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The Next Recruits: 16–18-year-olds and the United States' War on Terror

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The Next Recruits:
16–18-Year-Olds and the United States' War on Terror

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PIM 75

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of the Arts in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation at SIT Graduate Institute, in Brattleboro, Vermont.

May 2018

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“If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants.”
Isaac Newton

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Abstract

For many who experienced it directly or indirectly, 9/11 marked a dramatic shift as the United States processed the attacks and went from a country at peace to a country at war. Though the attacks themselves were geographically targeted, 9/11 was a nationally traumatic event and resulted in the formation of a collective memory and national narrative across the country. With the War on Terror, the military became synonymous with patriotism, as leaders and the media invoked the trauma of Pearl Harbor and the glories of World War II. Military records from the time describe patriotism as the motivation behind the majority of enlistments following 9/11, contrasting the traditional motivation of money and economic opportunity. As the War on Terror nears the end of its second decade, with a recently announced Afghanistan troop surge, there is no end in sight, though the adversary spotlight has shifted from the Taliban and Al Qaeda to the Islamic State (IS).

Drawing from the theories of collective memory, transgenerational trauma transmission, and militarism, this research explores how 16–18-year-olds talk about 9/11 and the War on Terror and how they understand their patriotic obligations to the War on Terror. Understanding this will be critical to understanding how the War on Terror proceeds for the next generation, including peacebuilding efforts and how the United States recruits for and staffs the military. Three sets of data, two semi-structured interviews and one questionnaire survey, demonstrate that in 2018, 9/11 is still a significant presence in teenagers' lives. Though no signs of trauma were noted in participants, the significance of the attacks and their implications were evident in responses, reflecting the curation of a collective memory. Additionally, the military and the flag were central to participants' understanding of patriotism and patriotic obligations in addition to practices such as voting.

Introduction

Personal Connection and Context

On September 11, 2001, I was 11 years old and lived 300 miles from New York City. I did not know anybody who died that day. I am not closely related to anybody who served in the military. Nonetheless, like many people who were old enough to remember that day, I have a unique story of how I learned about the attacks and what changed in my life as a result. Most significantly I recall one of my middle school teachers telling students during the last period of the day, “Remember what you were doing today, because history has been changed.” That particular statement revolved around the American experience of 9/11 but it would be impossible to tease apart my professional, academic, and personal experiences from the ripple effects of those attacks and the ways in which my world changed.

My own positionality of being among those who remembers “the day the world stopped turning” (Jackson, 2001) is undeniably part of the motivation for this exploratory inductive research¹ asking, “How do 16–18-year-olds talk about 9/11 and the War on Terror and how do they understand their patriotic obligations to the War on Terror?” I distinctly remember the sinking feeling I had after hearing that the United States had gone to war, first Afghanistan in 2001, followed by Iraq in 2003. At 11 years old I lacked full comprehension of what it meant to be at war, but I knew it was significant. I remember media coverage of protests against and for military engagement in Iraq. I recall when France’s opposition to the United States’ involvement in Iraq prompted many people to replace “french fries” with “freedom fries.” My work with Iraqi teenagers as part of my practicum, through World Learning’s Iraqi Young Leaders Exchange

¹ “The purposes for using an inductive approach are to (a) condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format; (b) establish clear links between the evaluation or research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data; and (c) develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data. The general inductive approach provides an easily used and systematic set of procedures for analyzing qualitative data that can produce reliable and valid findings.” (Thomas, 2006)

Program exists because of the United States' interests in Iraq. 9/11 and the War on Terror have been formative forces in my own life and experiences.

The next generation of military recruits has come of age in a culture shaped, directly and indirectly, by 9/11 and the War on Terror. Now ISIS is spoken of more frequently than Al Qaeda or the Taliban and Islamic terrorist attacks are not portrayed as abnormal by the media (Powell, 2011) with coverage of attacks including those in Sydney, Madrid, Manchester, Boston, San Bernardino, and Paris. Today's teenagers are growing up in a society marked by annual moments of silence on September 11, media coverage retelling the stories of horror and survival on 9/11, and homecomings of soldiers. They are growing up with exposure to a government that has attempted to limit entry to the United States based on religion. They are exposed to heated discussions about the threat of terrorism and national debates about how to properly show respect for members of the military. The military's youngest recruits lack a direct memory of 9/11 due to their age, but they have grown up in this context and are the next generation of soldiers in the War on Terror.

In his address to the nation that night responding to the attacks, President George W. Bush described the American "way of life, our very freedom" as being under attack and declared all Americans "united in our resolve for justice and peace" (White House, 2009, p. 58). Although the shock and impact of 9/11 was broad reaching, 9/11 and the resulting War on Terror were experienced in a variety of ways, not all of which were unifying. Three days later, President Bush asserted the American responsibility to "answer the attacks and rid the world of evil" (White House, 2009, p. 59), bracing the country for the upcoming War on Terror (Masters and Alexander, 2008). In November 2001, just months after the attacks, the War on Terror began with American military engagement in Afghanistan to rid the world of the evil of the Taliban.

Next, this war spread to Iraq in March 2003. Almost seventeen years later, the United States is still actively fighting this war and it shows no signs of ending, with President Trump's recent announcement of a troop surge in Afghanistan (Davis & Landler, 2017).

This research focuses on 16–18-year-olds because they are the first of the “post-9/11” generation who have recently become or will soon be eligible to enlist in the military based on their age. Even if they were alive at the time, today's teenagers were not old enough on 9/11 to have formed their own direct memories of the attacks or remember the day the United States shifted from a nation at peace to a nation at war. First, this research seeks to determine if 16–18-year-olds are talking about 9/11 and the War on Terror and if so, what they are saying. It acknowledges that historically, 9/11 and the War on Terror cannot be understood separate from each other. Next it will examine the extent to which 16–18-year-olds see themselves as having an active stake in the War on Terror as it nears completion of its second decade. It will explore whether the sense of patriotism that swept the United States in the form of enlistments after 9/11 is still strong and how actively these teenagers expect to engage in the War on Terror.

