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**Representations of UK Armed Forces Veterans in the Press:
A Quantitative Analysis of Newspaper Articles¹**

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Previous research has shown that British public perception of veterans can be negative and erroneous. Surveys, for example, indicate that veterans are characterized as skilled and valorous individuals but also as suffering from ill-health, unemployment and homelessness. To investigate how these beliefs may form, the present study examines the public dimension of knowledge by analyzing depictions of veterans in the media. A total of 335 newspaper articles that represent UK veterans were downloaded from Google News and UKPressonline. After the articles were classified with a content analysis, chi-squared tests were conducted to understand how the representation of veterans may be related to the political affiliations of news agencies and by newspaper format. The results suggest that UK veterans are predominantly represented in both heroic and victimizing contexts. While political affiliation did not affect the representation of veterans significantly, newspaper format did, with broadsheet newspapers emphasizing victimized contexts and local and international newspapers focusing on heroic contexts. Tabloids are a symbolic middle ground between broadsheet, international and local formats. In conclusion, broadsheet newspapers may express sociocultural scrutiny towards the ways in which veterans are treated while local and international newspapers may focus on stereotypical representations of heroic British military actions that veterans may symbolize. Implications and conclusions are discussed.

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Introduction

An essential feature of civil-military relationships is the way in which the state recognizes the sacrifices of men and women who have served their country once they have left the armed forces (Dandeker et al. 2006). Besides governmental recognition, social perceptions of veterans are important, reflecting an acknowledgement of, and appreciation for, the contribution of service personnel who, bound to the “contract of unlimited liability,” are obliged to risk or even lay down their lives in the course of exercising lethal force against the enemy. In addition, the social perceptions of veterans may have a particular place value, as these are prevalent in everyday contexts and discourses.

However, research shows that British attitudes towards UK veterans may be ambiguous and problematic. For example, public opinion surveys indicate that the majority of UK respondents associate veterans with having developed useful skills, helping them to succeed in their civilian careers, but also with increased risks of experiencing unemployment relative to members of the general population (Ashcroft and KCMG 2012, 2017; ICM 2012-2015). Veterans were also erroneously perceived as being more likely to suffer from homelessness, drug abuse and physical and psychological health problems or suicidal tendencies than members of the civilian population (MOD 2015; King’s Centre 2014; British Social Attitudes 2012; Ipsos MORI and KCL 2015; MOD 2018; Ashcroft 2012; Ashcroft 2017). Therefore, members of the UK public may hold implicit, negative stereotypes towards those who have left the UK Armed Forces.

Stereotypes and negative connotations towards veterans are problematic as these may impact veterans’ successful reintegration into society. This issue may be of particular relevance for veterans of the most recent missions in Iraq and Afghanistan as this younger population of veterans may not only face negative stereotypes related to public perceptions of veterans, but may also be confronted with negative attitudes towards these specific missions (Gribble et al. 2015; YouGov 2015). In addition, negative public perceptions of veterans may deter recruitment and cause disaffection among those who are currently serving. Therefore, it is surprising that to date little research has examined factors that contribute to erroneous and negative perceptions of veterans. The present project addresses this gap by examining the public dimension of knowledge.

The public dimension of knowledge describes spaces in which natural, day-to-day discourses about socially relevant matters take place (Jovchelovitch 2001; Dahlgren 1995;

Koopmans & Statham 2010). Therefore, the public dimension of knowledge is considered to play an important role in the creation, formation and acquisition of knowledge about such social realities as “veterans” (Jovchelovitch 2001; Moscovici 1988, 2000, 2001; Jodelet 1991). Here, the media is thought to play a particularly important role since it is *the* modern medium of the public dimension of knowledge (Habermas 1991; Farr 1993). Essentially, media is considered to offer a symbolic space for disputing opinions and thus challenging and reconceptualizing knowledge about social realities by initiating public dialogues (Jovchelovitch 2001; Habermas 1991; Farr 1993). In doing so, the media connects the personal lives of individuals to others through promoting discourses about socially relevant realities, constructing a chain of culturally shared and recognized experiences about social realities (Beardsworth 1980; Habermas 1991; Jovchelovitch 2001). Therefore, it is unsurprising that previous research has produced extensive evidence that describes the profound impact of the media on individual and public opinions in areas such as health behaviors, perceptions of asylum seekers, HIV/AIDS, etc. (Lido et al. 2006; Dietrich et al. 2006; Lupton 2013; Beharrell 1993; Berridge 1991; Clift and Stears 1989; Wellings 1988; Watney 1987; Pratt 1986). In conclusion, as the media may form, foster and transform individual and public opinions of social realities, it may also influence perceptions of veterans.

