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**How the Dirty Work of War Impacts  
Support for Veterans  
(Paper and Presentation)**

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2020: How the Dirty Work of War Impacts Support for Homecoming Veterans

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## **ABSTRACT**

Every society has dirty work that has to get done – what are the consequences of doing it? Despite public discourse to, “support the troops,” many post-9/11 veterans encounter social friction when reintegrating into civilian society. Using a factorial survey experiment, this study examines how members of the American public react to information about someone’s military past when evaluating veterans for professional and social opportunities. Findings show that people exhibit outwardly positive baseline views towards veterans. Nevertheless, any allusion to the use of controlled violence – the military’s “dirty work” and *raison d’être* – strongly and negatively impacted veterans’ prospects. The social consequences of dirty work were not offset by mitigating circumstances and were especially penalizing when veterans sought positions involving close and sustained contact with civilians. By showing that people can simultaneously support and judge what someone did in the military, findings highlight the need to reexamine what society expects from the military and the people who serve it.

**Key Words:** Military Veterans; Valuation; Moral Judgments; Stigma; Dirty Work

## **INTRODUCTION**

Every society has “dirty work” that has to get done (Hughes 1958). Fires must be fought, the sick must be cared for, and someone has to fight the wars. Since the events of September 11, 2001, over 4.2 million people have participated in “post 9/11” war efforts by serving in the United States (U.S.) Armed Forces (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics 2018). Since few remain in the military workforce until retirement (Segal and Segal 2004), this spike in accessions raises important questions about what happens to post-9/11 veterans when they return to civilian society. What are the social consequences of doing America’s dirty work?

This study focuses on the moral dimensions of military work and how they impact evaluations of veterans during gatekeeping encounters. Veterans and their advocates have long expressed concern that misunderstandings about military life undermine veterans’ prospects in civilian society (Gallucci 2010). I test the extent to which their concerns are warranted by having members of the American public evaluate post-9/11 military veterans for a variety of opportunities. Less than eight percent of the national population has been in the military (Department of Veterans Affairs 2016), meaning most gatekeepers are civilians with limited understanding of military experiences. How are civilians’ evaluations of veterans impacted by whether or not the veteran participated in the dirty work of war?

I recruit members of the American public for a factorial survey experiment that simulates gatekeeping encounters between veterans and civilians. While the vast majority of service members do not experience combat (Department of Defense 2016), research shows that many people presume veterans are inclined towards violence (MacLean and Kleykamp 2014). An experimental approach allows me to isolate and measure the extent to which these types of stereotypes impact veterans’ support. Findings show that veterans who undertake the dirty work

of war incur a “mark,” a negative social credential that impacts their prospects while reintegrating into civilian society. The military, as institution, may have a legal and social mandate to employ controlled violence in the context of war (Weber 1922). Yet findings show that actually engaging in such activities leads to lower social standing in the eyes of civilians.

### **GATEKEEPING CIVILIAN REENTRY**

The U.S. has been at war for over 18 years, one of the longest stretches of armed conflict in the nation’s history. Following the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Armed Forces (i.e., Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard) experienced a spike in military participation. Since most service members do not stay in the military for their entire working lives (Segal and Segal 2004), higher accessions foretold increases in the number of veteran homecomers. Between 2001 and 2016, over 4.2 million post-9/11 veterans left the military to begin the process of reintegrating into civilian society (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics 2018).

Support for veterans often manifests through public gestures, like acknowledgements at sporting events, discounts at stores, priority boarding on airlines, or yellow ribbons on lapels. Though important for expressing thanks, such gestures offer limited insight into how veterans are supported in their everyday lives. From an interaction standpoint, public gestures are unidirectional, atemporal, and not directed towards any particular person, making them comparatively less risky than supporting an individual *in situ*. A more meaningful form of support is expressed by the company one keeps.

Based on how “the troops” are addressed in public, one would imagine that homecoming veterans receive warm welcomes in institutional and social spaces. Yet, educators (Steele et al. 2010), government agencies (Strom et al. 2012), psychologists (Rudd et al. 2011), journalists

(Finkel 2013; Glantz 2009), political scientists (Bacevich 2013), and veterans (Hartley 2005; Marlantes 2011) suggest that civilian reentry is often a fraught period of time. Approximately 84 percent of post-9/11 veterans think that the public does not understand the challenges that they and their families have endured (Pew Research Center 2011). Many veterans also leave the military feeling out of sync with what they perceive as civilian values and ways of doing (Finkel 2013; Glantz 2009; Hartley 2005; Marlantes 2011; Schutz 1945; Steele et al. 2010; Strom et al. 2012). Bridging the gap can be especially daunting when 42 percent of veterans think that public support for the military reflects social desirability, rather than genuine respect (Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation 2014).

For veterans and non-veterans alike, the prospect of social integration is predicated upon approval from institutional and social “gatekeepers.” Gatekeepers limit access to the groups they represent by only accepting newcomers with select normative traits (Goffman 1959, 1963). Newcomers signal normative fitness by revealing whatever personal information they believe will enhance desirability. By making normative evaluations explicit, gatekeeping encounters offer researchers a window into the normative demands that facilitate social interaction (Goffman 1963).

Homecoming veterans go before a wide variety of gatekeepers, since leaving a “total institution” creates both professional and social vacuums (Goffman 1961a). Yet most of what we know about veterans during gatekeeping interactions comes from research on hiring (MacLean and Kleykamp 2014). This research shows that disclosing one’s military background can penalize job candidates who are white (D’Anton 1983), but improve desirability for otherwise disadvantaged groups, like women (Kleykamp 2010) and racial minorities (D’Anton

1983; Kleykamp 2009, 2010; Mare and Winship 1984; De Tray 1982). This study builds upon previous research by expanding the scope beyond employability.

Civilian reentry is a multi-faceted process involving gatekeeping challenges in domains that include, but are not limited to employment (Borus 1975; Faulkner and McGaw 1977; Schutz 1945). Bolstered by support from the “Post-9/11 G. I. Bill,” many returning veterans seek additional schooling to develop new professional pathways (Radford 2011). Since most contemporary veterans are young adults, romantic pursuits and partnering are also high priorities. Relationships with friends and family must adjust to the restoration of regular contact (Borus 1975; Faulkner and McGaw 1977; Schutz 1945), while new relationships introduce veterans to unfamiliar communities. How do gatekeepers in these other domains evaluate the normative fitness of homecoming veterans?

## **DIRTY WORKERS AND THE PEOPLE THAT THEY SERVE**

Understanding how veterans fare in the eyes of gatekeepers is especially important considering the moral undertones of military service. While people may outwardly champion veterans as, “the most deserving of citizens” (Feinstein 2015), valuations of military service also have to contend with the moral shadows of war.

The military, as an institution, exists to employ controlled violence on behalf of the state (Weber 1922), making military work an example of “moral dirty work.” Controlled violence is certainly not all of what the military does, but it is an important and fundamental potentiality in what military professionals do. Work becomes “dirty” when it involves tasks that are otherwise taboo (Hughes 1958, 1962). “Physical” dirty work engages materials that evoke visceral discomfort, like working with human remains (e.g., medical examiners) or commercial waste (e.g., garbage collectors). “Social” dirty work puts one in contact with socially marginalized

groups, like criminal offenders (e.g., prison guards) or refugees (e.g., aid workers). And, “moral” dirty work involves tasks that are considered immoral, if not downright illegal, outside of their occupational context. Dirtiness does not necessarily reflect the symbolic prestige of a job; for example, firefighting counts as dirty work (Desmond 2007). Nor should dirty work be conflated with salary, as lawyers and medical doctors can also be considered dirty workers.

