Experiencing the War

The Depiction of American Soldiers in the Iraq War in Life Writing and The News Media

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"For a thousand days, he had been the great Sergeant Schumann. Then he was injured. Then he was dead. Then he was done. Now, another thousand days later, he points toward the front steps of a home that in this one moment anyway seems like the most peaceful place in the world. [...] He feels so alive suddenly. If only the moment could last" (Finkel 256)

Abstract

This thesis compares the depiction of the American Soldier in the Iraq War in life writing and the mainstream U.S. News Media. It focuses on the life writing texts *Thank You For Your Service*, by David Finkel, and *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell*, by John Crawford, to examine the depiction of American soldiers in the Iraq War and after their homecoming. It creates a contextualized view on the News Media coverage as well as a scholarly framework regarding life writing and the News Media. Furthermore, it analyzes the potential of narrative focus and literary devices to convey personal experiences in life writing.

This thesis illustrates the ability of life writing to portray the personal self as well as to place that personal self within a historic context (Smith and Watson 6). Next to this, it illustrates how the News Media is prone to manipulation due to its ability to influence public opinion, as it used to "acquire factual information" (McCombs 1). Subsequently, this thesis states the crucial difference in life writing and the News Media is that life writing focuses on personal accounts and specific, subjective experiences, whereas the News Media attempts to depict an objective and contextualized portrayal of events. Furthermore, it claims that the heroic image of the American soldier as presented by the News Media forms a considerable contrast to the mentally scarred and traumatized veterans that are presented in life writing.

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Introduction

The portrayal of soldiers is often found in media and literature, however the manner in which these soldiers are depicted differs per medium. An example of representation of soldiers is through the News Media, which is used to provide historical accuracy, and is instrumental in shaping public opinion. This thesis will look at the depiction of American soldiers in the News Media and life writing, which includes biographical and autobiographical works, as well as memoirs (Winslow 37; Smith and Watson 4). Life writing is characterized by the fact that it "confronts not one life but two" (Smith and Watson 6). These two lives are presented as "the self that others see – the social, historical person", and "the self [which is] experienced only by that person" and is therefore the "personally experienced, self as a history" (6). Life writing portrays the contextualized, historical point of view, as well as the specific, subjective, personal point of view, and thus focuses both on the historical context and the personal experience of that context.

This thesis will analyze John Crawford's *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell* and David Finkel's *Thank You For Your Service*, which both focus on the Iraq War. Crawford's text mostly illustrates his own experiences and those of his squad while in Iraq. Finkel's text, on the other hand, is a biography that represents an American infantry squad, in particular their homecoming and their issues with readapting to the United States after experiencing the war. It features experiences and journal entries from soldiers and their families. In his text, Finkel examines the points of view of the soldiers, as described by Smith and Watson, and attempts to portray the social, historical, and personally experienced self. This thesis examines how the News Media has depicted the American Soldier in Iraq and how it attempted to focus on an objective representation of war. The portrayal of the News Media will be compared to the depictions presented by life writing, as life writing has the ability to illustrate both the contextualized and subjective point of view.

The first chapter will establish the literary framework and analyze the point of view of the News Media. The second chapter will then elaborate on the presence of the American soldier in Iraq and the personal experiences of the soldiers and how these are portrayed. The third chapter will focus on the depiction of the after-effects of the war, and will analyze how the homecoming of soldiers is presented. Through these chapters, it will be examined how the American Soldier is portrayed in contemporary American War Literature, specifically in life writing, and how this compares to the representation of soldiers in the News Media.

Chapter 1: The News Media and the American Soldier in Iraq

While depicting the war in Iraq, the mainstream U.S. News Media seems to focus on the U.S. Army as a general institution, whereas life writing focuses on personal accounts and consequences. To analyze the contrasting portrayals in life writing and the News Media, a contextualization of the News Media and the scholarly framework should be determined. War and the News Media are studied in political and media studies, as well in literary studies, as both are broad and influential fields in contemporary cultural studies. The News Media plays a crucial role regarding the public opinion as it can "focus public attention on a few key public issues", as well as place emphasis on particular facts, and omit others in their coverage (McCombs 1). As many people "acquire factual information" from the News Media (1), their view on events and issues can be influenced by what the News Media chooses to cover. This entails that the public opinion regarding a war, and the idea of its progress, can be influenced greatly by the News Media. Reporting on the war in Iraq, according to Wilesmith, was initially "broadly supportive […] before turning critical, often cynical and, by some, condemnatory about justification […]; and thereafter skeptical about tactics and strategies" (5). Consequently, this influenced the public opinion on the war itself.