In transposing depictions of social realities, the media is inspired by social actors and institutions (Jovchelovitch 2001; Habermas 1991; Farr 1993). Such actors and institutions could be, for example, charities that rely on depictions of veterans as victims to promote charitable campaigns, politicians who in expressing their honor and appreciation for veterans seek to win the general public’s favor, or veterans themselves by accomplishing extraordinary or attention-provoking acts (McCartney 2011). Additionally, media may become a social actor itself by pursuing its own interests (e.g., increasing newspaper sales) (Jovchelovitch 2001). Here, particular political agendas may be noteworthy as previous research indicates that newspapers’ political affiliations (Labour/center-left/left-wing; Conservative/center-right/right-wing; or no political affiliation) have an impact on how the same content is represented (see, for example, Brandenburg 2002; Semetko, Blumler, Weaver and Barkin 2013; Negrine 2003; Curran and Seaton 2002; Rooney 2000; Gekoski, Gray and Adler 2012; Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; Carvalho and Burgess 2005; Sparks and Tulloch 2000).

This notion may be particularly important for the depictions of veterans as decisions surrounding deployment and the use of the military are often highly politicized and controversial (Bland 1999). More concretely, depictions of veterans in newspaper articles may be influenced by the extent to which the country’s current foreign policies follow a news

outlet's party affiliation. Here, the two most recent interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan may play a special role. As both controversial British deployments happened under the Labour-led governments of Tony Blair, it may be argued that Labour-affiliated news outlets might depict veterans more favorably than Conservative-affiliated ones (YouGov 2015). In conclusion, if a newspaper supports the most recent deployments for political reasons, veterans of these deployments may be more likely to be depicted as heroes. This may reflect culturally pertinent associations between veterans and heroic sentiments.

Studies on rhetorical functions outline a cultural assumption that relates military service to heroism located in discursive descriptions of dichotomies (Gibson 2012; Gibson and Condor 2009; Coy, Woehrle and Maney 2008). Gibson (2012) argues that military service is culturally conceptualized in terms of performing a solemn function. However, while veterans in this context may be conceptualized as solemn people, veterans may be seen less solemnly if the mission is less appreciated. Therefore, if a newspaper did not support the most recent deployments, veterans may be predominantly represented as suffering from the consequences of a futile war. Here, psychological injury may be a key theme, as research indicates that the more a society perceives veterans to have fought in illegitimate warfare, the more veterans are represented in the context of suffering from PTSD and trauma (McGarry 2012). While socially appreciated missions (for example, World Wars I and II) may also draw attention to the veteran as suffering from the effects of war, the social focus shifts slightly in the context of ill-perceived missions (Goldensohn 2006). There the social focus rests almost exclusively on the veteran's horrific experiences on the battlefield (De Groot 1995; Chattarji 2000; Goldensohn 2006). From this perspective, the veteran's experience may be conceptualized as requiring public empathy and pity as conceptualizations of the veteran may overlap with definitions of victims in a victimological context (McGarry 2012).