Like other types of professionals, dirty workers (DWs) are bound to non-DWs (“outsiders”) by an interdependent service relationship (Hughes 1963). DWs provide physically, socially, and morally compromising services that address collective needs. Outsiders endorse these services through patronage, policies, or tacit consent. In spite of this mutually beneficial arrangement, research suggests that many outsiders are uneasy around DWs (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Coser 1969; Hughes 1958, 1962). Non-police officers can be wary of the idea that police officers can employ force, surveil citizens, and otherwise negotiate laws (Skolnick 1966; Waddington 1999). Likewise, civilians could be wary of the idea that military service members may have to take a life during combat.

Some of the unease may reflect an underlying fear that dirty work will creep into non-professional settings. Though dirty work is, by design, restricted to life on the job, research on police officers (Skolnick 1966), bail bondsmen (Davis 1984), private detectives (Shulman 2000), and other DWs (Ashforth et al. 2007) shows that many outsiders believe dirty work will manifest in non-professional settings. The military professional’s dirty work is bound to the context of war, with strict rules of engagement stipulating when and how acts of violence can occur. Nevertheless, scholars (Borus 1975; Faulkner and McGaw 1977; MacLean and Kleykamp 2014; Shay 2002; Starr 1974), journalists (Finkel 2013; Junger 2010, 2016), veterans (Hartley 2005; Marlantes 2011), and others (Abrams 2012; Fountain 2012) have all documented a pervasive

misconception that veterans are inclined towards violence. One of the more common manifestations of this misconception are questions about killing people during combat. Though only around 30 percent of service members work in combat roles (Department of Defense 2016), one would be hard pressed to find a veteran who has not been asked about killing (Pang 2018).

Unease around “dirtiness” could reflect a more intuitive reaction to acts outside the norm. Douglas (1966:85) argued that it was “sheer fantasy” to interpret concerns around dirtiness as a practical fear of contagion, since simply encountering the taboo is sufficient to provoke unease. Dirtiness can produce negative affective reactions because it highlights the boundedness and precariousness of social order, which undermines tacit assumptions about stability and ubiquity (Coser 1969; Goffman 1967; Hughes 1962; Schutz 1944). For example, members of the public are uneasy about the “dirty hands” of political tradecraft because moral transgressions, regardless of their intended purpose, are fundamentally unsettling (Walzer 1973).

The relationship between DWs and outsiders has implications for social integration. DWs have been known to shirk interactions with outsiders, whether to avoid unwanted stereotypes (Skolnick 1966) or out of contempt for people who do not put themselves on the line (Dick 2005). Outsiders likewise contribute to social distance by ‘forgetting’ that dirty work is occurring, out-grouping DWs, ‘cleaning’ dirty work (e.g., overemphasizing the service aspects), or by physically avoiding where dirty work happens (Coser 1969; Hughes 1962). In principle, social distance allows DWs and outsiders to circumvent potentially awkward interactions while maintaining a professional relationship. But this strategy has its limits since, like anyone else, DWs embody a wide variety of non-professional roles. In addition to being workers, DWs are family members, friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens. How are interactions off-the-clock impacted by the shadow of work that is morally taboo?

Most of what we know about interactions between DWs and outsiders comes from social theory (e.g., Coser 1969; Hughes 1958, 1962), psychology experiments (e.g., Ashforth et al. 2007), and first-hand accounts from DWs (e.g., Dick 2005; Pang 2018). These sources reveal social tension and capture DWs' perspectives on its potential implications. Comparatively less is known about the significance of dirty work experiences, to outsiders, during every day interactions. How do civilians evaluate information about veterans' military backgrounds when acting as gatekeepers? How does the dirty work of war impact veterans' prospects for social reintegration?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

A factorial survey experiment (FSE) was used to simulate gatekeeping encounters between veterans and civilians. FSEs are a vignette-based method that simulates decision-making and normative judgements (Jasso 2006). A FSE was selected over other experimental techniques because FSEs accommodate more varying factors, which helps reduce bias in two ways. First, the increased complexity of vignettes offers a closer approximation of how people make decisions in the real world, which are rarely based upon one distinguishing factor (Jasso 2006; Rossi and Nock 1982). Additional complexity also makes it more difficult to game responses (Evans 2003; Hechter 1999; Jasso 2006), which is especially important when studying a population with potentially high levels of outward support.

### ***Factors***

Hypothetical veteran candidates varied by four factors: (1) former military occupation, (2) whether or not he killed an enemy combatant, (3) reason for entering the military, and (4) gatekeeping context (Figure 1).

**[Figure 1 about here.]**

Former military occupation is one of the more common pieces of information that veterans disclose about their military pasts. Like other former jobs, they are integral aspects of personal biographies (e.g., résumés, online profiles) since they bracket periods of time and signal what one did in a previous institutional space. Since military organizations involve an enormous variety of occupations, the study tests how a range of military occupations impact veterans' standing. I selected four, relatively well-known but very different military occupations from combat, support, and elite occupational elements in the U.S. Army: Infantryman, Intelligence Analyst, Administrative Specialist, and Special Forces Weapons expert.<sup>1</sup>

The second factor focused on the effects of participating in the dirty work of war – i.e., whether or not the hypothetical veteran candidate had, “killed enemy combatants,” in the context of a deployment. Although it is highly unlikely that this information would be disclosed during a gatekeeping encounter, it was important to include for several reasons. First, while it is true that the military does more than combat missions (e.g., peacekeeping, force-building, stabilization), military work still occurs against a backdrop of potential violence. Moreover, while most service members do not experience combat first-hand, research shows that civilians nevertheless assume veterans have engaged in violence (Feinstein 2015; MacLean and Kleykamp 2014). Experimentally manipulating whether or not the veteran had killed an enemy combatant allows for a test of the social consequences of the assumptions held about veterans and violence, regardless of the extent to which they are true.

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<sup>1</sup> The correct occupational title is Special Forces Weapons Sergeant. It was adjusted to “Special Forces Weapons expert” after pilot testing revealed that respondents were incorrectly, albeit understandably, interpreting the word “Sergeant” as an indicator of rank and prestige.

Potential stigmas around killing come from the fact that, in most contexts, violence against others is morally taboo. While moral judgments are often treated as absolute and binary (e.g., Goffman 1961b), social psychology experiments show that moral outrage is moderated by the circumstances in which the moral transgression occurred (Bazerman and Gino 2012; Corrigan et al. 2003). To test whether the social consequences of dirty work could be moderated, I included an experimental condition describing why someone started doing dirty work. Since people are more likely to forgive transgressions when they believe the behavior was compelled by exogenous forces (Bazerman and Gino 2012; Corrigan et al. 2003; Walzer 1973), one would imagine that being drafted into the military would curry more favor than enlisting for personally-motivated reasons. On the other hand, the moral value of going, “where the action is,” is tethered to voluntariness (Goffman 1961b), which would suggest less favor for veterans that had been drafted. The study tested both possibilities by including four reasons for joining the military: (1) “money and benefits” (i.e., individualistic), (2) “to avenge 9/11” (i.e., individualistic), (3) “to help others” (i.e., altruistic), and (4) “because he was summoned by a new draft” (i.e., exogenously compelled).

The last factor tested the importance of context. I included four gatekeeping scenarios that commonly occur during civilian reentry and the transition to adulthood: (1) “applied for your program at school,” (2) “applied for a job on your team at work,” (3) “asked your best female friend, who is single, out on a date,” or (4) “asked your daughter, who is single, out on a date.” Research on veterans from previous eras suggests that positive experiences in these domains are key for reintegrating into civilian society (Borus 1975; Faulkner and McGaw 1977; Hollingshead 1946; Schutz 1945). Employment, schooling, and romantic options are also important for long-term status and health outcomes (MacLean and Elder, Jr. 2007; Wilmoth and London 2013).

The fourth reason, meeting the family of a romantic interest, was inspired by research on racial discrimination (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2006), which shows that even generally-accepting people may draw the line when it comes to family legacies.