A different factor of the News Media in the Iraq War was, as compared to earlier wars, the proximity of the journalists to the war. Fahmy and Kim claim that in the Iraq War "more than 500 embedded journalists had much closer access to the fighting", which ensured that they could "accompany military personnel", and therefore could "get much closer to the conflict" (444). They argue that while the journalists were able to get closer, they would show but "a glimpse of the human toll, [which] would be masking the extent of human cost and suffering of Allied soldiers" (455). Consequently, the actual toll of the war would be left unacknowledged and the public opinion would be shaped around false reports. These false reports were important, according to Fahmy and Kim, because "national interest played a

more important role in news framing, outweighing other factors, such as journalistic norms and practices. As shown, the visual portrayal of war was extremely narrow and ally centered" (455), and therefore failed to portray the true gravity of the events reported. This was, they claim, because the American government attempted to "maintain public support for military action in Iraq" (455); by showing a more positive, successful image of the war, the public would be convinced that the United States were on the winning end of the war and would therefore support it.

Lindner argues that the situation regarding the journalists' presence among the soldiers was handled inadequately, and that "the vast majority of the news coming out of Iraq may have emphasized military success and the heroics of soldiers, rather than the consequences of the invasion" (36). This suggests that coverage has been manipulated to portray solely the successful side of the war, as it portrays the journalists' inability to depict the negative events that were unfolding. Furthermore, he claims, most of the coverage of the Iraq War was based on the positivity and excitement voiced by soldiers, but it "failed to fully recognize the extent of the human and material costs" (38). This implies the News Media coverage did not convey the negative consequences of the war, and that it relied too heavily on a one-sided perspective. The overall report would therefore be more positive than the soldiers' personal experiences, and thus would emphasize different elements and events of the war than a soldier's personal account would illustrate.

A concern regarding these positive success stories is presented by Martin, who illustrates a soldier returning "home from the horrors of war to discover that the very nation which sent him off to battle with parades and cheers is uninterested in his suffering and welfare" (68). Martin suggests that some American soldiers had extreme difficulties with adapting to violence, waging war in a distant, unknown land, and then having to "return to civilian life" (69). He continues to portray multiple events in which veterans of the Iraq War

suffered from depression, episodes, nightmares and an urge to violence, which were in fact reported in media such as *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* (78). This implies that these stories do in fact exist and have been reported, but remained limited compared to the stories of success. However, these critical and negative stories written by real soldiers depict a side of the war that portrays the personal consequences of the Army's actions. Subsequently, they illustrate a personal side of the war, as well as a more humane one. They often do not report on general events, but rather on specific issues and specific people, as opposed to the Army as an institution.

The portrayal of the News Media lacks personal accounts, as it focuses on a successful image of the war to shape public opinion, ignoring negative coverage regarding injuries, fatalities and soldiers' experiences. The actual costs and consequences of the Iraq War are thus understated, and the soldiers' experiences are unacknowledged. Due to this, the negative consequences the war had on the soldiers' mental state and their difficulties in readapting to the United States are ignored. The limited existence of stories that describe these negative consequences is remarkable, as it implies that there is coverage available on these matters, however, the mainstream News Media more often reported the stories of success.

Chapter 2: The American Soldiers in Iraq

The previous chapter depicted that the News Media fails to portray the personal

consequences of the war by trying to give an objective overview. What is lost in this

overview is the perspective of the soldiers, especially those perspectives that are potentially

negative towards the war, as they are seen as damaging to the public opinion. However, to

learn from the personal consequences of war, it is important to examine the war from the

point of view of the soldiers, which can be done effectively through life writing. This chapter

will portray that the American soldiers were often abandoned by the Army, which alienated

them and exposed them to other dangers than the physical enemy, which was subsequently

left unacknowledged by the U.S. Army and the News Media.