In addition to the political affiliation of newspapers, economic decisions may influence depictions of veterans in press. Here, differences in readership and newspaper quality need to be taken into consideration (Gekoski, Gray and Adler 2012; Moore, Mason and Lewis 2008; Carvalho and Burgess 2005). The UK newspaper landscape consists of the text-led, higher-quality "broadsheet" press (e.g., *The Times*, *Guardian*, *Daily Telegraph*) and the right- and left-wing mid-market image-led popular "tabloid" press (e.g., *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*) (Rooney 2000; Boykoff and Mansfield 2008; Carvalho and Burgess 2005). While the majority of the broadsheets' readership is well-educated and belongs to the white-collar social class (Ipsos MORI 2005), the tabloid press is typically considered as "working class" newspapers (Boykoff and Mansfield 2008; Ipsos MORI 2005). In conclusion, broadsheet and tabloids may also differ

in how veterans are being depicted. As the broadsheet press is characterized by presenting thoroughly argued analyses of information, the broadsheet press may also discuss relevant issues that affect the veteran community—e.g., the social/governmental care for veterans or veterans' position in society. In this sense, broadsheet news may focus on depictions of veterans as victims. In contrast, tabloids that are characterized by an oversimplification of social issues and the avoidance of abstract or general reasoning may be driven by increases in sales. This may not allow these newspapers to follow a singular perspective, such as focusing on social issues affecting the veteran (Rooney 2000). Instead, veterans may be represented in any way and in any context that promotes sales, such as heroizing *and* victimizing sentiments.

In addition to the broadsheet and tabloid press, the media landscape in Britain consists of local newspapers. These are most often locally owned, representing social issues and discourses from a local perspective that have a direct appeal to readers within the circulation area (Williams 1998). In conclusion, the local press may depict aspects of veterans that are relevant to individuals in that region. Therefore, it may be possible that the local press may focus on depictions of veterans as heroes, as local groups commonly refer to “their” veterans when claiming recognition and respect (Gibson 2012). In the same way, the local press may utilize a culturally perpetuated veteran-hero assumption (Gibson 2012) to claim appreciation for the local region.

Similar to local newspaper articles, international newspaper articles that are accessible in the UK may represent veterans predominantly in the context of heroizing sentiments. This could be the case as the international press may focus on a culture-external perspective, reflecting on British societal myths that are expressed in “constitutional charters” (Liu and Hilton 2005, 538). The constitutional charter of being (together with the US) “world policemen [...] institutionalised through their permanent seats on the U.N Security Council” (ibid) may therefore influence international depictions of veterans and justify depicting UK veterans as heroes.

However, to date, a comprehensive study on depictions of veterans in press has not been undertaken. The present study will address this research gap by examining (a) how veterans are depicted in newspaper reports that are UK accessible, (b) the impact of the newspaper agencies' political affiliations on depictions of veterans, and (c) the impact of newspaper type (broadsheet, tabloid, local, international) on depictions of veterans. The present study therefore contributes to an understanding of public opinions and (mis)beliefs about veterans by examining the public dimension of knowledge, operationalized through media (Jovchelovitch 2001).

Methods

Literature Search and Sample

Research indicates that the overall readership and significance of printed news is steadily decreasing while the consumption of online news is on the rise (Ofcom 2017; Statista 2017, 2018). Therefore, the present study's literature search focused on online news by reference searching in the databases Google News and UKPressonline. The database Google News² was selected as it is a widely distributed, free and easily accessible news aggregator (also available as an App). In contrast, the database UKPressonline³ is a professional online research facility that requires a subscription. It contains archives of the most influential UK newspapers (such as the *Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent*). UKPressonline was therefore used as "backup" to access articles about veterans that may not have been covered by Google News due to copyright issues (Xalabarder 2012).

As the newspaper analysis was an initial attempt to grasp a broad picture of veterans' depictions in the news, a variety of search terms were utilized. Articles were selected and downloaded that referred in the headline and/or subtitle to a combination of the following search terms: "Veterans"/"veterans" and "UK"/"British"/"Britain"/"Scottish"/"Scotland"/"English"/"England"/"Ulster"/"Northern Ireland"/"Welsh"/"Wales". To ensure the recency of veteran depictions, the timeframe was limited to articles published after 22 May 2011 (the day of the last UK soldier's withdrawal from Iraq) and before 2 February 2018. This timeframe was selected as it allowed a broader depiction of veterans. For example, media may have depicted soldiers from the most recent missions in Iraq or Afghanistan as veterans, although remaining in the UK Armed Forces. Therefore, potential depictions of veterans as a young, fit and healthy population (as being veterans solely from these deployments) could be included. This consideration followed the intention to examine depictions of a general veteran population. In this sense, media definitions of veterans were not scrutinized.