### *Controls*

Previous research shows that evaluations of veterans may be impacted by unobserved meanings attributed to military credentials. To address this possibility, hypothetical veterans shared a baseline profile with several articulated controls (Figure 1). Following Pager (2003, 2007), the baseline profile was constructed with the intent of maximizing social desirability.

Scholars have argued that the veteran status may be treated as a sign of socio-economic disadvantage, since the military has historically attracted otherwise struggling communities (MacLean 2011; Segal and Segal 2004). The baseline profile, therefore, included several characteristics that signaled socio-economic advantage. Specifically, all hypothetical veterans were designated as white, college-educated males that had regularly worked since leaving the military and had comparable work experience to other potential candidates.

People have also been known to interpret military service as a proxy for physical, medical, or psychological fitness, since recruits are repeatedly screened throughout their careers (Flynn 1993; De Tray 1982). To dispel any doubts about veterans' overall well-being, the baseline profile also indicated that all hypothetical candidates were young (29-years old), physically healthy (regularly exercised), and sociable (regularly spent time with family and friends). Moreover, on a separate line for emphasis, respondents were told that, "None of them have physical or mental health problems."

More specific military skills and experiences could also signal information to outsiders. For example, people have been known to infer technical aptitude from which branch someone

served in, since some branches (e.g., Navy, Air Force) have a higher number of technical occupations than others (MacLean 2004). There is also a widespread belief that military training instills transferable vocational skills or work habits, like teamwork and discipline (Kleykamp 2009). Though military promotions are largely bureaucratic, especially early in one's career, civilians have been known to interpret rank information through the lens of expertise or capability (MacLean 2004). The type of discharge one receives can also influence perceptions, with other-than-honorable discharges being interpreted as signs of transgressions during service (Kleykamp 2009; De Tray 1982). To control for military skills and experiences that were beyond the scope of research, the baseline profile put all hypothetical veterans from the same branch (Army) and rank (enlisted). All hypothetical veterans were also given the same type of deployment experience (had deployed to a conflict zone), time in service (six years), and type of discharge (honorable).

Controlled characteristics were translated into vignette text and placed in a header that remained visible throughout the experimental portion of the study (Figure 2). Using a header, instead of providing the controls once at the beginning, allowed me to consistently reduce ambiguity around how respondents were imagining the veterans portrayed in the study.

**[Figure 2 about here.]**

### ***Procedures***

Gatekeeping interactions were simulated by having respondents read about and evaluate a series of hypothetical veteran candidates. Each experimental vignette (Figure 2) described one veteran candidate in detail and then provided an accompanying rating task: "Based only on the information you have, how do you feel about the individual in this scenario?" Respondents were to then drag and position a sliding indicator on a scale that ranged from -100 ("Strongly

Against”) to 100 (“Strongly For”), with 0 marked as “Neutral.” The slider’s default position was set to -100 (“Strongly Against”), since pilot testing showed that respondents were more motivated to engage the slider when it was set at -100 (“Strongly Against”) than when it defaulted to a more socially-acceptable value (e.g., “Neutral”).

The study’s vignette population of 128 unique vignettes was generated by the Cartesian product of each level defined by the four varying factors = 4 former military occupations x 2 conditions for whether or not he killed an enemy combatant x 4 reasons for entering the military x 4 gatekeeping contexts. Since a vignette population of this size would be too large for any one person to reliably evaluate, FSEs invite respondents to rate a purposive sampling of vignettes (Jasso 2006). I created these samples using a SAS macro developed for marketing research that shuffles the total vignette population and then randomly distributes vignettes across decks without replacement (Kuhfeld 2010). This process resulted in eight decks, each containing 16 distinct vignettes.

Respondents were randomly assigned to one deck apiece, using blocking and randomization functionality in Qualtrics. To facilitate more conservative estimates, the ordering of vignettes was also randomized for each new respondent. After rating their assigned vignettes, respondents completed a short survey on their demographic backgrounds, connections to military communities, and political attitudes.

### ***Data***

To capture a range of perspectives on military veterans, the survey experiment was open to any U.S.-based person over age 18. The experiment was hosted on Qualtrics, but study participants were recruited and paid through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is a

large, crowdsourcing research platform that allows researchers to recruit and pay “Workers” for online tasks.

While MTurk is not a national probability sample, it offers several advantages over other collection options. First, MTurk offers more control over data integrity than independently hosting one’s study (e.g., on a personal webpage) since MTurk has structured and normalized the ability to reject unsatisfactory work. Comparative tests have also found that, relative to university research labs, MTurk offers faster, larger-scale data collection at a lower cost and with fewer missing data (Paolacci and Chandler 2014; Paolacci et al. 2010; Weinberg et al. 2014). Comparative tests also showed that MTurk samples more closely represent the national population than the types of college samples typically used in experimental research (Benoit et al. 2012; Buhrmester et al. 2011; Paolacci and Chandler 2014; Paolacci et al. 2010; Weinberg et al. 2014).

In April 2016, 321 members of the U.S. public participated in the factorial survey experiment. In exchange for their participation, each respondent was given a \$7.00 study incentive. Three people were dropped from the sample, due to missing demographic data, resulting in a final sample of 318 respondents. Descriptive statistics show that the sample hold a variety of demographic backgrounds (Table 1). The gender distribution skewed slightly male, with only 38 percent identifying as female. The average age of respondents was approximately 36 years old. In self-identifying their racial/ethnic backgrounds, 83 percent indicated “White/Caucasian,” five percent as “African American/Black,” five percent as “Hispanic,” six percent as “Asian,” and two percent as “Other/Mixed.” Since the majority of the sample reported being “White/Caucasian,” the remaining categories were combined into a binary variable for race/ethnicity (White=1, Non-White=0).

**[Table 1 about here.]**

The sample also included a variety of educational backgrounds. One percent of the sample reported their highest level of education as some high school. Thirty-five percent finished school after completing high school or a GED. Nineteen percent completed some college or an Associate's Degree. Forty percent completed a Bachelor's degree and the remaining five percent completed a Master's Degree or Doctorate. Due to uneven cell sizes, I combined education categories into a binary variable indicating whether or not the respondent had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher (Completed a Bachelor's Degree or Higher = 1, Did not Complete a Bachelor's Degree = 0).

Politically, the sample was primarily U.S.-born (97 percent) and included a broad distribution of self-reported political views. Respondents indicated the, "majority of their political views," using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Extremely Liberal) to 7 (Extremely Conservative). As a whole, the sample had a mean political score of 2.61. Since the distribution of political views across intervals was fairly even, the Likert-scale format was retained for analytical models.

Respondents were also asked about their first- and second-hand experiences with military life, since people who are more familiar with the military might evaluate veterans differently than those with little to no contact. Six percent of the sample reported first-hand knowledge of the military, indicating that they were veterans of the United States Armed Forces or the armed forces of a foreign power. Respondents' second-hand knowledge of the military was estimated based upon how many veterans they knew and, of these, how many had shared first-hand stories about military life. Approximately 26 percent of the sample had not heard stories about military life from any veterans, 45 percent had heard military stories from one or two veterans, and 29

percent had heard military stories from three or more veterans. Not surprisingly, those who had heard military stories from three or more veterans were overwhelmingly veterans themselves. Since so few respondents were veterans and since first- and second-hand military knowledge were severely confounded, the analytical models excluded the variable indicating veteran status. Focusing on second-hand military knowledge (i.e., the number of stories one had heard about military life) supported a larger proportion of the sample that included but was not limited to veterans, allowing for more nuanced consideration of how exposure to military life may impact evaluations.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Baseline Attitudes towards Veterans***

With each respondent (n=318) rating up to 16 hypothetical veteran candidates, the experiment generated a grand total of 5,071 ratings. Examination of the ratings distribution (Figure 3) showed that, consistent with public discourse to “support the troops,” respondents exhibited outwardly positive attitudes towards veteran candidates. The distribution also revealed that, instead of using the entire 200-point scale (ranging from -100 to 100), respondents restricted their ratings to an average range of 92 points, with a disproportionately high number of veterans being scored at 100 (“Strongly For”). The incomplete and non-normal use of the ratings scale suggests the outcome variable must be transformed before further analysis. To account for the fact that people may have different baseline views towards veterans, I centered the outcome variable on each respondent’s average rating score by calculating the mean of the 16 ratings that he or she had completed. Centering the ratings normalized the ratings distribution and shifted the overall sample mean closer to 0 (Figure 4). Mean-centering allowed each rating to be treated as a deviation from the respondent’s unique, baseline view towards veterans. Practically

speaking, this allowed me to test how experimental conditions inspired respondents to rate individual veterans in ways that differed from their baseline views towards veterans as a whole.