The News Media fails to report the extent of the difficulties of the soldiers'

experiences, for example through its lack of portrayal of deaths among soldiers. According to

Kamber and Arango, "after five years and more than 4,000 American combat deaths,

searches and interviews turned up fewer than half-dozen graphic photographs of dead

American soldiers" ("4,000 U.S. Deaths, and a Handful of Images"). This suggests that the

News Media ignored many fatalities of the war, ignoring the personal consequences for the

soldiers.

Maguen et al. claim the experience of killing and engaging closely with death causes

"mental health and social problems" as well as "moral injury"[1] (90). Furthermore, they state

that soldiers who have killed or experienced killing often deal with "shame and/or guilt",

which makes them "weary of speaking to others of this sensitive issue, especially when they

fear others will not understand or judge them for their actions" (90). This implies the

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[1] In this context, "moral injury" refers to the state of mind that is caused in a person where
this person "may begin to view him or herself as immoral, irredeemable, and un-reparable"
(689). Two of the biggest causes for moral injury are, according to Litz et al., "shame and
guilt" (689).

importance for the government and media, and subsequently, the public to understand and accept that these problems arise, which begins with acknowledging their existence. If this is not acknowledged, the soldier will remain misunderstood and alienated.

Crawford portrays scenes in *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell* that depict his experiences with violence and death. He portrays one event in which members of an infantry squad visit an Iraqi bank on a routine mission, during which they are attacked by Iraqi men. In the scene, Crawford illustrates explicitly how a soldier is wounded. His friends try to save him, as "[h]is hands had a stranglehold on his own neck, and spurts of blood poured from between his fingers. [his] mouth opened and closed, but no words came out" (90). Through the use of explicit visual description, Crawford creates an image that is shocking to the reader, as well as making clear that the soldiers themselves were not fully capable of dealing with the situation. For example, "Private Buchanan had his hands over his mouth and was staring at the whole scene, trying not to hyperventilate", and officers had lost sight of their strategies due to panic (92). This scene portrays a situation the News Media often fails to show: soldiers start to panic, become distraught, and start to experience shock and other mental effects. The soldiers' inability to handle the situation emphasizes their humanity as a personal and emotional collective of people.

In *Thank You For Your Service,* Finkel elaborates on the impact of certain events the soldiers experience in Iraq, especially those in which fellow soldiers are involved. He illustrates how Sergeant Adam Schumann carried a wounded friend down the stairs. Finkel states Schumann experienced something he would never forget:

> he remembered the sudden dead weight of this dying man. He remembered his
>
> mouth filling with blood and gulping for air as he moved down the stairs and
>
> his mouth filling again. He remembered the taste of the blood, the smell of the

blood, the heat of the blood, and the wet of the blood as it spilled down his

chin and onto his uniform and through his uniform and onto his skin. (97)

Finkel emphasizes the effect of mental trauma by repeating the word "remembered" as well

as "blood", depicting throughout this fragment how the event remains within Schumann's

memory, highlighting the injury that has caused it. By emphasizing that Schumann

remembers the event so distinctly, Finkel illustrates the capability of memory in suffering

mental trauma and upholding it. This illustration clarifies how the war has been mentally

scarring for Schumann and thus suggests the negative consequences of experiencing war for

soldiers in general.

According to Diamond, however, it is the feeling of isolation and abandonment that

worsens the experience. Regarding isolation and abandonment, Diamond argues that

"[o]fficers and soldiers in Iraq were forced to keep their complaints about insufficient

manpower and equipment private" (35). The soldiers were not allowed to voice their

concerns regarding their situation, even though they experienced this situation first hand.

This caused concern and frustration among the soldiers, who had to survive on their own, as

they "stood by helplessly, outnumbered and unprepared" with "the Bush administration […]

stubbornly refusing to send in more troops" (36).

Crawford touches upon this when he depicts how soldiers sometimes act on their own

accord as a result of the frustration regarding their abandonment. He illustrates a house raid,

where the soldiers discover evidence of criminal activity. Instead of reporting the activity and

arresting the criminals, the soldiers raid the house, claiming money and other possessions,

such as guns. Crawford states "I looked around and saw the interpreter fingering a new nine-

millimeter pistol before tucking it away in his belt. I hadn't counted the money before, but it

was obvious there was no use now" (47). This passage depicts the way in which some

soldiers vented their frustrations and acted independently, which enabled them to survive the stress that the war has put them under.

