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‘Nowhere else sells bliss like this¹’: Exploring the emotional labour of soldiers at war

Abstract

Reading secondary data from military memoirs of recent conflicts through the prism of scholarship on emotional labour, this paper discusses feeling rules fostered by the total institution of military service. The military is a significant context for such analysis, given that it socializes its personnel into mastering the practices and skills of lethal violence for combat operations. It is also a total institution, and the disculturation new recruits must endure creates fertile ground for the inculcation of a specific emotional regime. Further, unlike most other service occupations, the military is both male-dominated and highly masculine. The paper also makes a case for using memoirs in the study of emotional labour. For us, being examples of what we call identity writing, they offer different insights to those we might attain through other methods. Third, our discussion expands the concept of emotional labour in that the emotional regime the memoirists index: is not undertaken for a specific group of customers; entails a distinctive range of emotions; and involves the conscious cultivation of communities of coping among soldiers. We conclude that memoirs provide a fruitful source for future organization studies research into the emotional regime of the military.

Keywords: emotional labour, emotional regime, feeling rules, masculinity, memoir, military service, total institution, war

¹ This quotation is taken from one of the memoirs we analyse (Hennessey, 2009, p. 211).

Introduction

This paper discusses the emotional labour soldiers report undertaking on combat operations. Drawing on secondary data from memoirs by British military personnel who served in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2006 and 2010, we identify occupational feeling rules for soldiers at war and provide new insights into emotional labour and service work as a result. The military is an especially interesting context for studies of emotional labour. For one, it demands of its members practices and skills that are antithetical to those privileged in the vast majority of civilian occupations. To put it bluntly, the mandate of the military is to ‘perfect the techniques of lethal violence’ (Kovitz, 2003, p. 9). This requires, as we read it, deliberate management of soldiers’ emotions; to prepare them for the realities of military labour and to help them renegotiate their relationship to violence, killing and death. Such practices - through which civilians are transformed into soldiers - are complex, diverse and deeply embedded in the structure and culture of the military (see, for example, Godfrey *et al.*, 2012).

Moreover, the military, during basic training in particular and in many respects also operational tours, is a total institution (Goffman, [1961] 1991). Its members work, play and rest in the same place; they carry out their daily activities alongside numerous other members, all of whom are treated identically; their lives are rigidly scheduled; and all activity is designed to serve the purposes of the wider institution or, as Goffman puts it, ‘to pursue some worklike task’ (p. 16). Total institutions ‘disculturate’ in demanding of their entrants ‘a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanities’ (p. 24) – like being assigned to quarters, issued with a uniform and subjected to random spot checks. This lays the foundations for a literal reorganization of self, based around ‘house rules’, privileges and punishments. In the military, Goffman suggests, the rationale for all of this is to foster ‘combat capacity’ (p. 49). It is this

last claim which our argument develops, and we suggest the feeling rules instilled into soldiers are extremely powerful as a result of their membership of this total institution. Indeed Goffman also points out that compliance in total institutions must appear to be absolute because if any ‘face-saving reactive expression’ occurs, like a grimace or a muttered aside, it meets with swift and explicit punishment (p. 41).

Military memoirs, of course, comprise an increasingly popular genre of writing (Woodward and Jenkins, 2012). Several of the texts we consider are best sellers (Hennessey, 2009; Mills, 2008; Tootal, 2006) and certainly sell in much larger quantities than academic treatments of war. They are, nonetheless, examples of ‘flesh witnessing’ (Harari, 2008); first-hand accounts based on direct experience at a corporeal level. While acknowledging the highly commercial aspects of and the mass consumer market for military memoirs, we argue they constitute valuable data about military lives which are no less valid than data generated by more conventional methods like interviews. We also assert that they offer a different sort of lens in this regard, adding another layer to investigations of emotional labour in organization studies.

Our contribution here is therefore threefold. First, we empirically explore emotional labour in the important context of occupational socialization for military combat operations. Second, we emphasize the use value of memoirs as a source of data for understanding the experience of work, and emotional labour especially. Third, we identify a number of ways in which emotional labour in the memoirs is distinctive given the context of a total institution, thus extending the parameters of the concept itself.

Next we map the conceptual lens through which we analyse emotional labour during combat operations, before outlining the methodology used to select and analyse the memoirs. Our

findings discuss the memoirists' enthusiastic responses to being told they are departing on an operational tour; the corporeal reality of war once in theatre and their various emotional responses to death and killing; and the fear of 'letting the lads down', which is identified as motivating the authors irrespective of rank or experience. A discussion follows, where we argue that soldiers' emotional labour during combat takes a particular form. First, it necessitates the mobilization of positive and negative emotions as well as the absence of any emotion at all. Second, it is undertaken in the absence of a definable customer group, which again sets it apart from the emotional labour described in other occupations. Third, it forms a vital element of a male-dominated and highly masculine service occupation, so its context is also very different to that of most other service work. Fourth, emotional labour as fostered by this total institution seems to demonstrate soldiers' unswerving conversion to military feeling rules as well as the deliberate inculcation of communities of coping among these workers as a way to deal with the demands of war.

