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"You do not live in my skin": embodiment, voice, and the veteran

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In this paper we challenge the fundaments of academic engagement with, and representation of, veterans' embodied experiences. Drawing on work we have undertaken at a number of recent conferences to open up the format of academic discourse to a more dialogue-oriented form of engagement, we try to bring the same principles and problems into written discourse. This paper weaves between the monologic form of academic argument, and the open explorative form of the dialogue, in an attempt to question core assumptions about veteran identity. Both of us are concerned with the politics of claims to "know" the veteran experience by researchers, policymakers, and the media. The paper is an attempt to take seriously a politics of embodiment, of voice, and of listening as a way of fundamentally reorienting what we think we "know" about veteran experience and how we go about our research. Above all, this paper is an intervention. It is an attempt to go beyond using notions of "embodiment" as a heuristic device, and to operationalize this analytic in a challenge to the limits and possibilities of academic forms of representation. We argue that we need new ways of generating knowledge about embodied experience and a different understanding of what knowing *means* in this context. We propose "the conversation" as an alternative mode of research praxis.

Keywords: veteran; experience; embodiment; critical praxis; dialogic methods

Introduction

In this special issue of *Critical Military Studies*, we are invited to consider the relationship between embodiment and militarism and our own research practice. Our contribution is a critical reflection on the collaboration between the authors. Sarah is a university lecturer working within critical military studies. David is a war veteran, political activist, and independent researcher. In 2013 Sarah contacted Veteran to Veteran, a UK-based community interest company, co-founded by David, which promotes "veteran-led" research. During our first meeting we watched David's film *Seven Days Down South: A War Story* which he produced for his doctoral degree (Jackson 2010). This documents his return to the Falklands–Malvinas Islands, where he fought and experienced the death of his best friend. In contrast to most war films there is no "action", violence, or heroic sacrifice. Instead there are panoramic vistas of the sea and the landscape, dictaphone recordings, poetry, journal entries, music, and photographs. We hear David's voice change tenor with emotion. We see him move through different spaces, feel his frustrations, and watch him talking to other people, to himself, and to us. The cuts are rough, the impression raw. The film does not explain David's embodied experience of war, but invites the viewer to

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witness his journey in all its complexity and uncertainty. We sat in silence at the end of the film. Words failed us in that moment. It might sound unusual, two relative strangers engaging in such an encounter in a university office, but watching that film in the presence of each other was the beginning of a productive working relationship exploring embodiment and experience, and a friendship developed through generosity of spirit and a shared intellectual agenda.

There is, of course, an existing literature about war and the body (*inter alia* Cooper and Hurcombe 2008; Sylvester 2011, 2013; Basham 2013; McSorley 2013; Wilcox 2015). Critiquing the absence of bodies in conventional accounts of war, this literature acknowledges that "people live in wars, with wars, and war lives with them long after it ends" (Parashar 2013, 618). Yet our experience points to some of the limits of this literature. One problem is that, although this literature recognizes the importance of the body and embodiments, there is often something missing, an affective dimension that has the capacity to radically transform academic practice and method. Much critical literature mobilizes "bodies" in a critique of something, as in uses of the body to trouble international relations theory (Parashar 2013; Sylvester 2013; Wilcox 2015). The danger with this is that it must render bodies "knowable" for an end outside themselves. Such deployments of the body work within the parameters of existing academic practice. We want to question the idea that the study of "embodied" practice or experience should take "bodies" as things "out there". We believe this narrows the radical potential of embodiment as a mode of research. We want to explore whether it is possible to move towards a more affective understanding of embodiment that engages with the person-as-such, who "can never be fully known, completely specified, or tied down" (Edkins 2011, 197). This requires us to go beyond existing forms of the academic research process.

