another representative example of an article that depicts British institutions as unhelpful and uncaring was *The Independent's* "Britain's 'Forgotten' Nuclear Test Veterans Bring their Battle for Compensation to Commons" (27 October 2013). This article demonstrated how the British government denied veterans compensation and, instead, invested money in lawsuits that went on for years. As the article maintained, "Successive UK governments have so far spent around £5m blocking legal action by the veterans to get compensation. The official position is that there is no correlation between the veterans' medical conditions and the tests." This article demonstrates the implicit notion of political self-interest and callousness on the part of the government, as its concern for

those who fought appears to be trumped by its concern for its own reputation. As the following quote illustrates, when the government focuses on its reputation, the veteran who has done his duty is pushed to the side and ignored: "We [veterans] are like ghosts, they [government] don't see you, they don't hear you."

Attitudes of negligence and callousness towards injured veterans, however, were not solely represented as an institutional phenomenon. Instead, both groups within civil society as well as individual members of the British public were also characterised as giving responses to those of the state. Examples include articles from *The Sun*, including "HERO'S TORMENT: Taxi Driver Fined £1,000 for Refusing to Pick Up Blind War Veteran Because He Had a Guide Dog" (26 September 2016) and "GUIDE DOG STORM: Blind RAF Veteran Turned Away from Guest House Because He Had a Guide Dog" (19 August 2016). Both articles emphasized the callousness of individuals within British society who failed to acknowledge the veteran's sacrifices, leaving them "disgusted after being turned away" (*The Sun*, 19 August 2016) and "annoyed, embarrassed and ashamed" (*The Sun*, 26 September 2016). Moreover, such attitudes of social negligence and callousness were depicted as negatively affecting the veteran's health.. One such example, which emphasized the psychological consequences of insult, comes from the article "Driver Tells a Veteran to 'Get Another Leg' in Woodley Parking Row" (BBC, 30 November 2017). As the following quote illustrates, the veteran was also depicted as having to overcome an added hurdle--having to process the defamation and vituperation he faced at the hands of the driver: "[t]he verbal attack had left him 'frightened' and he had had problems sleeping since."

Thus, veterans who are depicted as suffering from institutional injustice and social callousness are portrayed as facing two types of suffering: suffering from the "cost of war" (by having endured physical and/or psychological impairments) *as well as* suffering from the effects of being abandoned and discriminated against by both governmental institutions as well as members of the general public. In this way, a two-sided victimhood is created.

Moreover, social discrimination and a lack of understanding, or misunderstanding, were also highlighted by the media. For example, the issue of social neglect was critically evaluated in "Forgotten Underclass of Young Military Veterans Lost in Civilian Life, Says Study" (*The Telegraph*, 19 July 2016), which maintained that care was focused on older veterans, while younger veterans suffering from emotional and physical disabilities were mostly ignored by British institutions and the government. The blame for this was placed on social and institutional callousness, which, it was argued, prevented young veterans from receiving the service that they needed to reintegrate into British society. Similarly, two articles, "Veterans Face Job Discrimination Due to Misplaced PTSD Fears" (*The Telegraph*, 3 May 2016) and "Bosses Discriminate Against Ex-Soldiers – See Them as Mentally Unstable & Poorly Trained" (*RT*, 3 October 2016), criticized how veterans are socially misunderstood. By emphasizing society's inability to accept veterans, such articles illustrate how veterans are stereotyped and thus become victims of society.

Victim c) Charitable Organizations that Need to Help the Victim-Veteran

In this sub-theme, the focus of the articles shifts from the veteran to organizations that support the veteran. Specifically, these articles place the veteran in a passive role and characterize him or her as a needy and helpless victim of war. For example, the article, "HELP FOR TROOPS: Thousands of Veterans Will Get Faster Access to Mental Health Care Under a £9 Million NHS Programme," focuses on how a new NHS program will help veterans with anxiety, stress, depression and alcoholism. To highlight the urgent need for such a program, the article provides data on the large number of veterans who have mental health and alcohol-related problems. It argues, for example, that "[a]round 20,000 veterans a year already access talking therapies on the NHS" and that "[g]overnment figures released last year show the

equivalent of 10 infantry battalions of soldiers have required medical treatment for drinking too much booze" (*The Sun*, 1 April 2017). Here, it may be worth noting that the article's author may have intentionally omitted the latest estimates on the number of veterans who reside in British households (MOD 2016). When one takes into consideration that approximately 2.5 million veterans reside in Great Britain, the twenty thousand who are reported to access mental health care comprise only 0.01 percent of the entire veteran population. Similarly, the three to eight thousand individuals who required medical treatment for alcoholism (that is, the "10 infantry battalions") only represent 0.001 percent to 0.003 percent of the entire veteran population. Including such information would undermine the argument that veterans are in desperate need of help. Thus, presenting the large numbers of veterans who are in need, without making reference to the entire veteran population, is commonly used to emphasize the veteran's neediness.