Research Question

As the autumn of 2018 approaches, the youngest recruits to the military will potentially deploy to a war that is older than they are. For this next generation of military recruits, a period of time “before 9/11” simply does not exist. This research seeks to begin exploring how the post-9/11 generation, having grown up in the aftermath of 9/11 and in a country that has been at war for the duration of their lives, albeit on foreign soil, talks about 9/11 and understands their patriotic obligations to the War on Terror. It seeks to understand if they have inherited the trauma and emotions their elders experienced, the extent to which they have inherited a transgenerational memory of 9/11 and the experiences of members of the military who deploy,

and to better understand what role they want and expect to play in a war that is being passed onto their generation. Understanding this will be critical to understanding how the War on Terror proceeds for the next generation, including peacebuilding efforts and how the United States recruits for and staffs the military.

This research will draw partially from theories of transgenerational trauma transmission (Hirsch, 2008; Kaitz et al., 2009; Kellermann, 2013), examining how national traumatic events impact subsequent generations. It will examine the role of collective memories, post memory, and national myths as they relate to national traumatic events, acknowledging that 9/11 is distinct from many other national traumatic events. It will determine if 16–18-year-olds talk about 9/11 in a way that reflects the construction of a collective memory or post memory regarding 9/11 because collective memories are drawn upon for contemporary sources of meaning and are critical to the development of national identity and national myths (Neal, 2005).

This research will also draw on theories of militarism and nationalism (Clark, 2015; Morden, 2016; Sciorba, 2009) and how youth living in the United States are exposed to nationalism and the military. The literature review will examine what significance is attached to patriotism and the military in the United States, and how that meaning is instilled in youth and absorbed, even at a young age. Hedges (2002) argues war “can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living” (p. 3). This research will examine what meanings are assigned to the military and conflict in American culture and the role of the military in American culture after 9/11, especially for youth. It will determine what meanings, if any, have been assigned to 9/11 by a generation who did not experience it directly but are surrounded by the effects of it and will conclude what role 16–18-year-olds see themselves playing as it nears the completion of its second decade.

Literature Review

The national traumatic event of 9/11 marked a turning point in contemporary American history and its ripple effects are still felt today. Efforts to prevent future terrorist attacks triggered significant domestic and foreign policy shifts, including the “War on Terror.” This literature review will start by examining what constitutes a traumatic event and how traumatic events are transmitted to subsequent generations. Next it will examine the meaning that was assigned to 9/11 and the War on Terror by framing 9/11 as a traumatic event and examining how that meaning has manifested in the United States since 9/11. Finally, it will examine how youth are exposed to the United States’ military and the post-9/11 relationship between patriotism and the military in the United States.

A thorough review of existing literature suggests that 9/11, though a turning point in American history, does not serve as a defining moment for today’s teenagers who were very young or not yet born on September 11, 2001 (Neal, 2005). However, it does suggest teens are coming of age in a society where a collective memory and national myth surrounding 9/11 have been formed and that teenagers living in the United States have grown up internalizing at least some of the values perpetuated by that memory (Clark, 2015; Maira, 2016; Tindongan, 2011). It also suggests that, since 9/11, the military has become institutionalized in the United States’ educational system, from military recruiting in high schools through No Child Left Behind (Abajian, 2015) to Department of Defense funding of university research (Giroux, 2008). Today’s teenagers have grown up with exposure to these systems.

9/11 stands apart from most other instances of national trauma, such as the Rwandan genocide, the Nazi Holocaust, South African apartheid, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Transgenerational trauma studied in other conflicts cannot be ubiquitously applied to 9/11,

though many parallels have been drawn between 9/11 and the attack on Pearl Harbor, which drew the United States into World War II, because both stand out as the two deadliest attacks on American soil by foreign adversaries. This literature review will demonstrate that while 9/11, the War on Terror, and the significance of the military are well documented, most research has focused on people who experienced trauma from 9/11 directly due their physical or emotional proximity to New York City, Washington, D.C., or the Pennsylvania crash site. Existing literature has also failed to adequately examine 9/11 as a nationally traumatic event with transgenerational impact.

Traumatic Events and Subsequent Generations

Terrorist attacks are not an uncommon method of contemporary violence and warfare, but 9/11 stands apart because of its traumatic impact and the enduring repercussions. Traumatic events interrupt normal activity, involve an element of shock, and result in a radical change occurring within a short period of time (Neal, 2005). According to DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), trauma is “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury...in one (or more) of the following ways: directly experiencing the traumatic event(s); witnessing, in person, the traumatic event(s) as it occurred to others; learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend...or experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s)” (p. 271). From an American perspective, although there have been multiple notable terrorist attacks throughout the United States and Europe since 9/11, no subsequent attack has had the same level of traumatic impact. Terrorist attacks like those at the Boston Marathon and in San Bernardino received national media coverage, but the coverage of 9/11 and annual remembrances have been far more enduring. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 also stand out because, as a national trauma, it has been shared

collectively and had, at least initially, a cohesive effect including responses that involve fear and vulnerability (Neal, 2005).

9/11 resulted in changes for both civilians and members of the military, ranging from additional security on commercial flights to the deployment of military and national guard troops to the Middle East, especially Afghanistan and Iraq. Neal (2005) clarifies that national traumatic events are most likely to have significant meaning when they occur during an individual's formative and developmental years, implying that teenagers who are between 16 and 18-years-old in 2018 are not likely to be dramatically impacted by the trauma of 9/11 (p. 200). From Neal's perspective, despite annual memorials and depictions of 9/11, such as the often-aired video of planes crashing into the twin towers, today's teenagers are more likely to view 9/11 as a historical event and not as a traumatizing event.

Even so, significant traumatic events can be and oftentimes are passed on to subsequent generations through a variety of means, depending on the event itself and individuals' level of attachment to it. Transgenerational trauma transmission, also called intergenerational transmission of trauma, is the impact of trauma experienced by one person such as a family member or younger relative, regardless of whether that person was directly exposed to a traumatic event (Kaitz et al., 2009). For example, Kaitz et al. (2009) identify increased cortisol levels during pregnancy resulting from mothers' traumatic experiences, as well as one or both parents' visible distress and confusion about terror events, as being critical elements in how children respond to traumatic terror events. Some theories regarding transmission of transgenerational trauma go beyond behavioral transmission and chemical transmission, suggesting that the descendants of those who have survived traumatic events, such as Holocaust

survivors and war veterans, genetically pass on their trauma including repressed memories to their children through altered chromosomes (Kellermann, 2013).