There is much at stake in claims "to know" the embodied experience of war and militarism. We are troubled by conventional modes of representing the veteran, which we feel are often determined by didactic agendas which objectify "the veteran" as a social problem. Our shared frustration with the limits and constraints of academic forms, and desire to expose and disrupt those constraints, compelled us to consider whether we could do our research differently. We wanted to make an intervention. We pursued this through a series of conference presentations in which we explored aspects of David's experience as a war veteran through dialogue. We literally staged a conversation between us.[1] For us, dialogue, or conversation, reveals that the "study" of veterans should begin with an acknowledgement of the complex relationships between people, places, and practices. It is also performative, generating an affective response in an audience. We have "staged" three conference presentations for different audiences. Each is carefully prepared, although we allow space for spontaneity in the delivery. Each tries to "put back in" what we feel is erased in academic practice, particularly the affective content, the interpersonal relationships, and the value of singular, unique, and irreducible human experience. This is not simply about "recovering" that which is lost and augmenting existing methods and frameworks for analysis. We conceptualize our work as a transformatory project which seeks to disrupt conventional research methods and epistemologies. We believe that we need both new ways of generating knowledge about embodied experience and a different understanding of what knowing *means* in this context. Building on the tradition of collaborative ethnography (Lassiter 2005), we offer "the conversation" as an ethical and critical praxis which goes beyond "data gathering" towards a genuinely co-productive collaboration which can generate fundamentally different research. For us "the conversation" is not just discursive, it is part of an emotional, embodied relationship, something that exceeds academic convention.

Our conference dialogues sought to disrupt the ways in which knowledge is made and unmade in the form of the academic paper and the "knowing", masculine authorial voice. Here we attempt to translate our dialogue into a written form. This paper is again a performance. Our aim, as with our presentations, is to provoke, to trouble assumptions about war and embodiment. We want to ask the reader: How do you do your academic work? Whom or what do you do that work for? What is a *critical* military studies? At times we write with one voice; at others we write as individuals, sometimes as researchers, sometimes as friends, and sometimes as strangers who are trying to cross a gulf in understanding. We recognize that we each have many voices, or "skins" as David suggests below, and that the struggle to give an account of ourselves forces us into a critical relationship to ourselves and the social norms that constitute us as subjects (Butler 2005). We argue that we need to embrace, rather than erase, these multiple voices, and that the *struggle* to articulate embodied experience is the key problem for research on war. There are many ways to define bodies, embodiment, emotion, affect, and lived experience (Shilling 2012; McSorley 2013; Åhäll and Gregory 2015). However, as Kevin McSorley (2013, 239) writes, there is a "fundamental, wider struggle to be able to adequately comprehend, and articulate, the effects and affects of war. Bodies carry war in ways that are at once intensely felt and intractable, and yet seemingly unstable and unknowable". For us, this statement is provocative and points to the risk that in trying to foreground the body in war we abstract and objectify it. For this reason, our starting point is not to define what embodiment is or to argue that particular methods best "capture" embodiment. Instead, we let the complexity of embodiment challenge *us* to re-define ourselves and our praxis. We offer this intervention as one possible way to engage differently with embodiment. In the conversation that follows, we hope to show that it is precisely "unknowability" that is generative of different possibilities for engaging with embodiment, experience, and war.

The veteran as an object of research

Veterans are key protagonists in the negotiation of relations between geopolitics, the state, the military, and society. Many veterans bear the mental and physical scars of war; they are "living monuments" who confront domestic societies with the violence enacted on their behalf (Jordan 2011). In the UK, injured veterans have gained particular social prominence. Alongside policy initiatives and reports (Forces in Mind Trust 2013; Ministry of Defence 2011), there has been phenomenal public support for armed forces charities such as Help for Heroes (2015). However, representations of injured veterans as heroes (Kelly 2013; Woodward, Winter, and Jenkings 2009), symbols of national pride (Ministry of Defence 2014), or victims deserving of our sympathy (Kirkup 2013) all fail to acknowledge the complex experiences of those living with the embodied effects of war. Mainstream academic and policy research routinely objectifies veterans as "problems to be solved" (Ashcroft 2014). Studies of veterans' health needs and social function are typically based on telephone surveys or questionnaires based on medicalized diagnostic criteria (for example, Buckman et al. 2013; Iversen et al. 2005). Even the critical literature on veterans' embodied experiences, for example feminist work on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which depends on discourse analysis and fieldwork, often makes sense of veterans' experiences within a larger narrative of "the problem" of militarized masculinity (Whitworth 2004, 2008; Eichler 2012). Whilst generating valuable insights, these approaches risk appropriating veterans' embodied experiences through processes which limit veteran participation in the research process.

David: I was wondering whether I would start this conversation with a statement you have heard me make many times before: No one asks *us*.

Sarah: You feel that your experiences, and those of veterans collectively, are unheard and unrecognized. Is this why you founded Veteran to Veteran with Kevin Spruce?