From the databases a total of 335 articles that included a combination of the search terms in the headline/subtitle and that were published between 22 May 2011 and 2 February 2018 were identified. From these 335 articles, 284 articles (85%) were drawn from the online

² <http://news.google.com>

³ <http://www.ukpressonline.co.uk>

news aggregator Google News and 51 articles (15%) from the online print-press archive UKPressonline. However, it should be noted that newspaper articles were commonly accessible through Google News *and* UKPressonline, as being published in both online and print form. This explains the low number of articles drawn from UKPressonline, as this archive was searched after the Google News search had been concluded. Articles that were available in both archives were not counted or downloaded twice. It was hypothesized that individuals would not read the same article twice, even if accessible in different forms.

An overview of the number of articles grouped by political affiliation (McNair 2017; Wodak, KhosraviNik and Mral 2013; Brandenburg 2002; Hesmondhalgh 2005) and newspaper format can be found in Table 1. Articles that were drawn from international and smaller local news agencies (European Journalism Observatory 2011; Smith and Joffe 2009; Gabrielatos and Baker 2008; Tunstall 1996), were labelled as “international” and “local.”

Table 1.

Overview of newspapers that published articles about veterans, format and political affiliation

Political Affiliation	Newspaper Format	News Agencies	Total Number of Veteran Related Articles
[Newspaper Name]			[Proportion of Total Articles]
Centre Right/ Right Wing <i>[The Times, The Telegraph]</i>	broadsheet	News UK, Telegraph Group (Barclay brothers)	29 [8.7%]
Centre Left/ Left Wing <i>[The Guardian]</i>	broadsheet	Guardian Media Group (Scott Trust)	45 [13.4%]
None/ Other <i>[BBC, The Independent, ITV, Sky News, Business Insider]</i>	broadsheet	Statutory Cooperation, Novaya Gazeta, ITV studios, Sky plc, Axel Springer SE	93 [27.8%]
Centre Right/ Right Wing <i>[Daily Mail,</i>	tabloid	Daily Mail and General Trust, Northern and	58 [17.3%]

<i>Express, The Sun, Evening Standard, Scottish Sun, Daily Star, Metro, The Mail]</i>		Shell Media, News International (Rupert Murdoch), Evgeny Lebev, DMGT,	
Centre Left/ Left Wing [<i>Daily Record, The Mirror, Daily Opinion, The Canary</i>]	tabloid	Trinity Mirror plc, Independent Media	35 [10.4%]
None/ Other (<i>The Newsletter, CommonSpace, Deadline News, Diss Express, Free Press, Evening Times</i>)	tabloid	Johnston Press, Common Weal Deadline Press, Johnston Press, Newsquest Media Group	7 [2%]
Centre Right/ Right Wing [<i>Yorkshire Post</i>]	local	Yorkshire Post Newspapers	1 [0.3%]
Central Left/ Left Wing [<i>Wales Online, Western Mail, Liverpool Echo, The News, Bristol Post, East London & Wessex Guardian, Arianna Huffington, Leicester Mercury</i>]	local	Trinity Mirror plc, Derby Telegraph, Trinity Mirror plc, Fitzpatrick Family, Reach plc, Guardian Media Group (Scott Trust), Huffington Post	19 [5.7%]
Other Local Newspapers None/ Other (<i>Lancashire Telegraph, Lancashire Post, The Scotsman,</i>	local	Newsquest Media Group Ltd., Johnston Press, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations,	19 [5.7%]