It was left to the soldiers to find a way to handle the issues of the war, but according to Finkel, this was hardly possible. He states "[o]ne of the worst things about Adam [Schumann]'s war […] was not having a defined front line" (19). In this passage, Finkel personalizes the war by stating that the war belongs to Adam. This illustrates how the description of the war by Adam in Finkel's text is based on Adam's own interpretation of the war, as well as that Adam is personally attached to the war through his experiences. A result of the lack of a defined front line is that the war was taking place on every side without pause, as there was "no front to advance toward, no enemy in uniform, no predictable patterns, no relief, and it helped drive some of them crazy" (19). This indicates that the soldiers lived within an uninterrupted period of stress and wariness with no mental relief, which is depicted by the excessive enumeration of factors that illustrate the lack of a defined front line. Finkel illustrates how many soldiers lost their sanity, as presented in the journal of Sergeant Schumann, who writes "I've lost all hope. I feel the end is near for me, very, very near. Darkness is all I see anymore" (3). This passage shows the effect stress and wariness have on Schumann, blinding his vision of a better future. The repetition of "very" portrays the extent of his mental decline, as well as emphasizes the urgency of it. Like other soldiers, Schumann cannot find a way to deal with this on his own. However, since he does not receive adequate help, his mental state slowly declines.

Crawford states stress is different for every individual, but caused all soldiers to do "things at one time or another that defied logic. Sometimes you start to feel like someone is just in your head screaming at the top of his lungs so that you can't think", which caused the soldiers to look for an adequate outlet (211-12). This passage depicts that, according to Crawford, soldiers collectively acknowledge the mental effects of the war. They fail to find

relief, but still attempt to find a solution; all of the soldiers acted in an inappropriate manner at one time or another, and for them this was the way of war. In addition, Crawford illustrates the way the war has changed him:

> People say you leave home, go to war, and become a man. I want to be a little boy again. I want to trust people and not look behind my back. While I was there I didn't see it the same way, though. I only wanted to punish people for what was happening to me. I wanted to go to my home and my wife, but I didn't have either a home or a wife anymore. Twenty-five years old and nothing to live for. (153)

Crawford juxtaposes becoming a man, which is posed as an important objective, with being a little boy. He states someone becomes a man in a war, but that becoming a man meant losing trust and becoming paranoid, which causes Crawford wanting nothing else than to be an innocent and naive little boy again. However, in Iraq his mind started to long for violence, which Crawford interpreted as becoming a man. Eventually, Crawford realized the cause and futility of his violence, as he discovered within himself that there was nothing left to live for; he would never be able to return to who he was before the war.

According to Crawford, Iraq began to feel like home. In one scene, he states he "had just returned from two weeks of leave in America, and it was [his] first night back on duty. The city smelled familiar, with its plumes of smoke hidden in the darkness. Much more familiar than America had" (169). He feels more connected to Iraq and the war than to America and his old friends and family. His time in Iraq has caused him to detach from his home, and at the same time formed a new comfort zone, within the scene of the Iraq War. He illustrates the familiarity to things "hidden in the darkness", which emphasize how his wariness and readiness for action have shaped his comfort zone. Furthermore, Crawford states

[t]he skeptics, the reporters, the pro- and antiwar demonstrators, they're all wrong.

The news says the war's over. That was fine by us. No one else belonged there

anyway. This was our war, this was my war, and it's the only one I had. I may

have had my doubts about it, but it was something to hold on to. (73)

He declares that the discussion about the war in the United States was both wrong and

useless, as it was not their war; they could not know how it truly was. Crawford thus suggests

that people try to claim the war or knowledge of it, but argues that it is owned by those

fighting it, as they are the only people to have truly experienced and felt it. Furthermore, the

war embodies the soldiers' personal experience; taking their possession of the war away

would be as if the war itself would be taken away from them. Ahern et al. add to this that

soldiers often feel alienated, thinking of "civilian life [at home] as 'normal', while it was

clear that many aspects of civilian life no longer felt normal to them" (5). The soldiers feel

what Ahern et al. call "disconnection from people at home", and with that of home itself (5).