Another means by which traumatic events are passed on to subsequent generations is through national myths formed out of a collective memory and post memory of events. Collective memories are symbols of an event that are publicly maintained (Orlick, 1999). Post memory refers to “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch, 2008). This form of transmission has the most impact on this research as it determines if 16–18-year-olds talk about 9/11 and the War on Terror in such a way that reflects the existence of post memory around a national myth. These symbols can appear any time after an event and in the case of 9/11 included media coverage and traveling memorials. According to Hirsch (2008), individual memories passed on from parents to children of traumatic events, like the Holocaust, are also informed by familial images and objects that are publicly displayed, such as the “Tower of Faces” in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, constructing “every visitor as a familial subject” (p. 113). Building off the memory of those who remember the trauma of 9/11, the 9/11 Memorial Museum functions similarly as it “provides visitors with the opportunity to learn about the men, women, and children who died” (9/11 Memorial Museum, 2017).

Cvetkovich (2003) cautioned that the trauma associated with 9/11 would result in the need to build a collective (cultural) memory and emphasized the need to resist telling a story that glorifies heroes and stresses national unity as 9/11 enters the litany of national traumas (p. 61). Morden (2016) describes such narratives as “intrinsic to memory” as individuals recall “highly stylized” triumphs and hardships even if they took place before the individuals could remember.

Both Cvetkovich (2003) and Morden (2016) acknowledge the dangers of collective memory as it can feed into a dangerous sense of nationalism. According to Rieff (2016), it is critical to acknowledge that “sacralizing collective remembrance is likely to lead to even graver distortions of historical reality” and that societies should remember only when remembering does not “engender further horrors” (pp. 94, 101).

The impact of national traumatic events can be moderated by peace education because it allows subsequent generations to learn from the traumatic events by practicing forgiveness and reconciliation. Peace education can come in many forms including Peace Clubs, like those in Rwanda, or integrated schools implementing a peace education curriculum with the aim of enabling students to become “fulfilled and caring” adults, like those in Northern Ireland (Pickett, 2008, p. 351). Zembylas (2007) highlights the value of teaching empathy and humanization in peace education, but admits that to do so often challenges political narratives which seek to dehumanize the “other” and perpetuate narratives of victimhood. Meanwhile some, like Rieff (2016) argue that the best way to end the cycle of violence is by not making a deliberate effort to remember traumatic events like 9/11 as a society, claiming the piety attached to memorials of these events puts considerations of political consequences “out of bounds” and feeds a desire for vengeance that will transcend generations, like in the cases of Ireland, Bosnia, and Kosovo (p. 129).

9/11 is distinct from many other traumatic events that have been explored by scholars researching the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Traumatic events frequently studied for transgenerational trauma include the Holocaust and the conflict between Israel and Palestine. However, the violent elements of these conflicts have taken place over extended periods of time, making comparisons of trauma risky and ultimately inaccurate. Though the impacts of 9/11, as a

defining moment in the ongoing War on Terror, are still felt, the nationwide traumatic events of 9/11 took place in a much shorter timeframe. The most comparable national traumatic event to 9/11 is Pearl Harbor, which was often invoked by politicians and the media in the days following 9/11 and contributed to the significant meaning assigned to 9/11 in American culture.

Meanings Assigned to 9/11 in American Culture

Existing literature suggests Cvetkovich's warning was not completely unfounded. A collective memory and national story have formed out of 9/11, although the depths to which that story has been internalized by the post-9/11 generation has not been adequately explored. The significance of 9/11 and the War on Terror is evident in political rhetoric and popular culture, but most research focuses on the impact of 9/11 on people who lived in geographic proximity to the attacks or who were old enough to remember the attacks in some capacity. When "the world stopped turning" (Jackson, 2001) on September 11, 2001, many facets of daily life in the United States changed practically overnight. According to Neal (2005) traumas resulting from 9/11 included the shattering of assumptions about security and a violation of trustworthiness of everyday life, resulting in feelings of personal vulnerability (p. 181). TSA screenings and the word "terrorism" became part of a new normal throughout the country. The United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the broader War on Terror, which included surveillance of Muslim communities domestically. Videos of soldiers, who had been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, surprising family members with visits home started going viral. The honoring of veterans and members of the military became commonplace at sporting events.

In his address to the Joint Session of the 107th Congress on September 20, 2001, President Bush braced the United States for the upcoming war, describing the United States as "a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom" asserting, "Our grief has turned to

anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done” (White House, 2009, p. 65). In that speech, President Bush also braced the country for war by drawing parallels between 9/11 and Pearl Harbor, establishing 9/11 and the War on Terror as a continuation of the glories and patriotism of Pearl Harbor and World War II (Noon, 2004). Neal (2005) described President Bush’s designation of the War on Terror as an indication that those in power were taking decisive action in response to 9/11 even though the country was being prepared for a war that lacked a clearly defined enemy (p. 185), providing the United States with a sense of direction and a path to redemption in light of a shifting worldview.

A significant element of the collective memory of 9/11 is the analogy of 9/11 being the Pearl Harbor of a new generation. Noon (2004) argues that by invoking parallels between Pearl Harbor and 9/11, President Bush invoked the legacy of the World War II generation to mobilize national support for the War on Terror drawing on national nostalgia for “the greatest generation” and adding to the significance of 9/11 in American culture. Hedges’ (2002) asserts that war “allows us to believe we have achieved our place in society because of a long chain of heroic endeavors” (p. 23).

The complexity of motives for the attacks was minimized as comparisons were made between the evil of Hitler and Osama bin Laden (Neal, 2005). The use of this parallel endured for several years after 9/11, and Noon (2004) argues the use of this parallel, by President Bush especially, was critical to garnering and maintaining support for the expansion of the War on Terror. According to Noon (2004) collective memory of war, including World War II and the greatest generation, makes demands on the current generation to show themselves worthy of previous generations’ sacrifices by replicating those sacrifices. This demand is evidenced in

President Bush's speech on September 14, 2001 when he said, "the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time" (White House, 2009, p. 61). It appears that the United States answered those demands, as evidenced by "an 8-percent increase among young men likely to enlist immediately after 9/11," a statistic that held steady through 2005 (Daniel, 2011).