David: Unheard certainly, but not unrecognized. War veterans are recognized and widely represented within research. It was the need to question this representation that interested me when I did my MA. I recognized that, although with good intentions, researchers would write on our behalf but with this came an absence of voice. There was something missing. So after a chance meeting with Kevin at a conference we started talking about our experiences and how we might be able to offer an alternative to the status quo. This was the conversation that sowed the seeds to setting up Veteran to Veteran. Veteran to Veteran is an organization that encourages collaborative research projects which place the voice of war veterans and their families within research. The problems that arise in conventional academic discourse are illustrated by research on PTSD. The study of PTSD from combat is articulated through a process of objectification of the war veteran who becomes a subject to be studied and treated. Whilst this has offered some improvement in treatment, the treatment offered is still firmly entrenched in the medical narrative.

Sarah: What is the problem with that medical narrative?

David: The medical narrative is too limited and relies upon tick boxes. I had to see three psychiatrists before they got it right or I had "got it right" and was diagnosed with PTSD, which meant an extra £10 on my war pension. Yet a sense of war and its embodied effects cannot be defined within a single representation where there is little or no room for individual subjective narratives – it silences that embodied voice. To get a sense of who I am, and my experiences of living with war, you have to understand my journey.

Sarah: Where does that journey begin?

David: There is a problem with the idea of beginnings and endings. My journey isn't linear. I see my life experiences like a basket around me; I draw from them every day. My sense of war, even where the particular events are in the temporal past, is never distant. Experience disrupts linear understandings of time, place, and identity. You walk in with some sense of me based on your prior knowledge of me. You listen; you try to get a different sense of me, perhaps of war. You ask questions, perhaps expecting answers. However, a sense of war can't be packaged neatly for others' consumption or understanding. So, fundamentally, the challenge is raised in the question I ask you: Can you, as a researcher, adequately comprehend my sense of war?

Sarah: I don't know. At stake for me is a need to challenge the dichotomized archetypes about veterans as heroic, stoic, and proud, or conversely, as vulnerable, dysfunctional, and dangerous. I think that is a starting point we both share. My sense is that you feel there is a real struggle to be understood.

David: Sometimes I feel like I am living in an alien world because of those archetypes. A good example of this was my return to Hartland, the village where I had lived for several years, after returning from the Falklands in 1982. They had put on a party for me. I drove and stopped 2 miles from the village, at a pub, to have some Dutch courage. I thought "I can't do this", but eventually I went into the

village where the band was playing, the bunting was up, union jacks flying. Everyone was high as a kite, back slapping, drinking champagne. That moment was the first time in my life I've really felt detached from any sense of reality. I still have this in the basket. It sits hidden and sometimes it will appear in my life to then insidiously disappear until the next time. Anyway, I found my mask; I drank beer, answered questions, fielded difficult ones, and accepted the embraces of many. I found myself stood at the bar with a World War Two veteran spitfire pilot. We didn't do much talking, we didn't need to, and there was no embrace because there was a connection which goes beyond acts of sympathetic physical embrace. We drank to our fallen brothers. We both shed tears of loss. It starts as a single tear that rolls down your face tracking its way down, not wiped away. This was the first time I experienced this sense of knowingness. There was a massive sense of loss.

Sarah: So this form of understanding was unspoken, embodied, and ineffable. Perhaps, then, we need to engage critically with the claim to "understand", to analyze and evaluate someone's experience of war and ask: What is at stake in the researcher's claims to knowledge about war veterans and their experiences?

Veterans have often been the subject of the researcher's gaze, particularly around their sensory and psychological responses to war. The focus of this research has been PTSD and other trauma-related mental health difficulties (Kienzler 2008). The National Centre for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is part of the Department for Veterans' Affairs in the USA, tracks journal articles, books, technical reports, doctoral dissertations, and other relevant pieces of writing on PTSD and war. A search for "veterans" in the Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress (PILOTS) database brings up 7619 results since 1979.[2] Much of this research routinely objectifies veterans and their experiences, and engages in "diagnostic competition over soldiers' psyches" (Howell 2011, 115). Conventional methods used in veteran research, such as surveys and questionnaires, are inadequate because categories abstract, pathologize, and fragment a "wide array of soldier's modes of post-combat being" (Wool 2013, 406). They also fail to allow the veteran community to generate its own research questions or participate in the interpretation of the data gathered about them. There are often significant differences in veteran self-understandings and the policies designed to support them. Research has suggested that only half of former service personnel in the UK actually self-identify as "veterans" (Burdett et al. 2013). Many researchers are unaware of the historical, social, and cultural differences of the individuals they study.

