



Home, But Still at War: Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in *Thank You for Your Service*

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Abstract

Jason Hall directs *Thank You for Your Service* (2017) in a manner that shows the powerful emotional results war creates for soldiers transitioning back to civilian life. This research paper analyses Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), moral injury, emotional isolation, substance abuse, war soldier reintegration difficulties into civilian life and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) affecting immediate family members of war veterans. War veterans shown in the film suffer from enduring psychological wounds that continue to fester throughout the period between returning home and finding proper healing. The film demonstrates PTSD as the crucial problem persistent in its characters by showing their condition through flashbacks along with hypervigilance and emotional withdrawal. Moral injury is one of the major symptoms of PTSD specifically focusing on veterans who face internal turmoil between their war actions and personal moral values. The paper analyzes the emotional and social seclusion that causes veteran's mental wellbeing to deteriorate and their reliance on substance abuse as self-medication to ease their pain. Furthermore, the role of family and other support systems essential for healing takes a significant strain on their personal and social relationships. Through the analysis of these on-screen characters, the paper draws attention to real-life veterans and their challenges and reintegration struggles not only at personal levels but also in better support systems. The film acts as a strong reminder about both hidden wartime injuries and how communities need to enhance their support for veterans during their recovery process.

Key Words: War, Psychological Wounds, Moral Injury, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Secondary Traumatic Stress.

Introduction

Thank You for Your Service (2017) is a biographical war film directed by debutant director Jason Hall. The movie is an adaptation of the book titled by the same name by a MacArthur Fellow and Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter with the Washington Post, David Finkel. The movie depicts the impact of war on soldiers after returning home as war veterans. The focus is on a group of American soldiers who suffer psychological and emotional trauma post war as they try to get back to their civilian lives. The movie presents an honest depiction of the mental trauma which persists despite the disappearance of physical wounds. Psychological injuries usually cannot be seen but the deep persistent effects on affected individuals are substantial. This research paper delves into the various signs of PTSD and moral injury to emotional isolation and substance abuse. The analysis will explore PTSD symptoms through the characters as well as understand war's psychological consequences revealed in these portrayals in the film.

PTSD stands as the main traumatic condition presented in Thank You for Your Service. PTSD represents a psychiatric condition according to the American Psychiatric Association (2013) which emerges after people experience or see traumatic occurrences while displaying symptoms including flashbacks along with nightmares and both heightened awareness and emotional detachment. These symptoms are clearly depicted in the character of Adam Schumann (played by Miles Teller), one of the main characters featured in the film. He rode a shotgun in a Humvee and looked for bombs as Sergeant Adam Schuman. The story begins with the pivotal aspect where Adam misses to identify the bomb during patrolling, leading him and his men into an ambush. The fellow soldier cum friend is shot right into the head. While Adam tries to take him out of the scene, he chokes due to blood of the fellow soldier and slips off the staircase and drops the fellow soldier. He was always guilty because it

was his orders to get on that building. The guilt transforms into trauma. He struggles with flashbacks of him losing his friend in combat and is haunted by the sounds and sights of war even when he is home. These flashbacks, sounds and sights present in the memory serve as clear representations of post-traumatic stress disorder intrusions.

Related difficulties experienced by individuals with PTSD appear through the three main characters including Sergeant Schumann and his emotional distance to his wife Saskia (played by Haley Bennett) and their child. The return of Specialist Aieti results in his wife feeling estranged from him. Upon his return Private Waller discovers that his wife left him in an empty house. Placing an urgent call to his wife before she fails to reply does not find his spouse. PTSD creates distress that extends beyond affected individuals because it creates massive pressure on the relationships and families according to American Psychiatric Association (2013).

Through its storyline the film follows the experience of hypervigilance that affects Schumann who struggles with this common PTSD diagnosis. The sounds he hears in his civilian life transfer to him as security threats because he maintains his military duty to stay alert from Iraqi deployment periods. His continuous state of hyperarousal suppresses both relaxation and feelings of safety. Enduring a high state of preparedness prevents him from experiencing peace because he remains hyperalert in any situation including during family gatherings. The depicted clinical profiles of hypervigilance among veterans returning home match research findings on PTSD published in Zinzow et al. (2007).

Schumann considers himself guilty of certain actions and decisions made during his service. In one the instances, it is showed that his senior takes his place in the van and gets injured due to the bomb attack on their vehicle. The injuries proved fatal, and he lost his senior.

portrays moral injury through his guilt. Schumann struggles with the fact that he survived when others did not, and he questions his own morality regarding some of the difficult decisions made in battle. Psychological distress known as moral injury affects military personnel who violate their war-related moral or ethical standards causing them to feel deeply ashamed and guilty (Litz et al., 2009). Moral conflict stands as a leading factor in the development of his emotional distress. This moral conflict is presented as one of the core sources of his emotional turmoil.