The United States also adopted a narrative of shock and victimhood, as it mourned and came to terms with the realization that it was not universally admired (Neal, 2005). Commemoration played a significant role in this process of mourning, though "mourning and melancholia have both been made secondary to the initiation of new states of emergency" (Simpson, 2006, p. 4). Language and media have perpetuated this narrative and in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Fine (2003) critiqued the mainstream media's coverage of "who, what, how, where, and when" were behind the attack and its failure to ask "why" (p. 57). President Bush's response to the "why" was summed up in a single line declaring, "They have attacked America, because we are freedom's home and defender" (White House, 2009, p. 61). The language of "us" and "them" became a central piece of discourse in response to 9/11 (Hodges, 2011), while garnering support for the War on Terror, (Hodges, 2011) and has been frequently echoed by President Trump, including his attempts to ban Muslims from entering the United States based on the threat posed to national security.

Fried (2006) argues a narrative of 9/11 has been carefully preserved, although her research looks at the preservation of a narrative only five years after 9/11. While Fried believes history does not preserve itself and a deliberate narrative of 9/11 is being preserved, Neal (2005) only partially agrees with this, asserting that in American culture, few people make deliberate pilgrimages to places where events like 9/11 are memorialized, instead adding them on as a "bonus to a trip or to a vacation" (p. 205). However, in his assessment Neal fails to account for

the role of digital media and popular culture, especially television and the Internet, in memorializing national traumatic events. Schopp and Hill (2009) do account for this, examining the significant ways various media, including music, television, and even children's books, have served as tools for the United States to "implicitly and explicitly" examine and make sense of the attacks and their aftermath, including the War on Terror (p. 13). The presence of 9/11 and the War on Terror throughout popular culture implies that 9/11 has become a chosen trauma for the United States which Volkan (2006) defines as "a large group's mental representation of a historic event that resulted in collective feelings of helplessness, victimization, shame, and humiliation at the hands of 'others,' typically involving drastic losses of people, land, prestige, and dignity" (p. 173). Volkan (2006) further explains that if a generation does not have the power to conduct its inherited tasks, that generation may end up transmitting the unfinished tasks to subsequent generations, resulting in a chosen trauma.

It is important to note that the experience of 9/11 varies around the United States, contrary to President Bush's declaration of unity amongst "all Americans" (White House, 2009, p. 58). One of the most notable groups that continues to experience the meaning of 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror differently are Muslims living in the United States. This is especially the case for Muslim youth who have seen their faith targeted in the post-9/11 culture and as part of the War on Terror. Tindongan (2011) describes the post-9/11 culture, that both threatens and fears Muslim youth, as having forced them to navigate their "Muslim-American" identity, a journey that has been limited by stereotypes and misunderstandings of Islam (p. 80). Maira (2016) corroborates Tindongan's observation that Muslim youth of varying identities unite based on their religious identity, noting an increase in activism by Muslim youth in Silicon Valley who have a heightened sense of their own identities because of the War on Terror. According to

Maira (2016), invisible surveillance of Muslim communities has motivated some youth to reframe and resist surveillance and driven them to “self-consciously regulate, or re-narrate, their social and political lives” (pp. 195–196). Maira (2016) points to the fear of surveillance as being a major factor in limiting Muslim-American youth’s freedom of speech, particularly about topics like the War on Terror and the U.S. invasion of Iraq (p. 197).

9/11 was a nationally traumatic event that took on significant meaning in the United States. This meaning is evidenced in commemoration, increased military enlistment in the years following 9/11, and, in many cases for Muslim youth, an increased connection to religious identity. Despite the meaning immediately attached to 9/11, it is not clear that 9/11 has a durable significance to everybody 16 years later as most of the literature about 9/11 was released within 10 years of the attacks or focuses on youth who are currently in their mid-20s and have some recollection of 9/11. It is not clear if this literature gap is due to a lack of research or a lack of meaning attached to the attacks in contemporary society. Rieff (2016) titled his book and argued “In Praise of Forgetting,” and it may be that 9/11 is simply a historical event to today’s teenagers. Zevin (2011) believes that is precisely what is happening, although he believes 9/11 is one of those rare events in American history that “needs commemoration” to avoid forgetting (p. 143).

9/11, War on Terror, and Patriotic Obligations

Though a lack of literature in the past five years might suggest that for teenagers 9/11 is more of an historical event than an traumatic event, the fact that today’s teenagers are coming of age in a society heavily influenced by 9/11 cannot be overlooked. After 9/11, patriotism and the military took on a new level of significance in American culture. A Department of Defense article (Daniel, 2011) claimed that though patriotism has always driven enlistment it had almost

always been matched by a desire for money or college benefits, something which changed after 9/11. That same article described the “more than three million young people” who have joined since 9/11 as joining knowing that they would be going to war, knowledge that recruits today would also have, given the ongoing deployments as part of the War on Terror. 9/11, counter-terrorism, and the military have also become frequent themes in pop culture since the attacks including highly publicized movies such as *Zero Dark Thirty* and *American Sniper*.

Symbolism of 9/11, the War on Terror, and the military come in many forms including media representation, holidays, books, music, and movies to which youth are constantly exposed. Clark (2015) described the extent of patriotic symbolism that even the youngest residents of the United States are exposed to, saying,

Before a child enters kindergarten in the United States, she has already become steeped in expressive, symbolic experience linked to national meanings...when both Memorial Day and Fourth of July festivities were saturated with patriotic symbols and symbolic support for the military, concurrent with ongoing American military action in Afghanistan and Iraq. (p. 41)

Sciurba (2009) examined picture books, including *Fireboat*, intended to memorialize or explain 9/11 and critiques *Fireboat* for glossing over “*why*” the planes crashed, “*who*” was responsible, and “*what*” their motivations were (p. 191). Sciurba (2009) goes on to argue that picture books like *Fireboat* and *September Roses* feed into the culture of patriotism where everyone “regardless of race, gender, class, or political affiliation was suddenly encouraged to brandish Old Glory in order to prove national solidarity” (p.194). Clark (2015) observed the effects of exposure to this symbolism, in which children of the post-9/11 generation venerated the flag and the colors red, white, and blue as a symbol of the military, even as their parents assumed they

were not absorbing the meanings that society has attached to such symbols. Even with the military being omnipresent in holidays and daily life, Cooper (2015), clarifies that the interpretation and definition of war varies between generations. Cooper (2015) contrasts the “total war” experiences of World War II, where manufacturing and private industry were mobilized, to the War on Terror, describing the War on Terror as an experience stemming from 9/11 which his students struggled to neatly define.