Sarah: How would you conceptualize your experience of war?

David: It has been a long journey for me. The starting point was the process of objectification through the medical narrative, when I was diagnosed with a mental health disability. I needed to get more of a sense of my illness beyond the rigid categories of psychiatric assessment. Early on I was drawn to psychotherapeutic critical theory (Stevens 1994; Gay 1995; Kirschenbaum 1990; Laing 1990), but I still felt my experiences were being placed in different boxes based on the theoretical position taken. The breakthrough came when reading about the feminist position on trauma (Caruth 1995) as a lived experience. The questions from the feminist perspective are:

> How can we facilitate the integration of an individual's pain and therefore their sensory experience of trauma into a new ethic of compassionate representation?
>
> How do social, cultural, historical, and individual personal experiences lead to different and new meanings of traumatic experience?
>
> I am also drawn to poststructural feminism, which Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000, 479) describes as a theoretical critique "employed to examine any commonplace situation, any ordinary event or process, in order to think differently about that occurrence – to open what seems natural to other possibilities". I can open the not-so-ordinary narrative of my life story to alternative examination. It is from this position I am given a sense of liberation and freedom. Sawicki (1991, 27) explains that this freedom "does not basically lie in discovering or being able to determine who we are, but in rebelling against those ways in which we are already defined, categorised and classified". I believe my academic and research journey is an act of resistance and rebellion against the dominant discourses that currently seek to represent "the war veteran". My use of a poststructural positioning, in relation to my life narrative, enables me to disrupt, transgress, and challenge areas of my own life experience that I (and perhaps others) have taken for granted.

There is a need to think more critically about knowledge production and our practices as researchers, even as "critical" military scholars. Why is it that academic research takes the form it does?

The limitations of academic practice

As Foucault ([1969] 2002, 45) writes:

> If things are said – and those only – one should seek the immediate reason for them . . . not in them, nor in the men that said them, but in the system of discursivity, in the enunciative possibilities and impossibilities that it lays down.

Much academic practice is structured by particular modes of communication and form, such as the journal article, the conference presentation, the research grant application. These forms require a particular academic voice. We agree with Roxanne Lynn Doty (2004, 380), who argues that:

> our ideas, curiosities, intellectual wandering, and ethical concerns are twisted and contorted to fit our professional voices …. A certain writing voice is imposed on scholars and students from the amorphous and rather ill-defined, but powerful dictates of "the profession" and for this reason it is extraordinarily political with political consequences.

Writing this article has brought into sharp relief how powerful these writing forms are, and how difficult it is to write both against and within the journal article form. The development of structures that support these forms has been associated with academia as a site of Western, white, masculine privilege which trains academics in "disembodied ways of talking about the social and the individual" (Bannerji et al. 1992, 10). We argue that these forms curtail the enunciative possibilities that are essential for a serious scholarly engagement with embodiment, and that they are an "inherently violent imposition" (Doty 2004, 380).

Sarah: Is there a tension between your embodiment as a war veteran with a mental health disability and the expectation of you performing as Dr David Jackson, the researcher, in academic settings?

David: Yes, in the sense that my performance, for example at a research conference, is governed by the normative social discourse that positions me as a researcher. However, this suggests I should become that distant objective researcher who has to leave his embodied self at the main entrance of any organization where I am performing. As an example of these tensions of living in my skin, I can recall an experience of speaking at a conference a couple of years ago. To give voice to those parts of my embodied self, I wrote a short autoethnographical narrative in my journal:

> *I remember a feeling of nervous excitement as I, once again, was offered an opportunity to tell my story at an academic conference. The evening before my presentation I attended the conference dinner with all its networking, chat about the presentations and the inevitable jockeying for position. From across the white linen covered table an observation was shared.*
>
> *"You've done really well considering all you have been through"*
>
> *I smiled and thanked the individual but, as it happens, my internal dialogue was playing out its habitual and sometimes destructive pattern.*
>
> *"So I have done really well have I?"*
>
> *"You do not get it do you"*
>
> *"How dare you limit me by the assumed position that you place me in"*
>
> *"You do not live in my skin"*
>
> *I left, slowly walked back to my digs and had a restless night's sleep waking up hourly and getting up at 5am for a long walk along the promenade – but of course, I did really well, considering.*
>
> *The next day was my performance day and I was on after lunch. I sat on my own during lunch as is my way before I share my story of loss, war and its aftermath through my presentation "Three Days Down South: A Story of Loss".*
>
> *"Hello David, we were wondering if you could just show 15 minutes of your film with questions? We are really sorry we are running behind."*
>
> *"I am sorry that is not going to work the film is 20 minutes. If you like I can drop out." I replied.*
>
> *"No, no, no, let me come back to you."*
>
> *This exchange really threw me in that moment. I felt my already heightened anxiety starting to bubble inside my stomach. Fresh air I thought, so I walked to the car trying to hold onto that skin I struggle to wear as a Doctor of Education, researcher and academic. That irrational fear of getting found out, that well-rehearsed internal dialogue of being the only person who has struggled with an experience of war and a feeling of not being heard. I make a habit of making sure organisers are informed of my mental health disability and I will sometimes ask for a quiet space to be available should I become over anxious before and after my presentations. I take responsibility for my illness. This request to the organisers kept repeating itself in my head. I wanted to run away.*

> *It is as if the only skin I wore that day was Dr David Jackson, speaker, academic and confident former Royal Marine. To me it felt that a war veteran with a mental health disability was not allowed in this sacred place. It was as if as I entered this gated community I was to peel off that skin that makes the "the other" uncomfortable and hang it on a hanger locked in some metaphorical cupboard for collection on exit. It was several months later that I drove up to those same gates, waited for the big brother photo of my car registration number. Once again I scanned the area wondering whether there was a need to find a locker to hang up my skin.*

Sarah: Your account demonstrates how our feelings, senses, and emotions, and our inherent vulnerability as social beings, are characterized as a kind of "excess" which is unrelated to research and should be contained and managed, yet the body resists these attempts at containment. I am also struck by the way that I can relate to your feelings. I often feel uncomfortable in my own skin at academic conferences. I used to think this was a lack of confidence or simply that I did not really belong. I often struggle to hear what is being said at conferences. It is only recently, and in part as a result of my collaboration with you, that I have begun to consider that my sense of unease might open up opportunities for political intervention.

The politics of the conversation

We propose "the conversation" as an alternative research praxis for engaging with embodied experience. We conceptualize this as a form of collaborative ethnography wherein the challenge is to "place dialogue in the service of actual collaboration" (Lassiter 2005, 135). Our praxis encompasses both our informal, exploratory, and unstructured discussions and our purposefully curated, dialogic performances. To develop a presentation we begin by talking about the theme of a particular conference. We then reflect on what we've been saying and try to challenge each other and deconstruct our own dialogue by bringing it into conversation with existing research. From this we generate "material" for the presentation, which gets sent back and forth over email until we are both happy with it. We use life story as both a "mode of reasoning and a mode of representation" (Richardson 1990, 118), a way to conceive of and tell about the world. For us, these autoethnographic methods offer a better way to engage with lived experience (Mukaia 1989; Ronai 1992; Ellis 1993; Richardson 1997; Scott-Hoy and Ellis 2008). We foreground the embodied, interpersonal, and emotional content of David's experience of war and Sarah's engagement with it. We arrange the chairs so that our bodies are turned towards each other but we also face the audience.

David: Through many years of a long academic journey I have struggled to find new ways of representing my story. I have used life story as a method which gives a representation of and reasoning behind the many of the issues that I have faced. I have used sporadic diary writing in black moleskin journals to represent my lived experience. I have used poetic and lyrical representation to illustrate and give meaning to living with my remembered past so that embodied silences can be heard. Finally, I have used life story within the rigours of my academic journey to contextualize my research writings. Autoethnography has enabled me to find connections between the personal and the political, opening windows to

my "lived moments of struggle" (Ellis and Bochner 2000, 744), and enabled me to look outwards towards parts of my experience which are forged in the historical, cultural, and social aspects of being a war veteran.

However, there is always a tension. The journey of becoming the wounded storyteller is risky (Frank 1995). I expose myself to the world. I am opening myself to critique, being judged, misunderstood, or, at worst, not being believed.

Sarah: Is it more risky talking to me about your experiences because I am critical of military power?