**[Figures 3 and 4 about here.]**

With experimental methods, it is important to address potential design effects. Since each deck contained a unique set of vignettes, I tested for deck effects by regressing each type of ratings (i.e., centered, un-centered) on dummy variables for each deck using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). None of the deck variables were significantly associated with ratings, suggesting deck variables could be excluded from subsequent analyses. I also tested for possible order effects by regressing each type of ratings on dummy variables representing vignette order (i.e., positions 1-16). Vignette order was not significantly associated with how respondents rated hypothetical veteran candidates.

### ***The Social Consequences of Dirty Work***

The main analysis focused on how desirability varied across veterans with different types of military backgrounds. The centered ratings and the four factors were fit into a linear mixed-effects model using maximum likelihood. Findings show that, in spite of generally positive baseline views veterans, respondents were selective about *which* veterans they supported and *when* (Table 2, Model 1).

**[Table 2 about here.]**

People join the military for a variety of reasons, from wanting to help others to seeking a steady paycheck (Elder Jr. et al. 2010; Kleykamp 2006). Results show that veterans who joined the military to earn money and benefits were rated an average of 8.4 points less desirable ( $p < .001$ ) than veterans who had been called up by a new (hypothetical) draft. Joining the military to avenge 9/11 incurred even harsher social penalties, with average ratings 16.0 points lower ( $p < .001$ ).

001) than those of veterans who were drafted. The sole reason inspiring favor among gatekeepers was joining the military for expressly altruistic purposes. On average, veterans that joined the military “to help others” were rated 14.6 points more favorable ( $p < .001$ ) than veterans that had been drafted.

For veterans, former military occupation is a key source of information about one’s military past. It is a way to signal knowledge, skills, and accomplishments, making it one of the most readily disclosed pieces of information on résumés, online biographies, and in conversation (MacLean and Kleykamp 2014). As an indicator of social standing in the military, former military occupation is also an important factor in how veterans sort themselves into networks after leaving the military (Pang 2018). By way of contrast, experimental findings revealed that former military occupation is only marginally salient to civilian gatekeepers. On average, respondents rated former Intelligence Analysts 2.5 points higher ( $p < .05$ ) than former Administrative Specialists. Former Infantryman were rated an average of 2.3 points less desirable ( $p < .05$ ) than veterans that had been Administrative Specialists. While both findings were statistically significant, such small coefficients offer limited practical insight. Former Special Forces Weapons experts did not receive significantly different ratings than former Administrative Specialists, all else being equal.

One may wonder whether the marginal to non-significant effect of former military occupation is the byproduct of having a primarily civilian sample, since civilians are generally less familiar with what military jobs entail. To explore this possibility, I expanded the model to include respondent-level variables representing gender, race/ethnicity, education, political views, age, and (first- or second-hand) military knowledge (Table 2, Model 3). All else being equal, military knowledge was not significantly associated with how respondents rated veteran

candidates. Moreover, the standard errors for the former military occupation variables remained low across models with and without respondents' background characteristics. These results suggest that former military occupation, while highly salient to veterans (Pang 2018), has limited impact on civilian gatekeepers. None of the other respondent-level characteristics significantly influenced either raw (Table 2, Model 4) or mean-centered ratings (Table 2, Model 3).

While the military's institutional mandate broadened in the late 20th century, its core function is still the coordination of force on behalf of the state. How does the dirty work of war impact veterans' standing in the eyes of gatekeepers? On average, respondents rated veterans that had killed enemy combatants 19.5 points lower (Table 2, Model 1,  $p < .001$ ) than veterans who had not. In other words, veterans faced strong social penalties for doing moral dirty work – even in the legally and socially legitimate context of a deployment. To underscore the severity of this penalty, recall that respondents bound their ratings to an average of 92 points (out of 200) on the scale. On a bounded scale, 19.5 points represents a 21 percent difference in ratings between veterans who had and had not killed enemy combatants while deployed. The highly significant and negative effect of killing confirms what veterans and their allies have long suspected – the dirty work of war incurs moral taint in the eyes of civilians, even in the presence of outward support. Considering the use of violence is an inseparable part of the military's institutional mandate, these findings raise important questions about how much support those affiliated with the military can, in fact, receive.

Moral qualities tend to be inter-situationally salient (Tavory 2011), yet the degree of importance could vary across contexts. To test how context affected gatekeepers' evaluations, I estimated how the type of opportunity impacted evaluations of veteran candidates. Results show that respondents were neither more nor less inclined towards the same veteran joining one's

workplace versus school. However, respondents were quite discerning about who joined their inner social circles. Respondents rated veterans who had asked a best female friend out on a date 8.0 points lower ( $p < .001$ ), on average, than veterans who had applied for the same program at school. Respondents were even more restrictive when returning veterans approached their families. Asking the respondent's daughter out on a date resulted in ratings that were 13.2 points lower ( $p < .001$ ) than ratings for veterans seeking schooling. Such findings echo research on racial discrimination, which has shown that people may be willing to welcome racial minorities in the workplace, but draw the line at inter-racial marriage in one's own family (e.g., Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

To test whether reactions to dirty work varied across context, I added a cross-product interaction term and re-ran the model (Table 2, Model 2). The expanded model shows that dirty work is especially penalizing when meeting the family of a romantic interest. Veterans that had killed enemy combatants on past deployments and were now pursuing romantic relationships with respondents' daughters received an additional 7.0 point penalty ( $p < .01$ ), on top of the penalties they received for killing at all (-17.4 points,  $p < .001$ ) and for pursuing the respondent's daughter at all (-9.7 points,  $p < .001$ ). Interactions between killing enemy combatants and other gatekeeping contexts were non-significant.

## **CONCLUSION**

DWs undertake physically, socially, and morally compromising tasks as a professional service to others (Hughes 1958). In principal, this professional arrangement includes a tacit social contract that DWs will not be penalized for taboo activities that are integral to their jobs. Based on the accolades post-9/11 veterans receive in public discourse, one would imagine that the social contract between veterans and civilians remains strong. One would hypothesize that

veterans return to civilian society with symbolic capital earned from doing the country's dirty work (Levy 2007).

This study examined how members of the American public evaluate various types of homecoming veterans. Findings show that, even when veterans are outwardly exalted for serving, they *also* receive social penalties from moral dirty work. While respondents exhibited overall positive views towards veterans, they sharply distinguished between veterans that had and had not done the dirty work of war. Veterans who killed enemy combatants while deployed were considered significantly less desirable than veterans who had not. More direct involvement with war violence (Infantrymen) resulted in marginally more social penalties than having worked a desk job (Administrative Specialists). And veterans who joined the Army with arguably violent intentions (avenging 9/11) received less welcome than those compelled by an external force (called up by a new, hypothetical draft). Previous research documents DWs' perceptions that their unusual areas of expertise are stigmatizing (Davis 1984; Dick 2005; Skolnick 1966; Shulman 2000). Findings corroborate DWs' accounts and show that sheer affiliation with dirty work can impact social standing.