*The Third Force,
South Wales
Argus, The
Blackpool
Gazette, Banbury
Guardian,
Belfast
Newsletter,
Bucks Herald,
Evesham
Journal,
Linlithgow
Gazette, Penarth
Times, Northern
Ireland News,
Richmondshire
Today, ICNN,
Scottish
Housing Scottish
News Agency,
The News
Portsmouth,
Belfast
Telegraph]*

NewsNet Ltd,
Dundee Press
Agency Ltd T/A,
Independent
News & Media
plc

International
Newspapers
(*Irish Central,
Games Radar,
Irish Times,
Kotaku, Leinster
Express, Lifestyle
New York, New
York Daily News,
New York Times,
People, RT,
RTE, The Packet,
Vice, CBC, CRN*)

international

International

29
[8.7%]

Content Analysis

To categorize the newspaper articles, the present project utilized content analysis (CA). Content analysis is an extensively used method for media analysis (Morant 1998; Jovchelovitch 2001; Schmitz, Filippone and Edelman 2003; Washer and Joffe 2006; Joffe 2012). Bauer and Gaskell (2010, 132) characterize it as “the only method of text analysis that has been developed within the empirical social sciences”. CA is considered to be a “technique for making inferences by systemically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti 1969, 601). This means more concretely that CA culminates specific features of texts (i.e., “kinds,” “qualities,” “distinctions”) into numerical descriptions.

To derive numerical descriptions, re-occurring themes were developed and defined. Fifty randomly selected articles were deconstructed, simplified (to find the underlying meaning) and re-constructed (to verify assumptions about underlying meanings). This process was accompanied by two research associates. At first, the articles indicated that a general distinction between veteran-hero, veteran-victim, veteran-perpetrator and veteran-other depictions could be drawn. By deconstructing the 50 articles to determine the overriding theme, each article was allocated to one category. For example, articles that depicted and thematized veterans as suffering victims from deployment-related injuries, after having acted heroically during their deployment, were categorized into the veteran-victim category as this was the article’s central theme. This general distinction between “hero,” “victim,” “perpetrator” and “other” category was clear-cut and unambiguous. An initial codebook was generated in that category, memberships were defined and examples for each category were provided (Table 2). Inter-rater reliability was checked with one discipline external rater who categorized 25% of randomly selected articles (85 articles from the total of 335 articles). Inter-rater reliability was found to be sufficiently validated as 92.35% of the articles were correctly categorized. An overview of category frequency in relation to newspaper format and political affiliation can be found in Table 3.

Table 2.
Codebook

Category	Definition	Example
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Victim	<p>General Message: Veterans need help and empathy, veterans are worthy of pity</p> <p>Veterans suffer from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -physical, psychological disabilities, -social discrimination, -governmental callousness -institutional neglect -lack of care 	<p>Lusher, A. (2016, August, 21). Payouts to UK veterans with mental health disorders reach record levels. <i>Independent</i></p>
Hero	<p>General Message: Veterans are worthy of honor and respect.</p> <p>Veterans are to be honored for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -heroic deeds in the past (e.g., protection of UK population) -heroic deeds in the present (e.g., collecting money, offering help for other veterans with disabilities) -heroically overcoming psychological and/or physical disorders (e.g., climbing Mount Everest with prosthetic limbs) 	<p>Blackstone, G, (2016, September, 4). Top French honor for two Scottish WWII heroes, <i>Sunday Post</i></p>
Perpetrator	<p>General Message: Veterans are brutal, evil perpetrators who do harm to a peaceloving society</p> <p>Veterans are to be disliked for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doing harm to civilians - Having anti-social attitudes and behaviors 	<p>Bodman, M. (2017, November 14). Ex-navy officer Charles Howeson 'groped men on ship', <i>BBC</i></p>
Other	<p>Any other theme, e.g., Veterans vote against Brexit</p>	<p>Mortimer, C. (2016, May 9). EU referendum: Second World War veterans come out against Brexit. <i>Independent</i>.</p>

Table 3.
Overview of Frequency, Themes, Newspaper Format and Political Affiliation