David: There is risk in disclosing all parts of your hidden self. However, unless there is an openness to the "other" and the positions that they take, even if they are critical, I feel we do not get a true engagement with an experience of war. My expectation is that when I tell my story I am listened to and heard, and in turn I will do the same. It is about having a different conversation. The dialogues we engage in are a call to witness for you, the audience, and myself. They are not just a call to me to assume "a responsibility for telling what happened" (Frank 1995, 137). Rather, they imply a relationship with obligations: to engage with constructions of truths, to engage in partial meaning-making, to be open to change, to tell others of the experience of witnessing, and to explore issues of ethics and care (Ropers-Huilman 1999).

Sarah: On the one hand you want researchers and wider society to understand you and other war veterans, but on the other hand there is a real sense that we cannot understand.

David: Yes, but to say that no one can possibly understand is exactly the problem. If you set out to "understand" there is a chance you will not understand. These polarities between understanding and "not understanding" are rigid and inflexible. I did not "understand" the World War Two veteran I talked about earlier, in this sense. It was only when at the bar with Brian that I did not feel alone. There was a strong and emotional connection with someone of common experience. It was not a spoken connection; it was something that I felt by being in his presence and something I have felt many times since then. So I don't like the word "understanding"; I want the academic world to acknowledge and recognize the difficulties of "understanding" a sense of war. It's not about "understanding" abstractly, it is about listening and hearing and not censoring. To understand a sense of war you have to be able to walk with the person as they tell their story. If you walk beside someone, you see more. This is an act of witnessing. "Understand" is such an academic word; you need to empathize.

Sarah: What do you mean by empathy?

David: Let's imagine that I'm laid in a cold muddy ditch; I would not want you to climb into the ditch with me. Empathy is the ability for you, the researcher, to have one foot in the ditch and one foot on the bank. So it is about the ability to have one foot in my world but always keeping one foot in your world. I believe that society sometimes offers too much sympathy to war veterans. To show sympathy you are lying in the cold, wet mud next to me. This is not useful. You can have an empathetic critical engagement that involves challenge, agreement, and disagreement. However, it is approached from a more compassionate position, rather than from a didactic power-based position where the researcher knows best.

A conversation is not about reproducing pre-conceived assumptions. It is about the ability of the conversation to take you on a journey, and this involves trust. The conversation is more than the sum of its parts; it is more than just another "method" for extracting or disseminating the same data. Rather, the process itself *generates* different knowledge and calls upon us to embrace different ways of knowing. It collapses the distinctions between researcher and researched, between "data gathering" and analysis, and between "the field" and the research "outputs".

Debate about the value of narrative forms of enquiry have has focused on their "criticality" or their ability to be critiqued (Naumes 2015). For us, this debate suggests that critique comes from outside, or is at least "activated" outside the production of the narrative itself. However, we argue that the mode of research praxis we have engaged in is inherently critical. Through our conversations, we continue to "re-evaluate and disrupt what we have been taught" (Jackson 2004, 686) by questioning ourselves. This is risky for it imperils

> the very possibility of being recognized by others, since to question the norms of recognition that govern what I might be, to ask what they leave out, what they might be compelled to accommodate, is, in relation to the present regime, to risk unrecognizability as a subject. (Butler 2005, 23)

As such the relationship between us is an ethical one:

> the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgment: to someone else who is there to be addressed and whose address is there to be received. (Butler 2005, 21)

In our presentations we expose what academic norms of recognition leave out, and in doing so we risk not being recognized by the academic community. This has been an uncomfortable process, and this bodily sensation "speaks" of the absences in our usual practice. The engagement from our audiences has been constructive. Some have strongly supported the intervention because it enacts a politics we often talk about abstractly. Others have been more cautious. It has been suggested that veterans are already privileged voices in society, implying that our presentations are not needed. Others have said they were "turned off" by the "listen to my pain" narrative of veterans. In another discussion it was suggested that recovering veterans' stories might be a dead-end for anti-militarist politics.

David: These are interesting responses, especially the "listen to the pain" comment. By being "turned off" you are silencing that embodied part of my narrative. My "pain" cannot be turned off and on. All I can do is acknowledge and respect those embodiments I carry within my "skin" and ask you humbly, as the witness, to listen.

Sarah: I understand the caution regarding veterans and their "highly militarized" accounts. However, my experience is that you, and other veterans I have met, aren't any more militarized than I am. I remain sympathetic to but critical of your claims about the veteran being "different" from others in society. We've discussed our families, live music, our anger at the government, and our private battles with anxiety. Your anxiety may stem from military service, but it doesn't

sound like it feels much different to the anxiety I experience. The point is that you are not just "a veteran", you are a contradictory, complex person, and there are millions of veteran stories which will all be different. In a context where gross oversimplifications about veterans abound, surely it has never been more important to engage with the complexity of those experiences.