Scholars have posed that moral attributes outweigh amoral attributes in evaluations of others (Goffman 1961b; Tavory 2011). This study provides evidentiary support of this hypothesis, since the moral taint incurred from killing enemy combatants overrode other experimental conditions. Potentially moderating characteristics, like varying professional expectations (former military occupation) or what led someone to be in such a situation (reason for joining the military), did not alter the negative effect of having killed enemy combatants at all. Results were also consistent across various types of respondents, as none of the respondent-level characteristics were significantly associated with ratings. Cross-product interactions

between respondent-level characteristics and experimental manipulations were also non-significant when compared to un-centered rating scores.

Moral evaluations are often conceptualized as a zero-sum game, yet findings show that characteristics with opposing moral valences can lead to a situation of both accolades and critique. Consistent with public messaging, baseline attitudes towards veterans were largely positive. Gatekeepers were especially inclined towards veterans who undertook dirty work for explicitly altruistic reasons (wanting to help others), rather than exogenous ones (drafted). Still, altruistic intentions did not generate enough social standing to moderate the social consequences of dirty work. That said, the fact that altruistic intentions independently enhanced social standing suggests positive moral characteristics offer a potential avenue for managing moral taint.

It may seem odd to effectively equate military service with acts of violence for purposes of an experiment, especially since the military encompasses such a wide range of professions. Nevertheless, one cannot escape the fact that the military's institutional mandate is to enact force on behalf of the state (Weber 1922), which includes – but is not limited to – killing enemy combatants. Though most service members spend their entire military careers without engaging in violence, it is concerning to discover harsh social penalties for the people who do. The practical implications of these penalties should be investigated further, especially in light of the fact that many civilians presume veterans have killed, even when untrue (Feinstein 2015; Pang 2018).

Previous research suggests that people outwardly respect the military's dirty work, while quietly fearing that it will manifest stateside (Feinstein 2015; Hollingshead 1946). To offset these concerns, the experiment included extensive controls for countering stereotypes about

veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress and other potentially stigmatizing conditions. Controls highlighted veterans' regular participation in professional, social, and health-oriented activities to signal adaptive behaviors. On a separate line, to belabor the point, respondents were also told that, "None of them have physical or mental health problems." In spite of these efforts, respondents regulated their distance from hypothetical veterans. The exact same veteran was less welcomed in respondents' friendship networks (dating a best female friend) and families (dating respondents' daughters) than in classes at school. It may be that people are more discriminating about who they invite into their inner social circles, regardless of who the newcomer is. Such insights could be explored in a study that matches veteran candidates with a civilian control group, which was beyond the scope of this study but would be worth pursuing in the future. On the other hand, respondents' actions were consistent with DWs' accounts of how outsiders treat them (Davis 1984; Dick 2005; Skolnick 1966; Shulman 2000). More research is needed to definitively parse how social compartmentalization varies across newcomers with and without dirty work experience.

As a type of expertise encompassing a number of social services, dirty work is an integral and enduring presence in the social world (Hughes 1958). That the same professional service can be both exalted and vilified suggests the social contract with DWs is in need of reform. When DWs are willfully or unconsciously marginalized for doing what the public asked, it becomes necessary to rebuild consensus around whether and how dirty work will be tasked. Clarifying expectations around dirty work offers a next step towards better supporting DWs when they come home.

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**TABLE 1: Survey Sample Composition**

	<b>Mean</b>
Female	0.38
Age	35.73
Race	
White/Caucasian	0.83
African American / Black	0.05
Hispanic	0.05
Asian	0.06
Other/Mixed	0.02
Highest Completed Education	
Some High School	0.01
High School/GED	0.35
Associate's Degree	0.19
Bachelor's Degree	0.40
Master's Degree	0.04
Doctorate	0.01
Born in the United States	0.97
Political Views -- Extremely liberal (1) to Extremely Conservative (7)	2.61
Veteran	0.06
# of Vets Who Have Shared Military Stories with R	
0	0.26
1 or 2	0.45
3 or more	0.29
<i>n</i>	<b>318</b>

**TABLE 2: Linear Mixed Effects Models of Ratings of Veteran Candidates**

	Centered			Raw
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
(Intercept)	17.83*** (1.34)	16.78*** (1.51)	17.14** (5.47)	-20.14 (22.44)
<b>Gatekeeping Context</b>				
Work	-0.95 (1.15)	-0.43 (1.63)	-0.53 (1.63)	-0.52 (1.70)
Dating Daughter	-13.24*** (1.15)	-9.73*** (1.62)	-9.89*** (1.62)	-9.59*** (1.70)
Dating Best Female Friend	-8.03*** (1.15)	-7.91*** (1.62)	-7.90*** (1.62)	-7.89*** (1.69)
<b>Former Military Occupation</b>				
Special Forces Weapons expert	-0.58 (1.15)	-0.60 (1.14)	-0.70 (1.15)	-0.70 (1.18)
Infantryman	-2.25* (1.15)	-2.25* (1.15)	-2.20 (1.15)	-2.19 (1.18)
Intelligence Analyst	2.53* (1.15)	2.53* (1.15)	2.39* (1.15)	2.40* (1.18)
<b>Reason Entered Military</b>				
Money and Benefits	-8.43*** (1.15)	-8.40*** (1.14)	-8.28*** (1.15)	-8.28*** (1.18)
Avenge 9/11	-15.95*** (1.15)	-15.95*** (1.15)	-16.15*** (1.15)	-16.15*** (1.18)
Help Others	14.58*** (1.15)	14.58*** (1.15)	14.48*** (1.15)	14.49*** (1.18)
<b>Killed Enemy Combatants</b>				
	-19.50*** (0.81)	-17.44*** (1.62)	-17.28*** (1.62)	-17.10*** (1.70)
<b>Interactions</b>				
Work * Killed Enemy Combatants	- (1.15)	-1.01 (2.29)	-1.16 (2.30)	-1.19 (2.41)
Dating Daughter * Killed Enemy Combatants	- (1.15)	-7.01** (2.29)	-6.98** (2.29)	-7.59** (2.43)
Dating Best Female Friend * Killed Enemy Combatants	- (1.15)	-0.19 (2.29)	-0.38 (2.29)	-0.42 (2.43)

	<b>Centered</b>			<b>Raw</b>
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
	-	(2.29)	(2.29)	(2.41)
<b>Respondents</b>				
Female	-	-	0.05	7.03
	-	-	(0.86)	(3.67)
White	-	-	-0.06	-0.12
	-	-	(1.12)	(4.75)
Highest Completed Education - Bachelor's or higher	-	-	-0.01	-4.64
	-	-	(0.83)	(3.51)
Political Views	-	-	-0.01	2.61
	-	-	(0.42)	(1.80)
Age	-	-	-0.01	2.82**
	-	-	(0.26)	(1.12)
Age-squared	-	-	0.00	-0.02
	-	-	(0.00)	(0.01)
# of Vets Who Have Shared Military Stories with R (1 or 2)	-	-	0.02	5.47
	-	-	(1.02)	(4.31)
# of Vets Who Have Shared Military Stories with R (3 or more)	-	-	-0.10	9.17
	-	-	(1.13)	(4.79)
<i>Number of vignettes</i>	5087	5087	5071	5071
<i>n</i>	318	318	317	317

Standard errors in parentheses.  
Two-tailed significance tests: \* p<. 05 \*\* p<. 01 \*\*\*p<. 001