Emotional regimes, emotional labour and the military services

The literature on workplace emotion is diverse and highly contested (see Reddy, 2001; Charmaz and Milligan, 2008; and Sieben and Wettergren, 2010, for a review of the key debates). Recognizing this diversity and sensitive to the continuing debates, here we draw on the more sociologically-informed literature and define emotions as the 'feelings that people experience, interpret, reflect on, express, and manage' (Ehrlich Martin, 1999, p. 112). Emotions are therefore both something we experience and something we do (Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990). The social situatedness of emotions also means that the appropriateness of emotional displays varies across contexts. These displays are socialized, co-created and emerge through interaction as opposed to being purely 'internal' (Besiner, cited in Reddy, 2001; Sieben and

Wettergren, 2010). Indeed, as we know from the extensive scholarship on workplace emotional labour and emotion management, different occupations and organizations are characterized by different emotional norms. New recruits learn these norms – which Hochschild ([1983] 2003) calls feeling rules - through socialization. Reddy suggests they comprise an ‘emotional regime’ which establishes and maintains ‘a set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them’ (2001, p. 129). These workplace emotional regimes mandate specific emotions as contextually appropriate.

Within organization studies, the overwhelming focus of previous research on emotional labour and emotion management has been on service work, inspired by Hochschild’s ([1983] 2003) analysis of flight attendants and debt collectors. In these occupations, Hochschild argues, workers are required to ‘induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (p. 7) - customers, consumers, clients, patients or end users. When successfully performed, emotional labour adds value to the service encounter. But whether it involves surface acting (concealing negative feelings in order to deliver good service) or deep acting (internalizing management prescriptions so feeling rules actually shape one’s emotions), it is understood as alienating and exploitative, a more profound selling of the worker’s self than intellectual or physical work involves.

Elsewhere, additional types of workplace emotion management are identified – for example, philanthropic, where an employee simply wants to go the extra mile, perhaps because they feel they share something with a customer (Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Sarpong and Maclean, 2016). Bolton and Boyd (2003) suggest that emotion management can also be prescriptive – specific to an occupation or profession rather than something enforced by management – or presentational, governed by wider society’s feeling rules. They equate Hochschild’s emotional

labour to what they call pecuniary emotion management; and make the point that workers may follow different feeling rules at different stages during a working day. Emotional labour is also often described as a delicate balancing act to manufacture customer satisfaction (eg, Boyd, 2002; Hancock, 2013; Harvey *et al.*, 2016; Mulholland, 2004; Nath, 2011). However, very little attention has been paid to occupations where workers are expected to muster negative emotions, like anger or distrust, to undermine or frighten customers - as in the case of Hochschild's debt collectors. As she writes in one passage,

'One novice said: "My boss comes into my office and says, 'Can't you get madder than *that*?' 'Create alarm!' - that's what my boss says." Like an army sergeant, the boss sometimes said his employees were "not men" unless they mustered up a proper degree of open outrage: "My boss, he hollers at me. He says, 'Can't you be a *man*?' Today I told him, 'Can't you give me some credit for just being a human being?'".' (Hochschild, [1983] 2003, p. 146 – original emphasis)

In this occupation, aggression, contempt and sometimes even physical violence from the service worker towards the customer are rewarded, as the relevant emotional regime requires staff to treat clients as 'loafers' or 'cheats' (p. 143). What we also see here is the gendering of such negative emotional displays – this rare mandating of negative emotions is positioned as necessitating a masculine demeanour. Although both men and women work in these debt collection agencies, all are expected to act like men when dealing with customers. Interestingly moreover, given our empirical focus, these feeling rules are imparted by managers who behave like army sergeants. On the other hand, Hochschild argues that 'As traditionally more accomplished managers of feeling in private life, women more than men have put emotional labor on the market, and they know more about its personal costs' (p. 11). She suggests many

more women than men are employed in jobs where positive emotional labour is required – something which is, of course, still the case today.

A great deal of work has replicated, challenged, extended and/ or amended Hochschild's arguments, and the prism of emotional labour has been applied to a wide range of private, public and third sector occupations. Some research suggests emotional labour can be satisfying or may not even be a matter of performance at all: the feelings required in certain occupations are said to be those which motivate workers to do the job at all. The argument varies in large part depending on the occupation under scrutiny, including health and social care (Hebson *et al.*, 2015; Husso and Hirvonen, 2012; Kessler *et al.*, 2015; Sloan, 2012), call centre work (Lloyd and Payne, 2009; Marsh and Musson, 2008), academia (Brouillette, 2013; Gregg, 2008, 2010), railway work (Boyd, 2002), flight attending (Boyd, 2002; Curley and Royle, 2013), Santa performing (Hancock, 2013), retail (Ikeler, 2016) and foster parenting (Kirton, 2013).

Some of the empirical evidence around emotional labour also emphasizes employee resistance, given what Bolton and Boyd (2003: 299) describe as the space between what management expect and how workers actually feel. The agency afforded allows service workers to make conscious decisions about their workplace performances. For example, staff at one Irish call centre developed informal alliances to challenge management feeling rules, included faking sales and avoiding work via frequent smoking breaks or leaving early (Mulholland, 2004). In other call centres we see what Lloyd and Payne (2009) call 'going robot', where employees speak in a cold monotone, use only the most basic of organizational scripts or even hang up on customers, especially when they are being abusive (also see Taylor and Tyler, 2000).