Consequently, soldiers like Crawford began to feel uncomfortable and detached from

the United States. He declares that America was not familiar anymore, where even his friends

were "unsure of how to react to a stranger who looked so familiar" (174). Crawford states the

war had taken everything from the soldiers, and that this process was irreversible, and he

"couldn't help but feel disgust at how wrong it all was" that these soldiers were "crumbling"

for the benefit of others (174). By depicting his experiences in life writing, however,

Crawford makes the soldiers' experiences more visible and tangible, as he illustrates the

human element of the soldiers' thoughts and actions. This in turn could lead to a better

comprehension for civilian readers, as they can examine and interpret the soldiers'

experiences personally.

Finkel argues that the war is impossible to fully understand as an outsider. He states a

leak of images was necessary to show the real war, depicting "[h]eads half gone, torsos

ripped open, spreading blood, insides outside. Close-ups, auto-focused, sunshine lighting, perfect color" (227). This image, while shocking, was a truthful portrayal of the Iraq War; this was "[t]he war, in other words, as it was experienced by soldiers who were in it and asking what had happened to Harrelson [a fellow soldier who was killed] and wondering after a mortar attack if anything might be sticking out of their head" (227).

These shocking images are rarely depicted by the News Media, argues Andén-Papadopoulos. He states soldiers had to use instruments such as the internet to share their real experiences, which had been "denied a place in traditional Western media and culture" (923). Sharing these experiences was, for many soldiers, "an individual and collective way of dealing with the act of killing – and the fear of being killed", as well as a way to fulfill a need "to authenticate and filter a hurtful reality where death and serious injury is an all too real possibility" (Andén-Papadopoulos 931). Sharing their stories is both for therapeutic and social cause; they need to show the world what they endure and the realistic horrors that they experience, as well as find a way to deal with it.

These painful and shocking illustrations of the war are descriptions given by men who experienced these events unfolding personally. They witnessed the pain, and endured it. However, it was not reported by the News Media, nor was it fully acknowledged by their government. These soldiers returned to a home that they did not understand anymore, and, consequently, that did not understand them.

Chapter 3: The Post-War Invisibility

In the previous chapters, it was determined that the representation of the Iraq War by the News Media suffered from conflicting interests, which limited the extent to which soldiers' personal experiences were discussed, represented and depicted. While on mission in Iraq, American soldiers found themselves in a nation and culture that was exceptionally unlike their own. Soldiers' life writing and personal accounts could contribute to a better understanding of the stress and confusion the soldiers endured, and with this it could shape a more comprehensive context for the American public. This chapter focuses on the depiction of the aftermath of the war in life writing, examining the portrayal of how the soldiers return home and face the difficulties of readapting to life in the United States. It analyzes how the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Terminal Brain Injury (TBI), affected the soldiers' homecoming and how this is presented and reported in life writing.

A difficult aspect for the soldiers upon returning was, according to Finkel, dealing with the mental and emotional damage the war had caused. He states "[o]f the two million [soldiers], studies suggest that 20 to 30 percent have come home with PTSD and TBI", which cause "[d]epression, anxiety, nightmares, memory problems, personality changes, suicidal thoughts" (11). In *Thank You For Your Service*, Finkel defines PTSD and TBI as "a mental health condition triggered by some type of terror, or traumatic brain injury", and the consequences of "when a brain is jolted so violently that it collides with the inside of the skull and causes psychological damage" respectively (Finkel 11). Zeitzer and Brooks add to this that "[b]ecause mild TBI is often not a soldier's primary injury, the signs and symptoms are overlooked and the soldier is sent home or back to the battlefield with undiagnosed TBI" (347). This creates a dangerous situation, they argue, as "[t]he consequences of TBI can be devastating" as it often results in "vast impairment in physical, cognitive and psychosocial

functioning" (347). Left unacknowledged, TBI could lead to a situation in which a soldier feels increasingly more alienated and misunderstood, with potential fatal consequences.