**FIGURE 1: Summary of Experimental Conditions**

Experimental Factors	Controls
<p><i>Gatekeeping Context</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• applied for your program at school</li> <li>• applied for a job on your team at work</li> <li>• asked your best female friend, who is single, out on a date</li> <li>• asked your daughter, who is single, out on a date</li> </ul> <p><i>Former Military Occupation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an Administrative Specialist</li> <li>• an Intelligence Analyst</li> <li>• an Infantryman</li> <li>• a Special Forces Weapons expert</li> </ul> <p><i>Entry Reason</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• he wanted to help others</li> <li>• he was randomly selected by a new draft</li> <li>• he wanted money and benefits</li> <li>• he wanted to avenge 9/11</li> </ul> <p><i>Act</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has killed enemy combatants</li> <li>• has not killed enemy combatants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male</li> <li>• 29-years old</li> <li>• White</li> <li>• Has a bachelor’s degree</li> <li>• Enlisted in the United States Army after college</li> <li>• Spent six years in the Army, on active duty</li> <li>• Deployed to a combat zone</li> <li>• Was honorably discharged last year</li> <li>• Regularly worked, exercised, and spent time with family and friends after leaving the Army</li> <li>• Does not have any physical or mental health problems</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 2: Vignette Example**

*The box describes what the hypothetical veterans in this survey have in common. It does not change and will remain visible for all scenarios.*

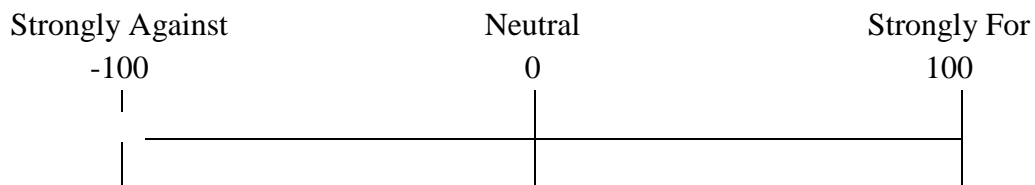
You are going to read about 16 men who are 29-years old, white, and enlisted in the United States Army after finishing their bachelor's degrees. They spent six years on active duty, deployed to a conflict zone, and were honorably discharged last year. Since leaving the military, they have regularly worked, exercised, and spent time with family and friends.

None of them have physical or mental health problems.

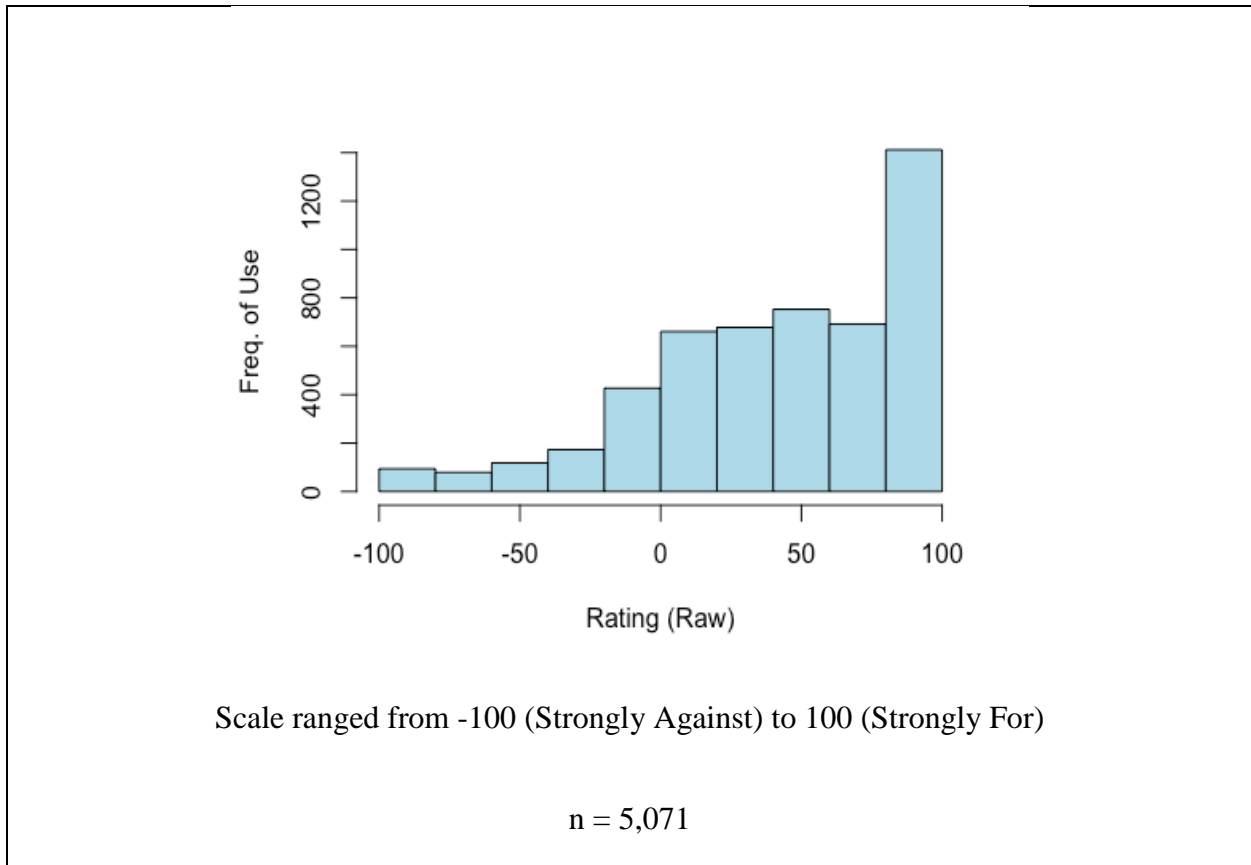
Under the box is more information about one of the hypothetical veterans. After reading it, please move the slider to the spot on the scale that best represents your personal opinion.

One of these men has asked your best female friend, who is single, out on a date. You look for more information and learn that he was an Infantryman in the Army and had joined because he wanted to help others. You also learn that he has not killed enemy combatants.

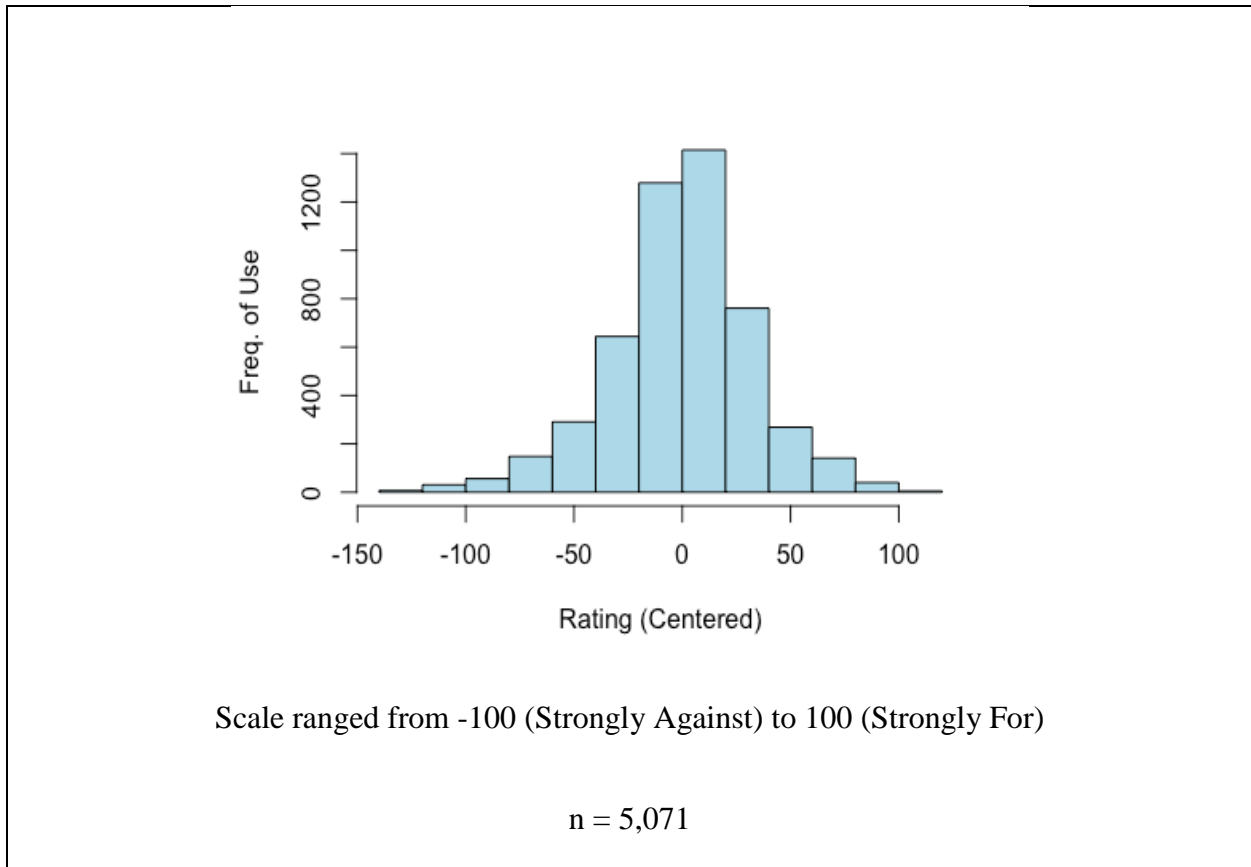
Based only on the information you have, how do you feel about the individual in this scenario?