This neediness was also frequently embedded within a narrative of the heroic veteran who has made great sacrifices for the greater cause. Accordingly, such articles implicitly place a sense of guilt and blame on British society, which is said to not treat veterans adequately. This is exemplified by the article "Heroes of Old Deserve Better," which lauded the success of the "ground-breaking Citizen Advice Bureau scheme" (a scheme offering free benefits, advice, and support for veterans), arguing, however, that the scheme should be better funded and extended to support more veterans who desperately need health care. The article claimed that veteran needs demanded to be better addressed and that veterans deserved more care for service-related injuries, as exemplified by the following remark: "If we cannot look out for those who were willing to risk everything for their country, it dishonours us all" (*Daily Record*, 28 February 2012).

Finally, just as negligence of veterans was considered to bring dishonour, so care and self-initiated assistance for veterans was glorified. An example of this was found in the article, "Scottish Charity Project Bravehound Wins National Award." This article praised the Scottish charity project Bravehound for its highly honorable "life-changing work with veterans." The article stressed that veterans who had experienced combat faced significant difficulties in their transition to civilian life and emphasized the detrimental effects of such suffering on veterans (*The Third Force*, 22 August 2017). In doing so, the article highlighted an implicit association between combat exposure and ill health that, while factually incorrect (cf. MOD 2016), is socially prevalent. Despite this, the charity's contribution to veterans was emphasized in a BBC broadcast and, through a small shift of emphasis, Bravehound became the center of attention, while veterans were depicted in a state of a pity.

Discussion

In examining the public perceptions of veterans in the United Kingdom, these findings suggest that veterans are nearly exclusively represented as either heroes or victims. Similar to media representations of veterans in the US, Estonia and Denmark, the most dominant and popular media representations of veterans in the UK relate veterans to either being heroes or being victims. Thus, the results in subtheme, "Hero *a.) Veterans represent heroism that is justified by their actions in the past,"* comprise discursive descriptions of dichotomies which are at the heart of the sanctification of military service (cf. Gibson and Condor 2009). Veterans, who committed themselves to solemn actions (cf. Coy, Woehrle and Many, 2008) became therefore solemn people However, veterans were also linked to being victims of their service, having been innocently involved in a conflict without choice, and, returning physically or psychologically damaged into civilian society. This conceptualization of veterans served as an underlying baseline for all victim subthemes. Therefore, the factually incorrect belief that experiencing war may automatically and necessarily lead to emotional and/or physiological

damaging (cf., Connelly and Burgess 2013; MOD 2016) was found to be mirrored in press depictions of veterans.

While the present study contributed to previous knowledge by providing an in-depth description of veteran depictions in the press, the study is limited by its sampling and analytical procedures. One limitation concerns the unscrutinised acceptance of the media's definitions of veterans. Specifically, in accordance to the inclusion criteria, all newspaper articles were included in the analysis that comprised the term "British veteran" in the title or subtitle. Future studies may want to further refine the search terms in order to focus on specific veteran groups or cohorts (i.e. British veteran who returned from the deployment in Iraq), or to focus on experiences of veteran-individuals (i.e. "British veteran"). This would legitimize the exclusion of articles that predominantly describe charitable organisations which assist a general veteran population. However, in terms of the current study, it is important to note that, although this approach would have generated a more concise set of data that may have simplified subsequent categorisation processes, it would have excluded thematic complexes with which veterans are frequently associated. In this sense, it remains questionable whether and to what extent a more precise definition of inclusion criteria would have allowed the researcher to provide an overview of societally prevalent discourses and discussions that address the veteran.

In conclusion, the present study's main limitations may be its explorative nature. Future research may build upon the present findings and delve into more nuanced and more specific aspects of veteran-related depictions. However, while these limitations need to be considered and future research in this area is indubitably necessary, the present study provided an overview of the common ways in which British veterans are being depicted in the media and related these depictions to previous research on the topic. In doing so, an alternative perspective on public perceptions of veteran was provided.

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