But Nath's (2011) call centre workers appeared so demoralized by the racism exhibited by many of their customers, and the absence of management support in such cases, that they felt unable to resist. Instead they relied on individualized coping tactics or left the job altogether. Korczynski and Evans (2013) agree management often turn a blind eye to customer aggression towards service workers – although they suggest staff may form informal 'communities of coping' to provide mutual emotional support as a result (also see Mulholland, 2004; Hancock, 2013). Amongst cabin crew, equally, passenger aggression made these staff feel angry, intimidated, worthless and depressed, leading to significantly lower job satisfaction, but no apparent resistance (Boyd, 2002; Bolton and Boyd, 2003). Bélanger and Edwards (2013, p. 447) add that many service workers 'have less capacity to resist or oppose' and 'do not want to act ruthlessly with customers or service recipients to express discontent'.

However, soldiers' service work is very different from the occupations described above and thus provides an opportunity for new insights into the phenomenon of emotional labour. First, as suggested already, it demands that incumbents mobilize their emotions so they are prepared to maim or kill other human beings. Second, it is undertaken in an all-encompassing total institution. Third, military service is still male-dominated and – perhaps more importantly – requires its recruits to be willing and able, regardless of their gender, to engage in these strongly masculine-coded activities (Barrett, 2001; Carver, 2007; Hale, 2012; Hearn, 2010; Höpfl, 2003; Godfrey, 2009; Godfrey *et al.*, 2012; Kovitz, 2003).

The maleness and masculinity of the military has further ramifications for the study of emotion when we remind ourselves of Hearn's observation about the 'dominant social construction of men as 'unemotional'' (1993, p. 142). Lupton (cited in Marsh and Musson, 2008, p. 34) also

remarks on the ‘unhelpful archetype’ of emotional woman and unemotional man. And of course, until the so-called ‘emotional turn’ (Fineman, 2008, p. 431), organizations themselves were conventionally interpreted as unemotional spaces. When considered together, the apparently ‘doubly unemotional’ (Hearn, 1993, p. 149) categories of men and organizations and a rendering of the military as a total institution dominated by men and masculine values where suppressing emotion is fundamental to organizational effectiveness might lead to the conclusion that this would not be an area suitable for the study of emotion - that it is either suppressed or an absent presence in the wider context of men/masculinity and (military) work/organization. But this is far too simplistic a conclusion to draw. Instead emotion as we see it is a key element of the organizational apparatus enabling military personnel to enact their labour in this extreme employment setting. Moreover, following Hearn, we conceive of men/masculinity not merely as categories of sex and gender but as ‘material discursive constructions’ of subject positions (Hearn 2008, 2014). Drawing on the field of critical men’s studies, we see masculinities as ‘multiple, fluid and dynamic ... positions that are occupied situationally, in that the position occupied, practices and values espoused in one context may be different from those of another.’ (Jewkes et al., 2015, p. S113).

Fourth, military service is not delivered to a specific customer/ client/ patient/ end user group: soldiers serve a much more amorphous notion of King, Queen, country, government or fellow citizens en masse. So the much-discussed ‘sovereignty of the customer’ discourse and the associated relations of production characterizing other service jobs (see, for example, Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Bolton, 2009; Korczynski and Evans, 2013; Nath, 2011; Sarpong and Maclean, 2016) do not apply. Soldiers do not interact with their ‘customers’ in the same way as – say – flight attendants, nurses, call centre workers or retail workers and they do not need to manage their emotions at work in order to satisfy these customers. Even when compared to

cognate occupations like the police, the fire service or paramedicine, soldiers may never encounter their customers at all, especially during combat missions. Indeed evidence from paramedicine suggests that, in this job, ‘caring presupposes a professional caring competence with an ability to deal with patients’ vulnerability, anxiety and suffering’ (Ahl and Nyström, 2012, p. 34 – also see Boyle, 2005; Campbell and Rasmussen, 2012; Filstad, 2011; Williams, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). As such, the emotional labour required in the emergency services seems to be akin to that required in the other civilian occupations discussed above.

Still, in the memoirs soldiers report performing what seems to be occupationally-specific emotional labour – or prescriptive emotion management – to deliver good service in protecting the security of their country or its allies. In fact we read the memoirs themselves as post-hoc emotional labour – accounts of the emotional regime in military service, one to which soldiers are required to adhere. We interpret them as ‘after the fact’ emotional labour, a continuing textual performance of the military’s feeling rules, even though some of the memoirists had left military service at the time of writing.

Methodology

‘This is my story. It’s an account of what it’s really like on the frontline. It’s also a story of comradeship. It is an honest eye-witness account of what really happened. ... It is not about the heroics of battle or crap like that. I just tell it as I saw it. I am not a saint, but I’m not a sinner either. This is just a modern soldier’s story’ (Croucher, 2009, p. 42).

Following Fraher and Gabriel (2014), writing a memoir produces a ‘narrative identity’ on the part of the author that is always reflexive, always incomplete and involves meanings being

attached to past experience. Vernon (2005) suggests this reflexivity and self-consciously constructed awareness define the memoir as text. Equally, Marche argues that memoirs are a form of ‘autobiographical narrative reconstruction’ (2015, p. 281). This reconstruction might be especially stark when they focus on controversial episodes like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as texts of this kind typically operate to deflect the blame narrative which attaches to participants. In other words, they ‘validate ... personal experience within a given context or a divergent notion that seeks to alter the social landscape by introducing a new “face” for cultural consideration’ (Sousa, 2011, pp. 223-224). Elsewhere we have described memoirs as therefore constituting identity writing (Authors). Unlike other forms of identity work - defined by Snow and Anderson as ‘the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept’ (1987, p. 1348) - this is retrospective and undertaken for an imagined audience of the future. Writing and reception happen at different points in time, and a coherent and cohesive account of self is much easier to compile, revise and present in the absence of immediate interlocutors.