I'm troubled by the presumed hierarchy about whose stories are more important. Of course, power determines who is heard. Yet the claim that "veterans" are already privileged voices, and therefore should not be heard, is problematic for me because in making that claim you silence and abstract people and their experiences, enacting the same kind of violence you are seeking to critique.

The question of an anti-militarist politics is complicated. I want us to remain open about what an anti-militarist politics might look like. Just as we need to go beyond archetypes of veterans, we need to go beyond archetypes of peace campaigners. What if the very resources for the challenging of militarism are to be found in places we least expect? What if the neat boundaries we draw between militarism and anti-militarism are part of the problem?

David: It is only recently I have started to consider this polarity of militarism and anti-militarism, and its troubling nature. It could be said that I have a place in both camps. I am proud of my service for my country, but I also feel angry at the lack of political responsibility taken for the aftermath of war. I would agree that as soon as you place these complicated concepts within neat boundaries you silence many of those who stand in no man's land. It is this troubling space that I like to inhabit. I am more comfortable in no man's land because it is here I feel I have found my voice, and it is where other voices can be found.

Alongside questions about voice, there are questions about hearing. Sarah is hearing impaired, and for her, listening requires careful attention to non-verbal cues and visual strategies such as lip-reading; it is not an easy or passive activity. Unlike traditional academic practice which concerns itself primarily with voice, to engage with someone's embodied experience requires a different form of listening than that usually engaged in within academic practice. A recent teaching experience where David ran a workshop for Sarah's undergraduate students illustrates this:

Sarah: The following week I asked the students what they thought about the workshop. I listened to my highly articulate and intelligent students deconstruct your identity. They could not reconcile your pride in your military identity with the pain serving in a war had caused you. For them it seemed that you should embrace a critique of militarism and become an anti-war veteran. Your narrative created an "ontological fracture" in their understanding (Naumes 2015, 823). A few of them didn't enjoy the workshop. It became apparent that they had a series of expectations about what a war veteran would be like and that they wanted to hear "war stories". I asked if they were *really* listening to your story. Or were they too busy thinking of reasons not to hear? My students' skilful deconstruction of your identity was first class, but, I asked them, where did that leave us? To really listen is to remain open to being transformed by someone's story. We

spent two hours discussing the students' encounter with you. As the module continued, I felt that the time spent with you had been transformative for the students and their engagement with war.

David: I entered the room as an academic whose aim was to give an academic workshop and offer alternative representations of knowing. So my conversation in my head on the way home was a pedagogic critique and not a concern for the exposing of my war veteran skin. I never set out to be understood as a war veteran, only to offer my research. I hoped the audience would think differently and would be challenged by the contradictions that my autoethnographical research offers up. Of course, as a visiting lecturer I am very pleased that it went well. However, it is important to also say that as an "object" of my research I do not feel the need to justify my subjective self. It is more about an act of witnessing and, through that process, evoking questions, critical thinking, and perhaps connecting with other narratives within the audience members' lives. I am happy that the workshop appears to have moved your students in some way by enabling a useful critical process.

Sarah: It is interesting that my students recognized you foremostly as a war veteran, and only secondarily as a researcher. It is not just you who wears different skins; my students *see* different skins, which brings us back to the relationality between you and those witnessing your story.

Academic ways of listening foreclose the potential of narrative to open up different ways of knowing and being with another person. Alongside new ways of speaking, we also need new ways of listening, and seeing, if we are to engage with embodied experience. People and their experiences often fail to live up to our expectations but if we listen carefully we may find things we didn't expect.

(Not a) conclusion: an experiential and affective politics

Lauren B. Wilcox (2015, 5) has argued that taking bodies seriously is a "critical project for opening up space for thinking about politics and resistance in ways previously overlooked". In this paper, we have tried to suggest that there might be other ways to do our research that can enable this critical potential. We do not see this as the final word on our collaboration, nor do we do not want to pre-empt or foreclose what the reader might take from it. We did not set out to argue for a particular representation of war veterans in society, only to explore how we might do research which opens up the possibility for multiple representations. Rather than tying up "loose ends", in this final section we reflect on what is at stake for both of us in our collaboration in order to make visible the points of tension within our relationship. We want to acknowledge that there are two different people creating this work, and that our conversation is an "ongoing and negotiated process" and itself subject to transformation (Lassiter 2005, 97).