Crawford describes that he had hoped coming home would solve his mental decline. He states he "wanted to believe that when [he] got to America things would be all right. [He] was wrong; you can never go back home" (154). Even though he has left the war, he cannot let go of the war mentally. He provides an example when he encountered an "Arabic man […] working behind the counter [of a gas station]" (154). Upon noticing a new customer, the Arab man greeted Crawford warmly. However, Crawford states after seeing the Arab man, he "walked out. [He] never wanted to hate anyone; it just sort of happens that way in a war" (154). Rationally, he knows that the Arab man is not a threat. However, his experiences in the war have imprinted in his brain a certain suspicion towards Arab people, caused by their involvement in his experiences during the war. Although Crawford had hoped being home would end his suspicions, he admits he cannot let go of these thoughts, which depict his mental trauma.

With regard to mental trauma, Finkel adds that Sergeant Schumann is physically fine two years after the war, "[m]entally, though, it is still the day he headed home" (9), which demonstrates the lasting effects of his PTSD. Schumann still witnesses images of the war, for example, "Emory […] is still draped across his back, and the blood flowing out of Emory's head is still rivering in his mouth" (9), which portray the flashbacks and memories that resulted in, and are caused by, his PTSD; he can still feel Emory's weight and taste his blood as if he is experiencing it in the present. From this passage, it can be concluded that Schumann is unable to let go of the guilt and the shock he experienced, which is emphasized by the repetition of the word "still". Furthermore, by using the word "rivering", Finkel suggests that Emory's blood overflows Schumann's mouth, which illustrates that Emory's injury is to some extent shared by Schumann.

According to Schumann, there is a lack of adequate support for soldiers, as he notices his thoughts about suicide are increasing. He keeps those thoughts to himself, stating "what would be the point? How many psychiatrics and therapists has he talked to? How many times has he mentioned it, and where has it gotten him?" (16). Finkel switches from his own perspective to that of Schumann, and it is Schumann who asks himself these questions. This evokes the emotional and personal perspective, as these experiences are expressed by the one who suffers them. With this switch in perspective, Finkel ensures that the soldier's perspective is apparent, which emphasizes the personal experiences that are being conveyed. This is important, as the experience is illustrated through a direct source, and not through interpretation by a biographer.

Finkel applies this technique most notably when depicting the devastating consequences from TBI and PTSD, such as violence, memory loss and suicide. In one scene, he portrays how the decline of Schumann's mental state is nearly fatal. This scene is depicted from the perspective of Schumann's wife, Saskia, which emphasizes Schumann's loss of control and rationality, as well as the effect on the soldier's wife. Schumann is holding a shotgun against his head, screaming to his wife to "[p]ull the fucking trigger" (102). Saskia describes that "[s]he wants to pull the fucking trigger and end his life and end her misery and clean the walls afterwards and be done with it, all of it" (102). This scene portrays the toll Schumann's mental scars take, as well as emphasizes the potentially horrifying consequences; Saskia wants to be able to clean the walls and restart her life, which shows the urgency of the situation, as well as a wish to begin anew, symbolized by the cleaning of the wall. Finkel portrays this by using expletives, repeating them in internal thought. These expletives evoke the idea of mental scarring, as they illustrate that Adam and Saskia are unable to fully express themselves and thus have to resort to curse words. Furthermore, the use of expletives emphasizes the couple's anger and frustration, portraying the intensity of

their emotions. In this passage, the combination of multiple sentences with "and", depicts a

panicked and crazed train of thought, emphasizing the severity of the situation.

When Saskia refuses to pull the trigger, Schumann attempts to do it himself, failing

and mentally collapsing, bursting into tears in front of Saskia. For Schumann, it is guilt that

he fails to cope with. Here, the narrative switches from omniscient narration to external

focalization. The writing presents the guilt and confusion Schumann attempts to express, as

he is saying

> something now, something about wishing he had died in Iraq. More things
>
> come out. About guilt. About being a bad husband, a bad father, a
>
> disappointment; about being twenty-nine and feeling ninety; about being a
>
> disgrace. His mind is roaring, and meanwhile his thumb is still on the trigger,
>
> the safety is off, the gun remains loaded, and Saskia stands next to him
>
> begging and waiting for the sound of the gun and for him to explode. (104)

In this passage, the despair is depicted through the repetition of "about", which portrays the

repetition of thoughts frequently present in a distressed mind. Schumann is a threat to

himself, however, he is unable to cope with this, which results in it overwhelming him. This

is portrayed by the switch to external focalization. Furthermore, it depicts two people who

feel that the end of suffering, both mentally and within their marriage, could only be found

through death; Schumann wants to die, and his wife sees no relief in both their suffering with

him still alive.