The role of the military expands beyond family and social interactions to include the educational system as well. Giroux (2015) argues that the presence of over 150 military-educational institutions in the United States and hundreds of colleges conducting Pentagon-funded research as evidence of a military fundamentalism that has taken root in the United States since 9/11. The connection between institutes of higher education and the military is corroborated by the requirement that any males receiving federal financial aid must have also registered for the Selective Service (United States Selective Service System, 2017). The presence of JROTC in many high schools and the controversial practice of military recruiting in high schools is further evidence of the extent to which the military is interwoven with the American educational system even before the collegiate level. Abajian (2015) discussed the difficulties of conducting research about high schools and the military considering the extent of access to schools the military is given through legislation, including No Child Left Behind. This and other logistical challenges in researching with legal minors could account for a gap in existing literature.

Today’s teenagers are coming of age in a culture where the military and military service are regularly emphasized, glorified, and synonymous with patriotism. Whether for benefits or patriotism, recruitment as recently as June 2015 by all branches of the military, excluding the

Army, met their recruitment and retention goals (United States Department of Defense, 2015). Today, the Department of Defense employs more than three million employees (United States Department of Defense, 2017). Though teenagers enlisting today surely know they will likely go to war, it is also not clear if patriotic and military obligations are presented in a way that links the War on Terror to 9/11, as was the case in the years immediately following 9/11 and what role the post-9/11 generation wants and expects to play in the War on Terror.

Summary of Literature Review

9/11 was a traumatic national event for the United States and an important milestone in the United States' narrative of defeating evil. Collective memory and post memory have played a critical role in the development and perpetuation of a national identity and engrained a story of American victimhood on 9/11 and the United States' military. This literature review has also demonstrated that patriotism and the military have become institutionalized since 9/11. However, in studying the effects of these phenomena, existing literature focuses primarily on people who are old enough to have had a direct memory of 9/11, neglecting to acknowledge that 9/11 is impacting subsequent generations growing up in the United States. Even if, as many sources suggest, 9/11 is a historical event for today's teenagers, it has still been a central player in the development of a collective memory and post memory for the post-9/11 generation.

This literature review suggests that deliberate peace education is necessary to overcome nationally traumatic events like 9/11. But if peace education curriculum is being implemented in the United States, it is not well documented and literature suggests that the military has more of a presence in the educational system than peace efforts. Evidence of the military's presence in daily life throughout American culture is strong, including popular culture, media coverage of

soldiers' homecomings, and the recent controversy surrounding whether NFL players' decision to kneel during the national anthem showed disrespect for the military.

This research will seek to expand on the existing literature. It will examine if a post memory of 9/11 exists and will engage 16–18-year-olds to better understand how they talk about 9/11 and the War on Terror. It will seek to understand how they relate 9/11 and the War on Terror and define what role 16–18-year-olds expect and want to play in the War on Terror. As the War on Terror continues for the foreseeable future, understanding the next generation of military recruits' relationship with 9/11 and the War on Terror and understanding how they perceive their patriotic and military obligations will be critical to the United States and peacebuilding practitioners.

Research Design

Methodology

This exploratory inductive research seeks to address some of the gaps in existing literature by using qualitative research to answer the question of how 16–18-year-olds talk about 9/11 and the War on Terror and how they understand their patriotic obligations in its wake. Attempts to conduct this research at public high schools were unsuccessful. It is important to note that this likely skewed results based on demographics. It is highly probably that limited exposure to a large immigrant population (compared to public schools), religious identity, and socioeconomic status all impacted the data obtained.

Recruitment of participants took place in a single, private, religious school. Access to the students was arranged through a former teacher who now serves in the administration and by sharing my research goals with two other teachers. A presentation of the research question took place in three classes comprised of approximately 50 students between the ages of 16 and 18.

Of the three classes, two classes were United States history classes covering all levels of instruction (college prep/honors and Advanced Placement). The final class was a psychology class. Upon entering the classes, I was introduced by the teachers as an alumnae of the high school who was doing research as part of my master's degree. Using a slideshow that visually depicted what I was sharing, my presentation to students included my educational background, my research question, my experience working with teenagers, and what would be expected of them if they chose to participate. This included an overview of topics to be covered, potential forms of participation (survey or personal interview), and the logistics of parental consent. Students were given the option of providing me with their contact information at that time or contacting me privately at their convenience. At the end, students were provided with the opportunity to ask questions.

Initially, ten students expressed interest and three followed through on participation. Following my in-classroom recruitment, I emailed all students who had expressed interest in participating and their legal guardian/parent if applicable. That email explained that the student had expressed interest in participating and reiterated details of the research. Some participants had taken paper versions of consent and assent forms and details about the research. Electronic versions of these forms were included in the email to ensure clear communication with their guardians/parents.

Participants were given a choice of participating via a personal interview or an electronic survey/questionnaire. Offering this option facilitated this research in two important ways. First, it allowed participants who might be intimidated at the idea of being interviewed to participate in a way that was comfortable to them with less pressure. Second, an electronic survey allowed for schedules to not be a logistical barrier to participation. A copy of the interview guide/survey

questions can be found in the Appendix (attachment 1). Interviews and surveys provided the same general information but semi-structured interviews allowed for clarifying questions. Two participants chose interviews that took place during their study hall periods in the school commons and one participant chose a questionnaire survey that was submitted and returned by email.