**FIGURE 3: Frequency Distribution of Baseline Ratings**



**FIGURE 4: Frequency Distribution of Mean-Centered Ratings**







# How the Dirty Work of War Impacts Support for Veterans

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## Background on Broader Dissertation Project

- Pang (2018): what do veterans and civilians think military service says about a person?
  1. Veterans, on their own experiences (interviews)
  2. Veterans, on other veterans' experiences (ethnography)
  - ✦ 3. Civilians, on veterans' experiences (national survey experiment)



## Today's Talk

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- “How the Dirty Work of War Impacts Support for Veterans”
  - Unpack the term, “dirty work”
  - Methods
  - Data
  - Results
  - Discussion & Implications



## What is “dirty work?”

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- Sociological construct (Hughes 1958) used to describe a type of work
  - Essential for society
  - Professional service
  - Involves physically, socially, or morally demanding tasks
  - Occurs at all levels of pay and prestige

## Why should we care?

- Every society has dirty work that has to get done



- Yet dirty workers (DWs) report strained relations with non-dirty workers (“outsiders”)
  - E.g., Research on the police (Dick 2005, Skolnick 1966)

## What makes military work count as “dirty work?”

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- Society gives military professionals the right to employ controlled violence while at war (Weber 1922; Janowitz 1960)
- Counts as “moral dirty work,” because tasks would be considered immoral or illegal outside of the war context (Hughes 1958)
  - i.e., a Soldier killing an enemy combatant versus a non-Soldier killing another civilian outside of the war context
- To be clear, military work involves a lot more than controlled violence (e.g., advising, training, & assisting)
- But the authority to use controlled violence on behalf of the country is unique to military professionals

## Why is dirty work a useful construct for studying how civilians treat homecoming veterans?

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- Many people do not serve in combat roles (DOD 2016)
  - Yet research shows people associate veterans with violence (Maclean and Kleykamp 2014, Pang 2018)
    - Inappropriate questions like, “have you killed someone?”
- We also know that veterans report strained relations with civilians
  - 82% of veterans report public does not understand challenges (Pew 2011)
  - 42% of veterans report lip service vs genuine respect (Washington Post/Kaiser Foundation 2014)

## Research Question

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*How does the dirty work of war impact support for post-9/11 military veterans?*