Sarah: I am a feminist researcher and, as such, I believe in an engaged scholarship which aims to transform the world through a critical praxis which is collaborative and democratic and takes seriously the emotional and personal.[3] This entails a commitment to openness and uncertainty, and a relentless questioning of those analytical concepts – for example, "militarization" – which can too often generalize and subsume messy individual experiences.

David: Without the historical journey of research into PTSD we, as a society, would not have made the progress in its treatment that we have. However, as a war veteran and political activist, current research does not excite or inspire me. It is not accessible to the many war veterans and their families who want to engage with the research community. This research often marginalizes veterans' voices, and in many cases silences them. Research speaks for us, and assumptions are made about us.

I am interested in why the narrative of war veterans within research has not changed much since the end of the Great War. We do not know the true extent of how war impacts the lives of war veterans, their families, and wider society. The fragmentation of the support offered to war veterans and their families from the public and private sectors potentially hides the extent of the problem. Through my work with Veteran to Veteran I have perceived first-hand the limited desire of researchers to carry out what you would term engaged scholarship. The answers to the many questions I have are currently not being addressed. Yet without a truer picture of war veterans and their families' experiences, we will continue, as a society, to make assumptions. The way veterans are represented affects the material support and understanding they get from society. The voice of the veteran should be foregrounded both within the support offered to us and within research. The fundamental change required is for a collaborative approach asking us what we want and what works best for us.

There is no doubting that my work with veterans and their families is my passion. This academic paper not only stimulates, challenges, and supports my academic modes of thinking, it also connects with the embodied part of me that wants to make a difference. Importantly, my wanting to make a difference is not based on what I have "read about" but what I have experienced.

Sarah: I am concerned that much academic engagement with war routinely pacifies, mitigates, and disciplines the sensory affects of war. It enables veterans' experiences to be "contained" as policy problems, marginalizing their complex political content and silencing debates about the effects of war and the responsibility for war.

David: How do you, as a researcher working within the powerful, hierarchical academic discourses we have talked about, widen your own research agenda?

Sarah: I try to remain critical about what I am doing, why I am doing it, and whether there might be different ways of doing it. I have questions: Firstly, what *is* an "embodied" encounter with militarism? I don't think this is an easy question to answer. Secondly, what makes that encounter "critical" as opposed to being in the service of the military–industrial complex many of us look to critique? I think we need to move beyond the subversion/co-option binary that characterizes much debate on this question. Thirdly, *how* do we, as researchers, capture and represent an embodied experience of war and militarism? And finally, how can we enable a more compassionate and ethical conversation about war and its embodied effects? Our collaboration has allowed me to explore these questions. I think embodiment, experience, and personhood need to be taken more seriously through a politics of the person-as-such (Edkins 2011). We must resist the temptation to abstract or enact closure on embodied experience. We must treat our research subjects primarily as persons with whom we have an ethical relationship.

There is a connection between our collaboration and a wider politics of resisting war and violence in its multiple forms. As Butler (2010, ix) states, "the opposition to war has to take place, in part, through remaking the conditions of its possibility and probability". An essential condition of possibility for war is the objectification of populations whose lives and personhood are not, in Butler's terms, "grievable". I think that the processes of objectification and generalization, and the erasure of personhood in research on veterans, including some "critical" work, are the same processes which make state-sanctioned violence possible in contemporary liberal states. These wider interests of mine are potentially a source of disagreement for us.

David: I can see there could be a perceived tension between your political agenda (critiquing militarism) and some of the positions I take, for example my pride in my military service. However, for me it is about not having to justify my subjectivity and inhabiting traditional polarities or specific political agendas. This is the whole point and purpose of the many conversations we have. To be able to move our dialogic performances away from polarized positions enables us to explore and be open to the possibilities that exist in no man's land. It requires us both to resist flying our banners. It is through these ongoing dialogic performances with you that I am able to show (not tell) what I would like from society as a whole and the academic community.

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Notes

1. The first performance, called "Rethinking the Veteran", is available here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFczPv7-B88. ForcesWatch Militarisation in Everyday Life conference, London, 19 October 2013.
2. Results accessed 31 May 2015. PILOTS database search available here: http://search.proquest.com/pilots/?accountid=28179
3. We would like to acknowledge Maya Eichler for the term "engaged scholarship".

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