Limitations and Positionality

This research was conducted in my hometown at the Catholic school I graduated from in 2008. I have relationships with the teachers and administrators who supported my recruitment of participants in the school, however I did not have any pre-existing relationships with students who I recruited for participation. Additionally, though I recruited participants from targeted classes and based on age, ultimately participants self-selected. This limitation was partially mitigated by recruiting participants in a variety of classes, rather than a single class that could potentially contain students who are focused on a specific of study.

Additionally, research participants' various social identities were not a focus of my research. All participants self-identified as female and Catholic. Without focusing on the social identities of participants, it would be impossible to separate identity from the results of this research. With only three participants, a much larger scale study is necessary to engage youth of varying identities. Suggestions for further research are included at the end of this paper.

This research question also relied on the assumption that 16–18-year-olds have any or some thoughts about 9/11 and/or the War on Terror. Prior to conducting this research, I hoped for strong opinions, clearly formed thoughts, and high levels of engagement from participants, but realized apathy was also a strong possibility given a lack of direct memory. Additionally, though ongoing and highly impactful to many people around the world, especially Iraq and

Afghanistan, the fact remains that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been fought on foreign soil. With the exception of military and national guard families, the general population has not been impacted in the same way as during previous conflicts through measures such as the enactment of the draft or rationings. For these reasons, I broadened the scope of this research to also include more general questions about the military and patriotism in addition to 9/11 and the War on Terror. This research question also assumes and establishes a link between 9/11 and the War on Terror, leading participants to answer in a way that reflects that historical link.

Like any researcher, I entered this research with my own ideas and positionality regarding my research topic. 9/11 and the War on Terror have shaped how I view the world and I have undoubtedly carried that with me throughout this process, frequently reflecting on how I understand and view 9/11 and the War on Terror. My identities also play into this research. I shared identities with research participants including gender, faith, and educational background. While recruiting, I was framed as an alumnae of the same school participants currently attend. My nationality also cannot be removed from this research, I am an American citizen and have grown up in the United States of America. It is entirely possible I do not fully understand the ways in which that has influenced me. Finally, I am a student of peacebuilding and have some degree of skepticism regarding the necessity of war in most, if not all, circumstances. The very nature of my training has encouraged me to question why violence happens and seek out less violent ways to address conflicts. As I progressed through this research, especially the literature review portion, I was aware that I was becoming increasingly cynical about the military and the weight it carries in contemporary American culture. I also feel a high degree of personal skepticism about the lack of historical context in the narrative of 9/11 and the national story of

victimhood. Although I tried to only listen and record during interviews, I may have unconsciously revealed my thoughts and opinions and unconsciously influenced participants.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the three data sets was conducted manually and focused on themes that emerged during the literature review. Coding used for analysis was based on themes that emerged during the literature review including transgenerational trauma, collective memory, militarism, World War II, and patriotism. Specific codes used included: “details” (of 9/11 including the feelings of the country in response to the attack or sensory descriptions of 9/11), “memorials,” “strength” (when speaking about the military), and “patriotism.” Given the small data set, frequencies of varying codes were difficult to quantify in a significant way.

In addition to coding for commonalities between participants’ responses, data analysis considered what participants did not say as well. Codes directly related to transgenerational trauma, such as “anxiety,” “stress,” and “fear” were ultimately irrelevant based on the data obtained. Participants did not indicate having these feelings. Additionally, data analysis considered participants’ lack of observations about varying experiences of 9/11 and the War on Terror based on identity and demographics.

Research Findings

Data

On 9/11 participants in this research ranged from 8 months to just over 2 years old. All participants self-identify as female and Catholics. Participants answered questions about what they know about 9/11, familiarity with and exposure to memorials, definition of patriotism and identifying patriotic obligations, opinions about the War on Terror, and interest in joining the military. Finally, participants were also given the opportunity to share any thoughts that had not

been specifically targeted in questions, but that they believe to be important in understanding the research question.

In responding to associations of 9/11, one participant with family connections to New York City recalled vivid images that she was able to describe with great detail. Sharing the personal experience of a family friend, she described the thickness of a cloud of smoke which the family friend thought was a block of concrete. She explained, “That expands to all the horrors of it [the attack].” The other participants, with a less direct connection described the national feeling, using words such as “disaster,” “turning point,” “horrible,” and “horrific.” One participant also identified the sense of “unknowing what’s going to happen” resulting from the attacks.

All participants were familiar with memorials and museums and two participants have visited memorials with the third planning on visiting one in the near future. One participant visited the memorial in New York City, though not the museum, on a school trip last April. The other participant’s exposure to memorials was through a local memorial at her community fire department. Both the participant who visited last year and the participant who expects to visit soon shared experiences talking about 9/11 and/or the memorials with their peers and spoke to the gravity of the experience being at the memorial.

Their knowledge of 9/11 and the War on Terror is derived from the friends and family members, media, and the broader communities in which they live. One participant definitively noted that in her experience, 9/11 is not talked about much because “people are very sensitive still.” All participants indicated their approval of memorials to 9/11, identifying 9/11 as an important part of the American historical experience and placed value on the honoring of

innocent lives lost in the attacks. One participant acknowledged that the War on Terror could be seen as “retaliation” and has also resulted in the loss of innocent lives.

Patriotism was associated with words that included dedication, loyalty, defending, pride, and support by the participants. All participants identified multiple ways to be patriotic. Two of the participants identified respect and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance as a patriotic duty, saying it “has been an upstanding tradition.” Also included in patriotic duties were voting, serving in “one way or another,” taxes, sacrificing, and standing up to make the United States a better country.

There was no consensus expressed by participants about if the United States is a country at war. They defined war as “fighting” and “a battle,” “taking up arms in defense resulting in death,” and “aggression between two or more conflicting sides.” Though no participant said the United States is *not* a country at war, only one definitively described the United States as a country at war, while the other two were noncommittal or restricted their affirmation to specific contexts. The depth of support for the War on Terror varied between participants from strong support because terrorism must be stopped to mostly supporting it. One participant in particular held onto the idea that she understands why war is necessary but there might be a better way that harms fewer people.