Organization studies has made use of memoirs and autobiographies² of different types. Dempsey and Sanders (2010), for instance, analyse three memoirs written by celebrated social entrepreneurs, suggesting these best sellers ‘have the ability to influence broader cultural understandings of what meaningful work in the non-profit sector is like and how it should be pursued’ (p. 439). Similarly, Goss et al. (2011) use Javinder Sanghera’s autobiography about escaping a forced marriage and subsequently establishing a social enterprise to draw conclusions about entrepreneurial action. Elsewhere, Weiskopf and Willmott (2013) discuss Daniel Ellsberg’s memoir about leaking the Pentagon Papers to construct a conceptual

² A memoir recounts a specific episode in its author’s life, whereas an autobiography covers a longer period, sometimes the author’s life to date.

argument around ethics as critical practice. Watson (2008) dissects Leonard Hilton's autobiography of his career at GEC-Plessey Telecommunications, developing a close reading of the connections between Hilton's life and specific moments in the wider environment. Srinivas (2013) also analyses a memoir, this time by Prakash Tandon who was the first Indian person to become the Lever Brothers CEO. Srinivas examines how Tandon, as a member of a marginalized social group, acquired 'a managerial identity in a colonial setting, but without recognizing the exclusions, nor the further social divides such a focus on professionalism perpetuated' (p. 1666). As such, there is an organization studies precedent for treating memoirs as data, although it is still not a well-established methodological route.

Military memoirs, on the other hand, have been used extensively to analyse the connections between war, militarism and military labour in research in other disciplines (eg, Connelly and Willcox, 2005; Duncanson, 2009, 2011; Gee, 2007; Higate, 2003; King, 2006, 2009; Kinzer Stewart, 1991; Newsinger, 1997; Robinson, 2011; Woodward, 1998). For Duncanson (2011), they provide important secondary data for understanding the lived experience of war and military labour, because they are first-hand accounts by authors who have not just observed war but also experienced it. These writers are 'flesh-witnesses' (Harari, 2008); they have a 'privileged status' in the retelling of a conflict (Woodward and Jenkins, 2012, p. 496).

Of course, such authorial positioning does not mean that memoirs are superior to any other representation of war. As marketable products, they are designed to tell a good story and aimed at particular consumers: they are not factual records of events and experiences. Indeed memoirists may lie to their readers, breaking what Gabriel (2008) calls the 'narrative contract'. Weiskopf and Willmott (2013, p. 470) also point out that memoirs should be understood as 'acts of self-constitution (rather than attempts to reveal a "true self")'; and Goss *et al.* (2011)

and Srinivas (2013) offer similar observations. On the other hand, we tell stories to ourselves and to others on a more or less continuous basis, as part of our ongoing, everyday identity work. The secondary data in our memoirs are therefore no less ‘valid’ or ‘truthful’ than any other data about the experience of combat.

Moreover, we agree with Woodward (2008) that the authors of military memoirs construct an identity through which they tell us what they think we want to (or should) know about war and military life. Woodward, with Jenkins (2012), argues that memoirs thus serve as ‘vectors of militarism’ (p. 495), narrating and seeking to justify the priorities, rationalities and practices of military action, perhaps offering a counterpoint to official, political or media reporting. Even leaving aside the difficulty of achieving access to serving or veteran soldiers for interviews, then, memoirs offer different insights to those we might attain through other methods. Indeed we regard our memoirs as narrating emotional labour as undertaken in specific conflict zones, but also as post-hoc emotional labour because of the authors’ continued observance of military feeling rules in a collection of very similar accounts.

For this paper we selected nine memoirs, all written by former and serving members of the British armed forces and published between 2006 and 2010, for analysis. This allowed a more focused engagement with the memoirs as data. Our selection also ensured inclusion of: those who served in Iraq (post-2003) and/or Afghanistan; members of several military services arms (the regular Army, the Royal Marines, the Special Forces and the Army Air Corps³); and a range of ranks, from commissioned and non-commissioned officers downwards. Table 1 provides details of the memoirs we chose.

³ Despite the various services our memoirists belong to, we use the shorthand ‘soldier’ to refer to them throughout for expedience.

TABLE 1 HERE

Each memoir was initially read by Author A to get a sense of its structure and content. From this first reading it was evident that they followed a similar narrative structure. An introduction consisting of an autobiography of childhood and early life was typically followed by a story of the moment at which the decision to sign up was made. Next came a discussion of basic training and subsequent military experience, followed by a chapter on the announcement of a tour of duty and pre-deployment activity. Most of the memoirs then narrate stories from the field, usually including a number of contacts with the enemy, experiences of being in theatre and relationships with fellow soldiers and other actors. Where the memoir was written following discharge from the military, a short postscript reflecting on life afterwards is frequently offered. Where it was written by a still-serving soldier, it usually concludes with some views on the politics of the war and an assessment of what had (not) been achieved.

In light of this narrative consistency, a second reading was undertaken in which all memoirs were re-read collectively by section (eg, all of the pre-military life stories, all of the experiences of combat chapters etc.), with particular attention paid to identifying explicit mentions of emotional responses and emotional labour practices. This produced a large quantity of data in the form of quotes, summaries of stories and examples of what Author A considered to be emotional labour. Through further cross-referencing and analysis, the quality and quantity of data around the themes of pre-deployment emotion, emotions during battle and the discussion of the balance between positive and negative emotions (and no emotions at all) stood out as particularly worthy of further exploration. These were refined and developed into the three themes that constitute our findings.