	Newspaper Specifications	Number of Articles: Veteran-Victim	Number of Articles: Veteran-Hero	Number of Articles: Veteran-Perpetrator	Number of Articles: Veteran-Other
		(Online Press) [Print Press]	(Online Press) [Print Press]	(Online Press) [Print Press]	(Online Press) [Print Press]
All	All News Agencies	166 (142) [24]	143 (120) [23]	15 (13) [2]	11 (9) [3]
	broadsheet	92 (72) [20]	57 (44) [13]	8 (6) (2)	5 (4) (1)
Newspaper Format	tabloid	49 (45) [4]	42 (32) [10]	6 (5) (1)	3 (2) (1)
	International	6 (6) [0]	13 (13) [0]	0 (0) [0]	0 (0) (0)
	local	19 (19) [0]	31 (31) [0]	1 (1) [0]	3 (2) [1]
Politic	left:	54 (43)	35 (27)	5 (3)	3 (3)

Left wing; Centre-left	[11]	[8]	[2]	[0]
right:	43	42	3	4
Right wing; Centre-right	(37)	(36)	(3)	(3)
	[6]	[6]	[0]	[1]
none	63	53	7	4
	(56)	(44)	(6)	(2)
	[7]	[9]	[1]	[2]
international	6	13	0	0
	(6)	(13)	(0)	(0)
	[0]	[0]	[0]	[0]

Chi-Squared Analysis

To understand a potential relationship between category and newspaper format/political affiliation, bivariate analyses (chi-squared tests), a frequently used method in the analysis of media content, were undertaken (Zaharopoulos 1990; Barlow, Barlow and Chiricos 1995; Clement, Golan and Wanta 2001; Devitt 2002). Chi-squared tests are constructed from the sum of squared errors or through the sample variance and determine whether there are significant differences between the expected frequencies and the observed frequencies in different categories (Greenwood and Nikulin 1996). Therefore, chi-squared tests allow us to observe whether ways in which veterans are depicted in newspaper articles differ between newspaper formats (broadsheet, tabloid, international, local) and the political affiliation of news agencies (left wing, right wing, none, and for comparison, international). Statistically significant chi-squared tests would suggest that the ways in which veterans are depicted differ significantly between newspaper formats and/or between political affiliations of news agencies. In contrast, nonsignificant chi-squared tests would indicate that veterans are depicted similarly across newspaper formats and/or political affiliations of news agencies.

Results

Chi-Squared Test

Before the chi-squared tests were conducted, careful consideration regarding the statistical value of the categories “perpetrator” and “other” were made. As both categories comprised less than 5% (“perpetrator”: 4.5%, “other”: 3.3%) of the 335 articles, it was decided to exclude the “perpetrator” and the “other” category from the subsequent analyses. Though we do not suggest that the prevalence of articles may equate with salience in the public mind, the low number of articles may suggest an absence of public discourse that thematize veterans in relation to these themes. Additionally, the exclusion of the categories “perpetrator” and “other” contributed to statistically valid, concise chi-square test models.

A total of 309 newspaper articles that depicted the veteran as “hero” or “victim” remained, after excluding articles from the “perpetrator” or “other” category. The chi-squared test included the variables “newspaper format” with four categories (“broadsheet,” “tabloid,” “international,” “local”), “theme” with two categories (“hero,” “victim”), and “political affiliation” with four categories (“left,” “right,” “none,” “international”). Assumptions of the chi-squared test were met as variables were categorical, the independence of observations was

established (no relationship between the cases) and the data was mutually exclusive (articles were categorized into no more than one category). Moreover, the data was found to be appropriately distributed as 0 cells (0%) had an expected count of under 5 cases in each categorical variable group for both chi-squared tests – “category vs. political affiliation” and “category vs. newspaper format.”

A chi-squared test of independence was calculated comparing the occurrences of “theme” (“hero,” “victim”) and political affiliation of newspapers (“left,” “right,” “none,” “international”). No significant association was found between the two variables (χ^2 (3, N = 309) = 3.71, $p = .295$). It may be concluded that depictions of veterans as heroes or victims do not stand in a statistically significant relationship with political affiliations of news agencies.