Speaking about the military and patriotism, participants used words like “strong” to describe those who have made the commitment to the military. Two of the three participants expressed a clear desire to eventually join the military, though not directly out of high school. Both want to receive their college degrees prior to enlisting. The third participant expressed her admiration for people who do join the military but said she had no interest because “I’m scared and weak.” Participants had varying relationships with the military including Veterans Affairs

and extended family members who have been or are in the military. Participants did not identify these connections as being strong influencers of how they view the military. At the school participants attend, it is common knowledge that one faculty member in particular is a veteran. On my visit to the school I also observed evidence of a priest's military service being honored, directly outside of the cafeteria (see Image 1).



Image 1

Discussion

It is important to note that although themes such as loss, duty, and strength as they relate to 9/11 and the War on Terror were present in all three data sets, no specific responses or ideas were ubiquitously present. This can be at least partially attributed to individual participants' respective diverse experiences and different connections to New York City. Unsurprisingly, face-to-face interviews yielded more nuanced responses and contained more detail than the survey questionnaire completed and submitted via email. This can be attributed to the ability to ask clarifying questions during interviews and a different setting, including the dynamics of exchanges between participants and myself as the researcher.

This research suggests that seventeen years later, 9/11 and the War on Terror are still significant forces in teenagers' lives, though not significantly traumatic forces. Participants did not identify any major shifts in their lives resulting from 9/11 or the War on Terror or fear in their daily lives resulting from 9/11. Their young age on 9/11 means they were too young to remember life prior to 9/11 which likely accounts for this. No participants identified immediate family members or close friends who have deployed as part of the War on Terror, though some had extended family members serve in the military in a variety of contexts. If any participants did have immediate family members who had deployed in the War on Terror, particularly to Afghanistan or Iraq, I would have anticipated responses to differ significantly, reflecting the experience of military families who have had the War on Terror impact their daily lives and the ways in which they live.

Through the sharing of general thoughts about 9/11 and The War on Terror, it does not appear that transgenerational trauma transmission has been a significant factor in how 16–18-year-olds talk about 9/11 and the War on Terror and how they understand their patriotic obligations to the War on Terror. No participants mentioned exposure to any storybooks that, as referenced by Scieurba (2009), serve as vehicles of perpetuating trauma and the national narrative of 9/11. Additionally, the matter-of-fact tone and language used by participants when speaking about 9/11 supports the theory put forth by Neal (2005) that traumatic events like 9/11 serve as more of a historical event for those who were not old enough to remember it or who were not at developmentally critical stages of their lives at the time. Though participants demonstrated an awareness of 9/11 and the War on Terror, they did not indicate feeling high levels of anxiety or stress related to either of these things and indicated that the current state of conflict surrounding the War on Terror is normal.

Despite no obviously identifiable transgenerational trauma, two participants spoke at great length about both 9/11 and the War on Terror and their understanding of those events in the broader context of United States' history. Participants identified other conflicts the United States is or has been involved in, both making connections and distinguishing between those conflicts and the War on Terror.

The ability of participants to describe 9/11 in detail about both images and emotions felt at the time indicates the presence of a collective memory preserved through personal connections (e.g., family and friends) and community remembrances (e.g., school remembrances and the memorial in New York City). Though the third participant did not provide the same level of detail, she attributed a lack of discussion of 9/11 and the War on Terror to the fact that "it is still a sensitive topic" suggesting her awareness of the depths to which 9/11 serves as a chosen national trauma (Volkan, 2006). Her observation is profound because it indicates the awareness and power behind stories both told and untold. It also reflects the awareness that teenagers have of the trauma experienced by their parents' generation and the heavy weight it carries in their communities. Based on Volkan's concept of chosen trauma, this participant's observation supports the idea that 9/11 has become a chosen trauma as part of a national narrative.

The absence of clearly defined transgenerational trauma hardly reflects apathy or ignorance of 9/11 and the War on Terror. Even as participants did not indicate specific signs of trauma, the depth of sentiments and emotions felt by the United States as a result of 9/11 is notably strong, though it is experienced by subsequent generations in a different way. Another participant, describing the sense of a loss of certainty and knowing what's going to happen next, further affirmed the presence of chosen trauma by describing a collective feeling that she was not old enough to remember first-hand. Finally, one participant whose family once lived in New

York City, with her detailed description of the smoke cloud experienced by a family friend, demonstrated how perpetuating individuals' stories contributes to a larger collective memory. This applies to individuals' stories that are perpetuated both formally, like school and in museums, or informally, like family and friends' retelling of their experiences.

Participants' collective memory of 9/11 and the War on Terror is informed primarily by family, friends, and the media. One participant recalled a class in junior high taking time out of the day to remember and reflect. Another participant spoke at length about the role of media in contemporary times compared to during World War II, contrasting the depth to which the War on Terror has been covered by the media compared to World War II where there was less frequent news coverage which she believes made it easier to feel removed from the conflict. Physical memorials, though not insignificant, appear to be secondary to first-hand narratives and media in forming participants' opinions and experiences related to 9/11 and the War on Terror. Participants mentioned physical memorials in significantly less detail than the ways in which they recalled the experiences of individuals as heard both directly and indirectly.

Though the 9/11 Memorial is connected to the 9/11 Museum, the one participant who had the opportunity had only visited the memorial but not the museum. It was unclear why this was the case, but likely could have been the result of time constraints or other logistical limitations. However, the visit to the memorial pool reflected the importance of honoring those lost on 9/11. Both the participant who expects to visit the memorial soon and the participant who visited the memorial spoke about the atmosphere. One participant indicated that even young children who would normally be expected to fuss and cry understood the emotions connected to the place. This observation mirrors the observations about patriotic ceremonies made by Clark (2015) that even

at a remarkably young age, children understand and absorb the meanings adults around them attached to various forms of patriotic ceremony.

Participants admiration for the military and desire to potentially enlist is significant. When asked about comfort critiquing the military and U.S. foreign policy, all participants indicated their disinclination to do so on forums like social media. Participants differed with their preference for discussing such topics with friends or family, but clearly indicated their preferences to do so with people they felt already understood them and would be able to understand both things said and unsaid. Participants included practices like voting and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in their explanations of what it means to be patriotic, echoing the observations by Clark (2015) of the value placed by American youth on practices and traditions surrounding patriotism and the military.