Similarly, Crawford presents how his homecoming turned out to be completely

different than he expected, depicted through his wife eventually leaving him. He illustrates he

"spent a few months drifting around friends' houses, from one couch to the next", and that he

could only rely on the loyalty of his dog. With regard to his dog, he states "[h]e sleeps with

me at night when I'm drunk and can't understand why I'm alone. Dogs don't turn their back

on you, that's another truth" (210). In this scene, it is apparent that Crawford fails to adequately adapt to his surroundings. Crawford states he often gets drunk and fails to understand why he is alone, which evokes the idea that he has had no appropriate help in readapting to civilian life and that he is confused over his current situation because of his mental state. Crawford's depiction of his loneliness and confusion present the scars the war has left on his mental state, which contributed to his difficulties in adapting to civilian life.

In most soldiers portrayed in Finkel's and Crawford's works, guilt is described as an important cause that maintains PTSD. In the case of DeNinno, Finkel draws upon the soldier's journal, which illustrates his feelings in detail. Finkel describes DeNinno as "a true patriot", who regarded himself as a good soldier, "and then he punched his first civilian in the face, and then he pushed his first civilian down the stairs, and now he is back in the United States crying and saying to his wife, Sascha, 'I feel like a monster'" (51).[2] In this passage, DeNinno is presented as a competent soldier, although he later commits what he perceives as monstrous acts. These acts have occurred in the war and it can be interpreted that these acts are a result of the stress and difficulties DeNinno has had to face. His actions, however, have caused him to see himself as "a monster". This indicates that his guilt has been burned into his brain, which Finkel presents in DeNinno's own journal, when he opens up about his mental state:

> What the fuck is going on in my mind? Last night I was sitting in bed and
> looked across the room to a chair in my room and there was a young girl
> covered in blood. What happened after that I don't remember. I was told a full
> scale panic attack [...]. I FEEL SO FUCKING VIOLENT RIGHT NOW. (56)

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[2] Note the repetition of the word "and" that depicts a panicked and crazed mind, as illustrated earlier on page 21.

In this passage from DeNinno's own journal, his hallucinations are presented, which depict to what extent PTSD has influenced his mental state: A loss of self-control and heavy panic attacks. Furthermore, the passage portrays his flashbacks, which contribute to his guilt as well as his confusion and frustration, presented in the first and last lines of the passage through his question and his use of expletives. DeNinno's thoughts are presented in a stream of consciousness, with the last line written entirely in capital letters. The passage thus is an impression of DeNinno's own mind and his private thoughts, as it replicates his way own thinking, which shifts from confusion to panic to anger. Furthermore, the last line presents DeNinno's reaction to his confusion, flashbacks and panic; he becomes violent and aggressive, because he cannot cope with his guilt and fails to understand his own thoughts.

This violence is also seen in Tausolo, another soldier in Finkel's work. Tausolo suffers from PTSD and TBI, which cause flashbacks, memory loss and extreme guilt. Finkel states Tausolo was marked as a "high risk" soldier; which means that there is a high risk of suicide or violence (146). Here, Finkel shows the fault of the Army's support system; there is no adequate way to help a man like Tausolo. Tausolo has completed PTSD programs and is part of the WTB, which stands for Warrior Transition Battalion. This battalion is specialized in transitioning soldiers back to American life, although according to Finkel it is mostly bureaucratic and often a source of stress, instead of relief (144-46). As a result of the stress it caused, the WTB was unable to prevent Tausolo from becoming violent. This implies that Tausolo's situation, which was supposedly thoroughly examined and monitored, was not fully acknowledged, causing the system to fail in giving Tausolo the help he needed.