The extracts we report here therefore serve as illustrations of prescriptive emotion management in the military. Of course, as with the reading of any qualitative data set, Author A's interpretive strategies need to be recognized and reflected upon. The interpretation provided is subjective, and others might read the nine memoirs very differently. However, in order to address this limitation, we quote frequently, sometimes at length, to support the claims we make. As Duncanson (2011) rightly observes, all of the texts considered are also freely available to the public, unlike many data sets. Consequently our readers are able to decide themselves about their value as insights into combat operations.

Findings

Anticipating war

As suggested, a consistent tactic across the memoirs is an extended passage, often a whole chapter, describing the author's emotions on hearing they were to depart on operational duties. All nine authors present the opportunity to go to war as the pinnacle of a soldier's career and an opportunity to legitimize their professional identity and military masculinity. Indeed the memoirs suggest that going to war is a pre-ordained right that soldiers earn through weeks, months and years of training.

Patrick Hennessey (2009, p. 6), for example, writes 'This was our moment, our X-factor winning, one perfect fucking moment; we finally had a war ... it felt as though our whole military lives had been building up to the challenge that Afghanistan presented'. Similarly, Matt Croucher (2009, p. 15) describes deployment to Afghanistan as an adventure he

anticipates with great relish: 'I am about to get the ride of my life: real war, real bullets, real blood, real guts and real gore. This is why I had signed on the dotted line'. Others employ similes in this respect. James Newton (2007, p. 21) likens the professional soldier who has not seen 'action' to the Premiership footballer who trains for years but never plays in a competitive match. For Chris Hunter (2007, p. 111), a lack of excitement about going to war is as 'irrational' as a 'surgeon never wanting to set foot in an operating theatre'. The opportunity to fight is also constructed as providing a boost to the memoirists' self-esteem, with Steve McLaughlin (2006) suggesting embarking on an operational tour finally gave him a sense of self-worth. He writes: 'I did have a yearning to be involved in something meaningful on a global scale'. Indeed knowing he was going to the front line meant that 'for the first time in my life, I began to feel good about myself' (p. 13). As the memoirists explain, then, war is what they have trained for: it is the labour they crave, and they look forward to it with considerable excitement.

Still, as Douglas Beattie (2008, p. 100) suggests and as we have established already, 'War is about dirty disgusting realities that are rightly an affront to most people. It is about blood and guts and pain and distress. Nothing more'. So what happens once the soldier enters the conflict zone? To this we now turn.

Combat operations

When our memoirists experience the 'blood and guts and pain and distress' of war, the emotions they report feeling are rather more complex. Accounts of combat operations frequently begin with the author arriving in theatre and descriptions of an immediate, visceral reaction to the climate and geography of Iraq or Afghanistan: the sand, the heat, the space, the sense of emptiness. A number of chapters are then dedicated to recounting, often in detail,

specific contacts with the enemy as well as other duties and operational experiences.

So for Patrick Hennessey (2009, p. 146): 'Getting out on first Op took things to another level. I have never been so scared and excited at the same time ... It's the ultimate affirmation of being alive'. He also suggests war is effectively a narcotic: 'Nowhere else sells bliss like this, surely? Not in freefall jumps or crisp blue waves, not on dance floors in pills or white lines ... It's the ultimate affirmation of being alive' (p. 211). Dan Mills (2007, p. 172) employs the same simile: 'The excitement and the adrenalin rush was like a drug; we were all slowly becoming addicted to it'; and Chris Hunter (2007, p. 40) uses the cognate term 'rush' in this context: 'I've never experienced a rush like it. The hairs on the back of my neck are standing on end. This is it. We're in one of the most hostile areas in Basra and things are about to go noisy. It feels good. I feel alive'. Patrick Bury's (2010, p. 178) account of arriving in Afghanistan also uses the drug simile: 'Sand. Heat. Thirst. Adrenalin still pumping. Eyes wide, taking in every minute detail. Alive. Every muscle, every sinew, every nerve, every sense, every blood cell, every corpuscle, every brain cell working in overdrive like a drug'. Later Bury waxes lyrical on a specific episode of an Allied jet flying overhead:

'Once, as we patrolled in silent single file over a long dyke, evenly spaced and watching, the still water barely rippling beneath our feet, the bright blue morning sky wide open above us, a jet screamed over our heads so low, so fast and so unheard we all ducked. And then we watched as he pulled up steeply in the white-edged blueness, pulling looping barrel roll after barrel roll, leaving twisting white wisps in his wake. His personal salute to us. Power. And you laughed and you turned to the man next to you and you both grinned. Because sometimes, war was too cool' (p. 194).

There are also descriptions of killing enemy combatants. In some, regret and self-reflection on the taking of another's life are narrated:

'The job was something I'd spent years training for. But being the victim of a violent ambush and having to kill a man in the process was an intense experience for me. It changes a man's life forever; how could it not? It was the first time I'd seen the head of another human being in my rifle sight, and squeezed the trigger' (Hunter, 2007, p. 497).

Elsewhere, intense pleasure and even the affirmation of one's own existence in the kill are indexed:

'I felt the overwhelming need to shout. Only one thing came into my mind. 'Yes!' I screamed. 'Have some of that, you fucker!' ... You knew when one of the lads had hit someone because they would let out a whoop in delight. It was too hard not to. Adrenalin, stress and fear were all working overtime at once' (Mills, 2007, p. 72).