Throughout the story Solo (played by Beulah Koale) acts as a representation of moral injury consequences. The feeling of guilt following the ambush confrontation drives Solo to engage in self-harming conduct along with emotional detachment. Through its main character, Solo, the movie demonstrates that unresolved moral conflicts cause whole-scale suffering for veterans both psychologically and socially (Bryant-Davis, 2005).

Moral injury depiction in the film explores current veteran mental health understandings where trauma results from both psychological and ethical causes in war. Veterans commonly experience extreme emotional pain because they think they violated their individual moral principles. The resulting trauma causes veterans to face extremely challenging readjustments because they no longer recognize their moral values and struggle with their sense of self.

Military veterans experience broad-spread emotional detachment and social detachment which runs throughout *Thank You for Your Service*. War veterans show signs of social detachment when they return from combat duty. Veterans experience social alienation mainly because they lack the ability to describe emotional and physical wars injuries to their family members and friends. These military personnel show in the movie how their separation from civilian society including

Schumann includes emotional detachment from their family and childhood friends. Throughout the story Schumann attempts numerous times to convey his deep psychological distress to his wife but he fails. After military deployment the establishment of emotional detachment appears repeatedly between soldiers and their family members. The extent of his suffering remains incomprehensible to his sympathetic spouse since she does not share his whole experience which intensifies his feeling of separation. Alongside Solo he fails to communicate his trauma to his wife and later when he is institutionalized at the Mental Health Centre.

Patients with PTSD typically experience profound emotional detachment that stops them from creating support groups while deepening their war-related psychological trauma. Scientific research about veteran readiness into civilian life shows emotional detachment stands as the biggest barrier for veterans adjusting after combat. Soldiers who experience combat typically encounter feelings of being isolated from families and communities and also from society at large according to Erbes et al. (2010). The gap between soldiers and society causes mental health problems while boosting substance abuse tendencies and suicidal thinking.

Veterans typically resort to substance abuse when they fail to process their trauma. Actor Joe Cole portrays the character of Will who uses drugs and alcoholic substances to manage his emotional state in *Thank You for Your Service*. The film shows that Will starts using substances because he cannot work through the trauma that he endured during his time in Iraq. The film demonstrates how substance use worsens psychological symptoms of PTSD that subsequently pushes veterans to use drugs more frequently.

Multiple studies have established that veterans use alcohol and drugs as a way to handle their mental health issues. Research by Fortney et al. (2004) found that veterans show

greater substance abuse behavior than civilians with specific emphasis on PTSD patients. The film displays substance abuse as providing fast relief but creating a long-lasting challenge within veterans who handle trauma because it leads to more detachment from others and romantic failures along with professional help avoidance.

Throughout the film Will's character emphasizes the main theme of veterans receiving inadequate mental healthcare, as well as the challenges that many face when trying to break free from the cycle of substance abuse and trauma.

Family and support system plays a crucial role of family and support systems in the healing process for veterans and Thank You for Your Service emphasizes the importance of understanding and assistance from loved ones. Schumann's wife, Saskia, stands by her husband, despite not fully understanding the depth of his internal struggle. The emotional toll of living with a loved one who suffers from PTSD is shown through Saskia's character, who also experiences feelings of helplessness and emotional exhaustion and thus falls prey to STS.

The film indicates that family backing stands as essential yet fails to be the only necessary factor. The experience demands great emotional and physical conflict. Returning soldiers find insufficient assistance from their families because families usually lack proper support training and resources which results in relationship failures. According to Solomon et al. (2008) research has revealed that PTSD causes veterans' family members to develop their own traumatic symptoms while dealing with anxiety alongside depression and enduring marital relationship breakdowns. The movie accurately depicts Saskia's experiences to show how PTSD creates double difficulties which affect both veterans and their family members during the post-military life.

Conclusion

Through the main characters the film Thank You for Your Service demonstrates the psychological aftermath from war that includes PTSD together with moral injury alongside substance abuse, emotional detachment and STS. This demonstrates why social, and family support plays an essential role in helping veterans deal with their problems. The film presents a complex view of trauma which prompts society to explore further the price war extracts from its fighters through their extended experiences with mental health issues. The movie's depiction of veteran struggles extends our awareness about community support towards veterans while promoting public knowledge of war-related psychological transformations.

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