The aspects of 9/11 and the War on Terror not mentioned by participants are just as notable as the many things they shared, especially in regards to the ways Muslim communities living in the United States have been impacted by the War on Terror. Participants' lack of mention of this can be attributed to several factors. The first is that all participants attend Catholic school and although that school is in a community with a large Muslim immigrant population, participants' regular exposure to that community would require more deliberate efforts rather than if they attended one of the local public schools. Another possible explanation is that as Catholics, participants have no reason to understand the ways their Muslim peers experience the War on Terror both domestically and abroad.

The literature review clearly revealed social and political parallels between the patriotism of the United States as the United States entered World War II in response to Pearl Harbor and the patriotism as the United States entered the War on Terror following 9/11 but this was not

reflected in participants' responses. Only one participant spoke about World War II. The lack of references connecting the War on Terror and World War II could be attributed to the fact that the United States is now thoroughly engaged in the War on Terror. Differing from the parallels drawn between the two to sell the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Noon, 2004), the participant clearly differentiated between the two conflicts. She observed that the form of fighting is different in the War on Terror and that many people easily forget that soldiers are still deployed and fighting. She also emphasized the importance of self-driven research to learn about conflicts throughout history, especially World War II and the War on Terror, in order to keep history from repeating itself.

Additionally, it is important to note that this participant connected World War II to the War on Terror in a historical context distinctly different from the context that was evident in the literature review. She expressed her belief that the War on Terror is an indirect outcome of World War II. She posited that a "turf war" between Israel and Palestine, fostered by the giving of land to Israel after World War II, has played a significant role in radicalization of Arabs. She acknowledged the role of colonization historically in contributing to contemporary political tensions between Israel and Palestine and the role those tensions have played in contributing to extreme violence in and related to the Middle East.

Though no participants demonstrated evidence of transgenerational trauma, they did demonstrate exposure to the national narratives of 9/11. The ways in which they felt comfortable challenging national narratives varied between individuals within the frame of honoring and respecting sacrifices made by members of the military. Participants showed varied beliefs about conflicts the United States is involved in, including the War on Terror and the reasons for those conflicts. Even as participants expressed the hope that there is a better way to approach terrorism

and conflict than is currently being done by the United States, they also were resigned to the fact that the War on Terror is probably necessary and understandable.

Conclusion

After 9/11 a collective memory of 9/11 formed as the United States processed the trauma of the three coordinated attacks. Almost immediately, a national narrative of 9/11 was placed in the context of other significant moments in the United States' history, especially Pearl Harbor and World War II, establishing the evil of those who attacked the United States in juxtaposition to the goodness of the United States. Most notable is the cultural significance placed on the United States' military after 9/11. With the shift from being a country at peace to a country at war, support of the military, especially enlisting, became synonymous with acts of patriotism as American flags flew high.

In answering the question of how 16–18-year-olds talk about 9/11 and the War on Terror and how they understand their patriotic obligations to the War on Terror, it is obvious that 9/11 still carries a high level of significance, if not for 16–18-year-olds, then for the adults by whom they are surrounded and influenced. Although participants did not exhibit signs of transgenerational trauma, all participants participated in or were exposed to some sort of memorial or reminiscing about 9/11, perpetuating the existence of a national narrative of 9/11 in mainstream culture. Participants acknowledged multiple forms of patriotic duties, specifically identifying military service, voting, and standing and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Two of the three research participants indicated a desire to serve in the military and the third explained her reluctance to serve to weakness rather than an opposition to the war itself. No participants addressed the domestic War on Terror as it relates to Muslim communities living in the United States.

With no end in sight for the War on Terror, more extensive and more in-depth research is absolutely necessary to better understand what the future of this conflict and this war will look like. Further research should focus on the national narrative of 9/11 as it is understood by diverse communities, including immigrant communities and in communities where youth are likely to enlist in the military straight out of high school. Longer-term research is also necessary to understand how the narrative of 9/11 and the War on Terror has changed between the generation that remembers 9/11 directly and subsequent generations. Further research should study the ways that narrative stabilizes and continues to evolve over the passage of time. It should also study the ways in which teenagers are exposed to 9/11 and the War on Terror through various forms of media and the ways in which those forces influence their understanding of 9/11 and the War on Terror.

Research should focus on deepening the understanding of what meaning has been assigned to patriotism and nationalism in the United States. Expanding this research is important both to the United States' government and peacebuilding practitioners. For the government, understanding the post-9/11 generation's relationship to the War on Terror will impact how they motivate the next generation of recruits to enlist. For peacebuilding practitioners, it is critical to understand the ways the post-9/11 generation wants to be involved in the War on Terror and how they view the military generally. This initial research suggests teenagers have high levels of regard for the military and view the War on Terror as necessary, but not ideal. Though they may not be old enough to remember 9/11 and the beginning of the War on Terror, recently announced troop surges mean the War on Terror has become the war of the next generation and will continue to be a force in teenagers' lives for the foreseeable future.

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Appendix

Attachment 1: Interview Guide/Survey Questions

How old were you on September 11, 2001?

What words come to mind when you hear 9/11?

What memorials dedicated to 9/11 are you aware of?

Have you visited any memorial or museum dedicated to 9/11?

If yes, which one(s)?

If yes, how old were you at the time of the visit(s)?

If yes, what was your impression of it/them?

How do you define patriotism?

What do you consider to be your patriotic duties?

How do you define war?

Do you consider the United States to be a nation at war? Why?

What words come to mind when you hear War on Terror?

How invested do you feel in the War on Terror and why?

What role do you see yourself playing in the War on Terror?

Do you support the United States' War on Terror? Why or why not?

How comfortable do you feel criticizing U.S. foreign policy and U.S. military engagements?

In your family?

With your friends?

On social media?

How much interest do you have in joining the military or national guard? Why?

Do you have any close friends or family members who are members of the military or national guard?

If yes: Have they been deployed?

If yes: Where to and when?

If yes: How do you feel about their decision?

Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share about 9/11 and the War on Terror?

Demographic questions:

Have you resided outside the United States? If so, where and for how long?

How do you identify your gender?

How old are you?

What faith, if any, do you practice?