Finkel states the soldiers he has followed will always carry their scars with them, and are still in the early stages of learning how to cope with them (225). Three years after their homecoming, and they are still "trying to recover from the trying they did during the war"; all soldiers in Finkel's text have attempted to kill themselves at one point, but "all of them are

still here and still at it, as are all of the soldiers from their unit, as is every other affected person in this cluster of war wounds" (225). Schumann states:

> 'I'm not cured. I don't think any of us are or ever will be,' he says. 'But I'm definitely in a better place than I was six months ago. Even a couple of months ago for that matter. It feels like in the last couple of weeks, a million pounds have been lifted off my back. I can breathe again. I can wake up in the morning and smile. For the first time, I'm not thinking about killing myself every day'. (246)

This passage presents the progress Schumann has experienced since finding help and feeling understood and supported. At the same time, it portrays how even though Schumann's mental state is improving, it will never fully heal; the mental scars from the war will fade, but the war's consequences will never truly go away.

These stories present the continuing difficulties of these soldiers to readapt to their old lives at home. What they have seen may have been reported generally or untruthfully, how they have experienced their homecoming may have been ignored and unacknowledged, however, their stories are real. The News Media may have shifted away from the stories that Crawford, Schumann and their soldiers have experienced, but for them every day is and will remain a battle.

Conclusion

This thesis analyzed the depiction of the American soldiers in the Iraq War by exploring and analyzing the details and insights in life writing, and established that these are often missing in News Media accounts. It analyzed John Crawford's *The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell* and David Finkel's *Thank You For Your Service*, and juxtaposed these with coverages by News Media and scholarly articles regarding the subject. Through analyses, it is presented that the News Media proved to be an influential instrument in shaping public opinion, which made it prone to manipulation so public opinion could be influenced.

Furthermore, analyses proved that News Media reported events in a general manner and with that failed to depict the personal experiences and consequences of soldiers; it portrayed the U.S. Army as a faceless institution, instead of a collection of individuals. As a result, soldiers' experiences were not adequately portrayed in News Media, which contributed to the soldiers' alienation from the United States. This thesis found that the soldiers' experience as depicted in life writing challenged the portrayal by News Media, as it evoked the personal and emotional perception and consequences of war. Furthermore, it presented the difficulties with waging a war in a culture that is heavily divergent from a soldier's own.

Subsequently, this thesis established that life writing and the News Media depicted the soldiers' homecoming in a notably different manner. The News Media failed to portray the return of physically or mentally injured soldiers, whereas life writing focused on the experiences of these injured soldiers in readapting to the United States. Life writing focused on the personal and emotional, depicting tragic and horrifying stories and events. The News Media, on the other hand, focused on stories that emphasized American success and portrayed a positive image of the war.

A concern I found when conducting research is the absence of articles criticizing the war and its consequences, as they had been found by scholars in the past, but now seem to have disappeared. It is possible that these articles can be found with further research, such as research into the material databases of the News Media such as *The New York Times* or *CNN*, which have not uploaded their entire physical database onto the internet. Another interesting notion that I came across during the analyses was the movie adaptation of Finkel's *Thank You For Your Service*, implying the increasing attention to life writing with regard to soldiers, war and its aftermath. Further research could focus on the involvement of popular media regarding the depiction of American soldiers, such as movies, games, television series, and novels. Furthermore, it could focus on earlier wars, such as the Vietnam war or World War II and the depiction of soldiers in their respective contemporary News Media and life writing. With this, the possible changes that have already occurred and what could be learned from this process could be investigated for future reference.

Regarding the Iraq war, it has become clear that the mainstream U.S. News Media had presented a view of the war and the soldiers that was too general and too detached. This was due to its own focus and its lack of coverage on personal accounts, which caused the depiction to ignore the individual, but instead portrayed the American Army as an institution. Consequently, the American soldier was not depicted personally, as in life writing it was depicted that there were several negative notions regarding the war that have not been acknowledged. This caused difficulties for soldiers both in Iraq and in the United States after their homecoming, as their stories had not been told and their experiences were therefore misunderstood. What was presented as an image of the heroic, patriotic American soldier fighting for freedom proved to be an image of damaged men, alienated and estranged, with brain injuries, post-traumatic stress, depression and suicides.

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS
STATEMENT

Fraud and Plagiarism
Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only
printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:
- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations. The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

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Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

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