'There is nothing sweeter, purer, more self-affirming than knowing you have killed someone who was trying to kill you' (Bury, 2010, p.78).

In these extracts, the emotions the memoirists report experiencing when killing an enemy combatant include regret, fear, delight and excitement. In all though killing is positioned as part of the job. Elsewhere we see a similar motif, although the lack of emotion described here is the antithesis of the regret Chris Hunter narrates above:

‘The honest truth is I didn’t give a shit about him. He was the enemy, and all I gave a shit about was that he was dead. He’s wasted. Move on’” (Mills, 2007, p. 73).

‘He was the first man I had ever killed, lying spread-eagled on the floor. ... I had no emotion really. Remarkably, I had no regret either, none whatsoever. To me this guy got what was coming to him. He was happy to kill me or any of the lads in my unit. To him we were the invaders. In the blink of an eye, it could have been me lying there dead in the dust, not him. This is the grim truth of war’ (Croucher, 2009, p. 61).

Our third theme speaks to the negative emotions which attach to the memoirists feeling they needed to soldier to the highest level and to keep those fighting alongside them as safe as possible.

Soldiering on

‘Like most soldiers going into combat, my overriding concern was the fear of failure. Threat to life and limb had its place, but a man’s biggest fear about going into battle is concern as to how he is going to behave in front of the group when the lead starts flying. No one wants to let their mates down or be found wanting when it counts’ (Tootal, 2009, p. 143).

It is not just positive emotions like exhilaration, excitement and delight, more negative counterparts such as fear for one’s safety and regret or even the absence of emotion which are said to characterize the experience of combat operations. Fear of under-performing and of letting others down are also frequently indexed. For instance, as Matt Croucher (2009, p. 9)

suggests, ‘What keeps us sharp is the fear of letting the other lads down. Nobody wants to do that’. Few of the memoirs reflect in detail on the author’s own mortality other than the brief references we have seen above. Passages like the one written by Chris Hunter below are more typical:

‘I say a quick prayer to myself. The one every bomb tech says before he goes forward. *If fate is against me and I’m killed, so be it, but make it quick and painless. If I’m wounded, don’t let me be crippled. But above all, don’t let me fuck up*’ (Hunter, 2007, p. 4, original emphasis).

The military’s socialization process in which, from the very first day of basic training, working as part of a team and not letting others down is instilled into new recruits, is also frequently referenced. Patrick Bury (2010, pp. 258-259) writes:

‘It dawns on me that I know these men intimately. I know if they have financial problems, if their marriage is in difficulty. I know their pasts and their hopes. I have shared shell scrapes and bus journeys with them from Kenya to Cape Wrath. I have sweated and bled with them, cursed and laughed. People have tried to take our lives and together we have taken life. I feel traces of it now, but later I will realise there is a bond, an unspoken, intangible magnetic bind that holds us together and apart from civilians. Of shared experiences, shared tests, of danger and death, which no one else can understand or even wants to. A closeness that is rarely equalled outside these circles. A mutual understanding, an affirmation of manhood’.

The building of friendship and camaraderie manifests itself positively here but also in the fear

described by Tootal and Hunter. In terms of military jobs as service work, moreover, the memoirists repeatedly affirm they are actually fighting for one another. For example:

‘They were not motivated to keep going because of abstract sentiments of patriotism. Belief in the cause of what we were doing played a part, but at the worst moments people sometimes began to doubt that. The real motivations were the ethos of the regiment, being paratroopers and loyalty to a small cohesive group that engenders a keen sense of not wanting to let their mates down’ (Tootal, 2009, p. 240).

‘The lad next to you in combat is all the family you can handle, and it is your job to keep him safe, then he will return the compliment’ (Croucher, 2009, p. 208).

This emphasis is also visible in remarks about heroism:

‘I had previously entertained foolish fantasies of Victoria Cross-winning heroics, but when I found myself entering a genuine danger zone, I sensibly downgraded my expectations. I would be happy if I could merely perform well and not let anybody down - fuck winning medals’ (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 144).

‘War is not about gongs and trinkets and glory. It’s not even about winning or the thrill of victory ... The lads who were there knew what I did and to a man recognised what happened for them. That’s all that matters’ (Croucher, 2009, p. 222).

Here the label ‘hero’ is used to describe those who *do not* conform to military norms, to prescriptive feeling rules. A final example, again from Matt Croucher, is exemplary:

“No heroics, lads. OK?” [said the Officer Commanding]. Heroics was the last thing on our minds. After all, being a hero is about the shortest-lived profession on earth, and none of us wanted to join the ranks of the Dead Heroes Society” (Croucher, 2009, p. 207).

Discussion

Our understanding of emotions is that they are profoundly conditioned by socialization, so emotional displays vary in appropriateness according to context (Besiner, cited in Reddy, 2001; Sieben and Wettergren, 2010). This leads to the now well-established argument – pioneered by Hochschild ([1983] 2003) - that occupations and organizations have their own feeling rules, or emotional regimes, into which new recruits are acculturated. Our data suggest the military is no exception.