A chi-squared test of independence was calculated comparing the occurrence of “hero” and “victim” category with broadsheet, tabloid, international and local newspaper formats. A significant association was found, indicating that “broadsheet,” “tabloid,” “international” and “local” newspaper formats report in significantly different proportions on the veteran as “hero” and “victim” (χ^2 (3, N = 309) = 12.58, $p = 0.006$) with a small significant effect size ($\Phi = .20$, $p = .006$). The analysis indicated that while broadsheet press focuses predominantly on the veteran-victim depiction (hero: 38.3%, victim: 61.7%), depictions of veterans as heroes are predominant in international (hero: 68.4, victim: 31.6) and local press (hero: 62%, victim: 38%). Tabloids depict veterans as heroes and victims in comparable proportions (hero: 46.2%, victim: 53.8%).

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons (MacDonald and Gardner 2000) with Bonferroni correction ($p = .073$) revealed a significant difference in frequency of “hero – victim” depictions in two instances. broadsheet newspapers differed significantly from the international press (χ^2 (1, N = 168) = 6.31, $p = .012$; $\Phi = .19$, $p = .012$) and from the local press (χ^2 (1, N = 199) = 8.56, $p = 0.003$; $\Phi = .21$, $p = .003$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons indicated no significant differences between broadsheet and tabloid (χ^2 (1, N = 240) = 1.45, $p = .228$), tabloid and international press (χ^2 (1, N = 110) = 3.25, $p = .077$), tabloid and local press (χ^2 (1, N = 141) = 3.25, $p = .072$), and international and local press (χ^2 (1, N = 69) = .25, $p = .620$). In conclusion, post-hoc pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni corrections show that the previous descriptive comparison between veteran-victim and veteran-hero report coverage in percentages was significant.

Discussion

The present findings suggest well-established, socially distributed connections between veterans and heroizing sentiments and veterans and victimizing sentiments. However, while the political affiliations of news agencies did not affect the ways in which veterans were represented significantly, newspaper format did. While the broadsheet press focused predominantly on depictions of veterans in victimized ways, the local and international press emphasized heroic depictions of veterans. The tabloid press did not differ significantly from any newspaper format and so may depict veterans in an “anything goes” fashion – as both heroes and victims.

In conclusion, media distributions of veterans resonate with theoretical notions of “constructing military service as ... solemn function” that legitimizes the “cultural assumptions regarding a category of persons who ... deserve to be treated with more respect” (Gibson 2012, 145; see also Coy, Woehrle and Maney 2008; Gibson and Condor 2009). On the other hand, media distributions resonate with theoretical notions of veterans as “victims ... who are involved in a conflict [and] become injured or killed as a result” (Gibson 2012, 135; see also De Groot 1995; Goldensohn 2006; Chattarji 2000; McGarry 2012). Therefore, factually incorrect beliefs that experiencing war may be emotionally and/or physiologically damaging (cf. Connelly and Burgess 2013; MOD 2016) were found to be mirrored by depictions of veterans in the press.

Moreover, the findings from the present study suggest that political affiliation of newspaper agencies (left, right, none, and for comparative purposes, international) may not affect the way in which content is represented. While previous studies indicate that the political affiliations of newspapers impact media coverage in other areas—such as reports concerning the government and politicians (e.g., Brandenburg 2002; Semetko et al. 2013; Negrine 2003; Curran and Seaton 2002)—the present results suggest that depictions of veterans are less tied to political affiliations. Therefore, the present study does not support the notion that depictions of the military and its members may be tainted by newspapers’ party affiliations and by the extent to which these affiliations may be aligned with current foreign policies.

However, in contrast to the lack of a relationship between the news outlets’ political affiliations, newspaper format (broadsheet, tabloid, local and international) was found to significantly affect how veterans are depicted. The culture-external perspective that the international press may take may explain the predominance of depictions of British veterans as heroes in the international press. The international press may therefore focus on evaluations and representations of British “constitutional charters” (Liu and Hilton 2005, 538). Representations of the UK as being (together with the US) “world policeman [...]”

institutionalised through their permanent seats on the U.N Security Council” (ibid), could have influenced international depictions of veterans as heroes. This may be further evidenced by the fact that those international newspaper articles that were included in the present study were drawn exclusively from Anglo-Saxon countries that cooperated with the UK in military missions.