First, as Goffman suggests of this total institution, its all-encompassing ‘disculturation’ of its recruits is designed to fulfil the ‘worklike task’ of ‘combat capacity’ ([1961] 1991, p. 16, p. 24, p. 49). The military trains its personnel to perform an enthusiasm for war: without this, it would not be able to function. This feeling rule seems to underpin the responses our memoirists report on receiving the news they were heading out on operational tour. We see, for example, references to feeling as if one’s whole service career had led up to this point and comparisons to surgeons keenly anticipating the operating theatre. In this emotional regime (Reddy, 2001), the proper responses are excitement, enthusiasm, entitlement and heightened self-esteem. Not only are these the opposite of those fostered in most civilian occupations, but negative responses (eg, fear of fighting or reluctance to fight) would represent a significant breach of military occupational feeling rules. Such emotions cannot be legitimately narrated in the

memoirs: as we have argued, these are both accounts of emotional labour and emotional labour in themselves in their continued adherence to the prescriptive emotion management demanded by the military. Our use of memoirs, we suggest, adds this extra conceptual dimension to previous empirical considerations of emotional labour which rely on analysis of primary data. Moreover, some of the memoirs were written after the author had left military service, which seems to us to testify to the far-reaching influence of its emotional socialization, something we return to below.

The same is true of in theatre accounts, like the descriptions of combat experience being akin to ingesting a drug. We also see references to combat as ‘the ultimate affirmation of being alive’ (Hennessey, 2009, p. 146), and as a whole body experience where ‘Every muscle, every sinew, every nerve, every sense, every blood cell, every corpuscle, every brain cell working in overdrive’ (Bury, 2010, p. 178). These tropes are especially interesting because they are attached to a situation in which there is a real possibility of these men dying. But, given the ultimate purpose of the military is to engage in armed combat with the expectation of death and killing, the reporting of such experiences, and especially of the first kill, is once more suggestive of its prescriptive feeling rules. So Chris Hunter recounts feeling regret at killing someone else whereas Dan Mills and Patrick Bury narrate a definite relish and a sense of self-affirmation. And both Mills and Matt Croucher report feeling nothing at all in the aftermath of their first kills because, as Croucher asserts, ‘This is the grim truth of war’ (2009, p. 61).

The emotions our memoirists recount – and which they perform on the pages of their books – indicate that positive and negative emotions, even the absence of emotion, come together in the military’s occupational feeling rules. This is in contrast to the emotional labour undertaken by most other service workers, where interactions with customers are governed by pecuniary

or prescriptive feeling rules mandating positive emotional displays. These displays are positive, pro-social and other-oriented, so hospital patients, social care clients, call centre customers, university students, airline and train passengers, audiences for Santa performers, customers in shops and foster children – *inter alia* - feel respected, cared for and attended to. Feeling rules of this kind also exist in the emergency services occupation of paramedicine, perhaps the closest in terms of its characteristics to the job of soldier (Ahl and Nyström, 2012; Boyle, 2005; Campbell and Rasmussen, 2012; Filstad, 2011; Williams, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). The only exception we have located is the debt collectors Hochschild ([1983] 2003) talked to, who were expected to muster anger or distrust in order to compel customers to pay up. As we saw earlier, one actually likened his boss to an army sergeant in expecting his team to “Create alarm” for this purpose (p. 146). The exhilaration and numbness in our military memoirs seem especially redolent of the military’s emotional regime. Taken together, they again underscore the idea of emotions as more than inner psychological states: rather, they are managed social performances, both at the time of their initial occurrence and in their retelling (Ehrlich Martin, 1999; Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990).

There are other specificities of emotional labour in the military. As we have suggested, soldiers do not serve their customers/ clients/ end users in the same way as those in the vast majority of service jobs, even in the cognate occupations of the emergency services. Their customers are not specific nor even necessarily identifiable groups of people – instead military service is undertaken to serve King or Queen, a country, a government and/ or a population. Soldiers may never meet their customers, during operational tours especially. There is no requirement that they perform in specific ways in order to manufacture emotions and therefore customer satisfaction. Instead the feeling rules at work appear to be for the purposes of 1. ensuring soldiers are ready and able to fight and to kill, as argued above; and 2. preventing impulsive

behaviour which would increase the considerable risks inherent in combat. Again, in all other accounts of emotional labour we have located, end users of the service provided are a specific and identifiable group of people. In the main workers interact with these end users either face to face (eg, in health and social care) or voice to voice (eg, in call centres). However, even in ‘backstage’ occupations like hotel housekeeping and room service, staff are said to ‘feel the constraints their organization is facing in meeting the demands of customers or the needs and requirements of citizens, as in the public sector’ (Bélanger and Edwards, 2013, p. 441).

The eschewing of impulsive behaviour in our data is also at odds with longstanding cultural representations of the soldier-hero. Our authors deride their own ‘foolish fantasies of Victoria-Cross winning heroics’ (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 144) and joke about not wanting to join the ‘Dead Heroes Society’ (Croucher, 2009, p. 207). As such, we suggest the military’s emotional regime operates to reverse widespread notions of heroism and sacrifice. Also significant here is how military training is described as fostering strong communities of coping. Unlike the support networks which develop organically so that service workers in other jobs band together to resist management diktat or to look after each other to weather the emotional demands each faces (eg, Hancock, 2013; Korczynski and Evans, 2013; Mulholland, 2004), these military communities emerge as the outcome of deliberate and explicit occupational socialization. In terms of the close-knit culture of the military, as described by Sion and Ben-Ari (2009) among others, our memoirists describe a regimental ‘ethos’ and ‘loyalty’ (Tootal, 2009, p. 240), a ‘closeness that is rarely equalled outside these circles’ (Bury, 2010, p. 259) and their colleagues being ‘all the family you can handle’ (Croucher, 2009, p. 208).

Equally, they represent themselves as having little truck with the notion of fighting for ‘Queen and country or any of that shit’ (Woodward, 2008, p. 328). Ultimately, in the field of battle,

the memoirists report only ever fighting for the unit and the man next to them. As Matt Croucher (2009, p. 222) writes, ‘The lads who were there knew what I did and to a man recognised what happened for them’. As such, the people to whom good service matters in the memoirs – those for whom emotional labour is undertaken - are colleagues, not customers of any sort. But what is also interesting is that, just as the memoirists refuse any notion of heroism or service to a wider ideology, so we can read them as performing humility as one element of the military’s emotional regime. And, as one of our reviewers pointed out, this ‘ultimately can be said to make them even greater heroes in a different, low-key, not hogging-the-limelight way’.

Our analysis of emotional labour in a male-dominated, masculine occupation is also significant, given the points Hochschild makes about horizontal gender segregation in occupations requiring emotional labour and the predominance of women in the jobs studied by scholars of the phenomenon. Moreover, our analysis supports Hearn’s (1993) argument that men’s emotions have no unmediated existence but rather persist in discourse and are enacted through social structures and contexts. Thus, whilst fighting and killing are very strongly coded as masculine, the display of masculine-coded emotions and the pursuit of masculinity *per se* are not at all the sole preserve of men. Recent developments, which represent ‘a historic change for the military given that it was only in 1994 that men and women were allowed to serve together within the same units and organisations’ (Mackowski, 2016), mean women soldiers in Britain will in due course be able to serve in combat roles. Whether this will have any effect on the military’s emotional regime remains to be seen – our supposition is that it will not, for the reasons already outlined.

The absence of much if any discussion of resistance to the military’s prescriptive feeling rules

in the memoirs is also notable, in contrast to emphasis on and detailed accounts of this phenomenon in other service occupations - call centre work especially (eg, Curley and Royle, 2013; Lloyd and Payne, 2009; Mulholland, 2004; Taylor and Tyler, 2000). This, we contend, says something about the military as one of Goffman's ([1961] 1991) total institutions and the consequent power of these rules. What is especially interesting here, though, is that Goffman also suggests one common characteristic of these institutions is 'the fraternalization process, through which socially distant persons find themselves developing mutual support and common countermeasures in opposition to a system that has forced them into intimacy and into a single, equalitarian community of fate' (p. 57). This, he argues, may well result in forms of group defiance (p. 59). Fraternalization, then, seems to have elements of the resistance identified amongst call centre workers, as produced by Korczynski and Evans' (2013) communities of coping. And yet, in the memoirs, what we identify instead is Goffman's 'conversion', whereby these soldiers have seemingly – and collectively - adapted to the strictures of their total institution by evincing flawless 'monochromatic ... institutional enthusiasm' ([1961] 1991, p. 63). This also reminds us that the memoirs are 1. instances of post-hoc or after the fact emotional labour, even following re-entry into civilian life; and 2. forms of identity writing, which allows a much more cohesive presentation of self than other identity work.

Conclusion

This paper has identified what we see as a particular emotional regime present in the military that regulates the emotional labour of soldiers at war. We analysed published memoirs of British military personnel undertaking combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2003 and 2010 as sources through which this regime is detectable. These memoirs of the

pleasures and horrors of war are suggestive of complex and dynamic emotion management performances that appear fundamental to the effective conduct of military labour. By exploring the emotional labour they document, we gain insights into both the experience of war and military life and to what it is soldiers think we would like to know, or think we should know, about that experience.

We draw several inter-related conclusions from our analysis about the distinctive nature of emotional labour in military combat. First, the military appears to foster a particular set of feeling rules, to encourage prescriptive emotion management so soldiers are prepared for the realities of war and the strong possibility that they may have to injure or kill enemy combatants, or sustain injuries or die themselves. Equally soldiering as service work does not appear to be undertaken to mobilize positive emotions in any identifiable group of customers. Instead the memoirs suggest service here is for one's fellow soldiers: the civilian construction of heroism is to be disdained because it would put these colleagues at risk. Interestingly however, this refusal of widespread notions of bravery and sacrifice can also be read to construct a different version of heroism, turning on humility and reluctance to take centre stage.

Soldiers are also socialized to form communities of coping to deal with the extreme emotional demands of war, whereas in other service work these communities form informally and organically. The array of emotions narrated here, furthermore, runs from light to dark, encompassing the absence of emotion, which combination is barely detectable in other studies of emotional labour. And soldiering is also – unlike most other service occupations – male-dominated, with highly masculine values. Further, we detected no resistance in these texts to the emotional regime which the military inculcates, something which seems to us to speak to

the power exerted by this total institution over its members via its disculturation mechanisms. Here our memoirists appear to have been thoroughly converted to this set of feeling rules.

To conclude, our nine memoirs consist of valuable data about military lives. These exemplars of identity writing – undertaken retrospectively, for a notional future readership and thus allowing more polishing and cohesiveness in accounts of oneself - not only describe emotional labour during combat operations but also represent emotional labour in and of themselves in their enduring conformity to the feeling rules of the military. They provide different insights into combat especially from those we might expect to glean from other qualitative methods. This rich vein of secondary data, we suggest, provides a significant avenue for organization studies research into the emotional regime of the military going forward.

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