In conclusion, the macro level of culture-external perspectives that the international media is forced to take may scratch the surface of stereotypical representations of British military actions that veterans may symbolize. In contrast, significantly increased depictions of veterans as heroes in local newspaper formats may relate to the micro level of local perspectives. These local perspectives may focus on promoting appreciation for the region by transposing appreciation for veterans onto the local region (see Gibson 2012; Gibson and Condor 2009; Coy, Woehrle and Maney 2008). This may help attach an extraordinary character or heroic sentiment to the local region (Gibson 2012). This argument may also explain why the tabloid press does not significantly differ from local formats in their proportion of veteran-hero depictions. On a national level, it may be argued that the appreciation for British veterans may reflect an appreciation for the British national identity and thus recognition for the British individual’s national identity.

In contrast, significantly higher proportions of veteran-victim depictions in the national broadsheet press may represent intracultural discourses. These discourses may reflect socio-cultural scrutiny towards the cost of war and may challenge social responses towards veterans’ sufferings. The dominance of veteran-victim representation in the broadsheet press may reflect the role of the press as a social agent that re-conceptualizes culturally determined taken-for-granted by discussing ambivalent relations between critically minded citizens and British politics (Jovchelovitch 2001). Therefore, the broadsheet press may be considered as representing a symbolic space for disputing contradictory and dichotomous arguments and perspectives of various social actors in contrast to debates that are excessively simplified or excluded in other media (Jovchelovitch 2001). In this sense, the predominance of veteran-victim depictions in broadsheet newspapers may be the result of more critical, nuanced and detailed analyses in matters of social life. However, this notion may not be true for the tabloid press. Although the tabloid press did not differ from the broadsheet press in reporting on veterans as victims, the tabloid press may focus on increasing their sales and attracting a higher readership and so depict veterans as victims and heroes (Rooney 2000).

The present study, however, was limited by sampling and analytical procedures. Despite its ability to provide objective and generalizable information, further research in this

area may need to consider a separation of veteran-types. While this study intended to provide a general and broad snapshot of veteran-related media depictions, future studies may investigate representations of veterans from specific deployments. In this sense, observations of specific interactions between hero/victim category and veteran type may be taken up by future research. As this study was exploratory and utilized a category-based content analysis, future studies may also consider conducting a textual content analysis. In this sense, lexical contents and sentence structures could be investigated to examine other factors—for example, specific veteran-related bywords (e.g., hero/heroic; poor/suffering) and their frequency.

Another limitation concerns the inclusion of articles as the media definitions of “veteran” remain unquestioned. The inclusion criterion of articles referring to a British veteran in the title or subtitle may need to be further refined in order to allow a more critical adoption of newspaper articles. For example, it may be beneficial to include only articles that refer to one British veteran individual. This would legitimize the exclusion of articles describing predominantly charitable organizations that help a general veteran population. Therefore, subsequent analyses may be more concise and may more clearly differentiate between veteran-types (e.g., WWII veteran, Iraq veteran).

Lastly, the present study did not take potential differences in the news outlets’ impact on social attitudes into account. However, to date, the question of how different UK news agencies differ in terms of their impact on public attitudes remains unaddressed. Though it is known that tabloids have a greater readership and a higher circulation, it is also known that the readership of broadsheet newspapers is more influential and thus may comprise a more powerful group in terms of policy making (Rooney 2000).

In conclusion, the present study’s main limitations may be considered to follow its explorative nature. Future researchers may wish to build upon the present findings to delve in more nuanced and specific aspects of veteran-related depictions. However, though these limitations need to be considered, the present study fulfilled its intention: An overview of common ways in which British veterans are depicted in the media was provided and differences between veteran-depictions and newspaper format/ political affiliation of news agencies were investigated.

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