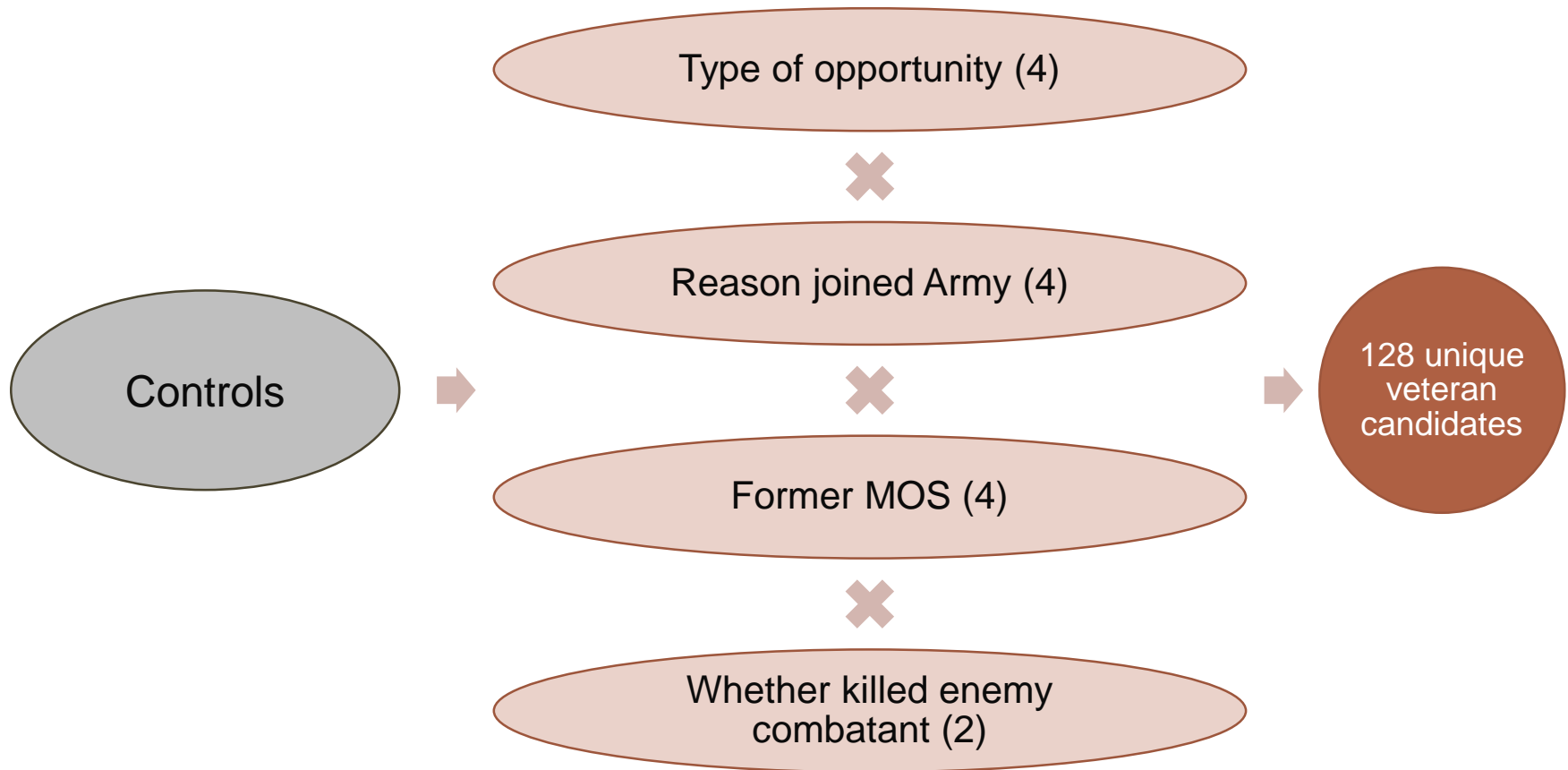
## Collection Strategy

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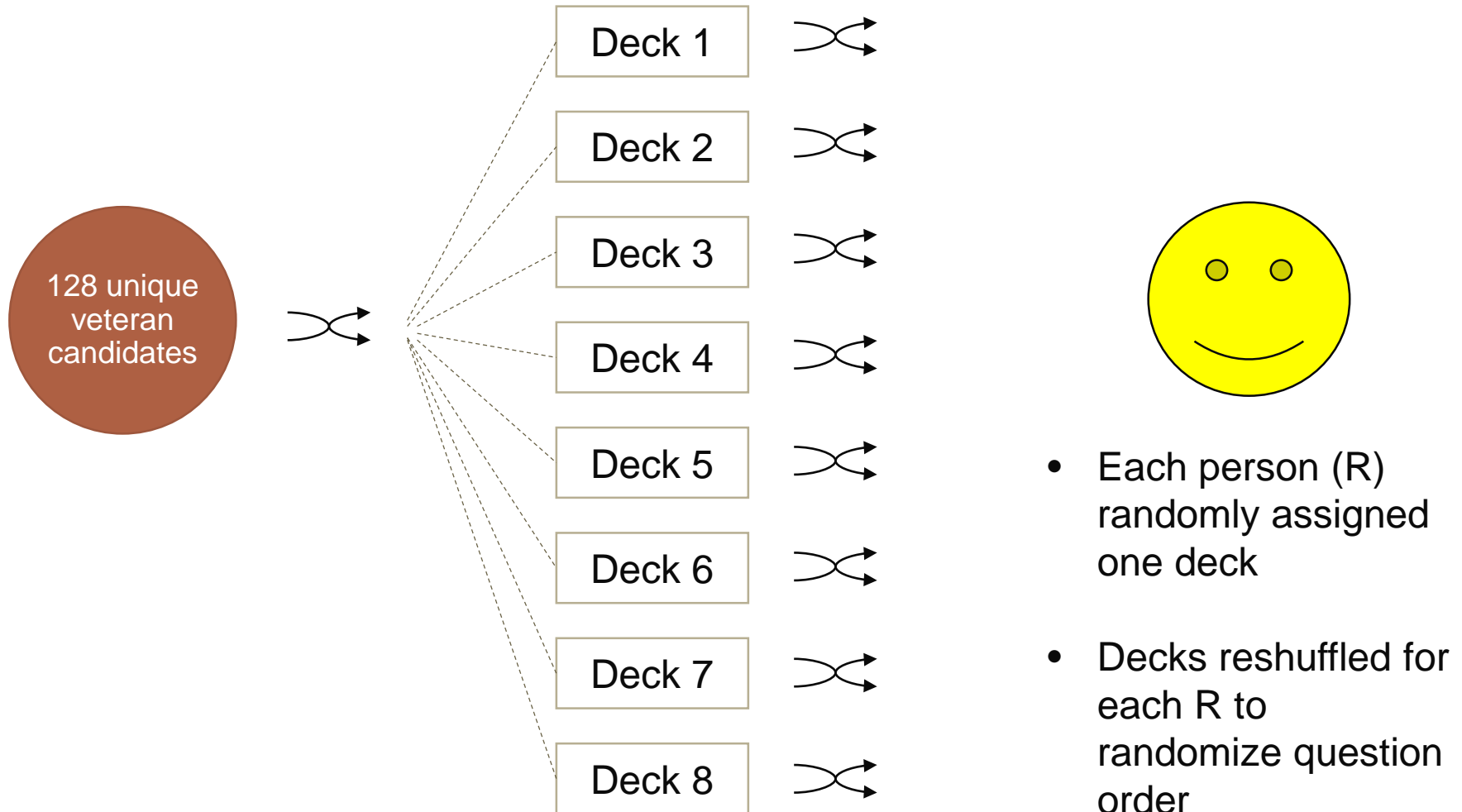
- **Factorial Survey Experiment (Jasso 2006)**
  - Type of vignette method
  - Useful for studying decision-making, esp. in cases with high levels of social desirability bias
  - Simulated gatekeeping encounters in which a respondent (R) rates a series of veterans for professional and social opportunities
  
- **Short Background Survey**
  - Demographics
  - Military experience
  - Military knowledge
  - Political background

## Experimental Design – Step 1: Construct Hypothetical Veterans' Profiles

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## Experimental Design – Step 2: Shuffle, Divide, & Shuffle Again





## Data

- Convenience sample of  $n = 318$  U.S.-based adults spread throughout the country

- Recruited through



Pros	Cons
More representative than college samples because allows wider geographic engagement	Less representative than national probability samples
Comparable data findings with national probability samples	Still less of a gold standard among academics
Less expensive than national probability samples	
Rapid, large-scale data collection	
Higher data quality	

See Buhrmester et al. (2011) and Weinberg (2014) for comparative tests between MTurk samples and, respectively, college samples and national probability samples

## Sample Characteristics

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Characteristic	Percent
Female	0.38
White	0.83
Age (Mean)	35.73
Highest Completed Ed (Bachelor's or Higher)	0.45
Political Views (Extremely Liberal=1 to Extremely Conservative=7)	2.61
Born in the U.S.	0.97
Veteran	0.06
Military Knowledge (# of Vets who have shared military stories with R)	
0	0.26
1-2	0.45
3+	0.29
<i>n</i>	<b>318</b>

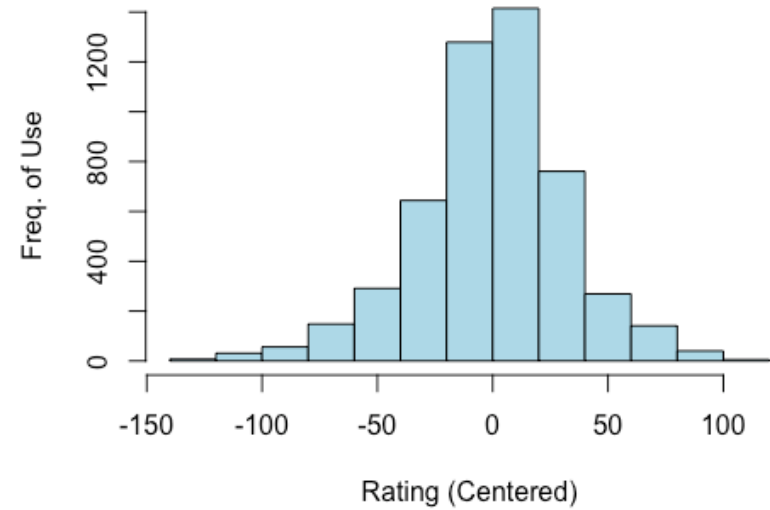
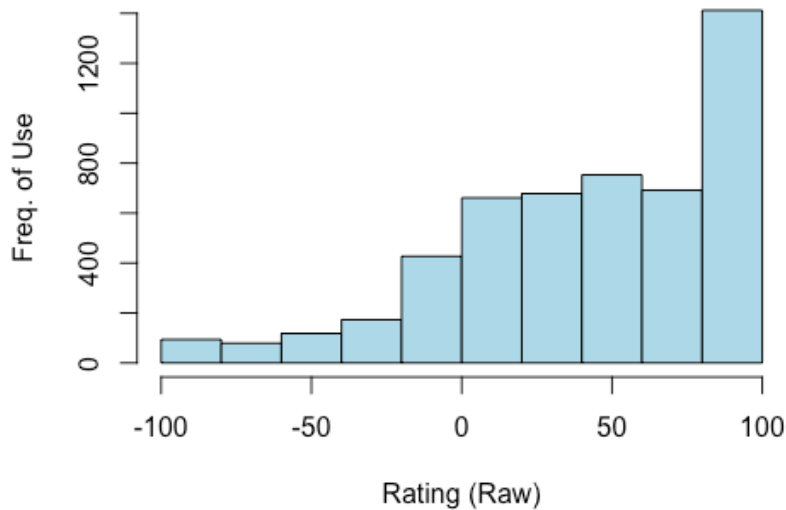
## Analysis Procedures

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1. Examine baseline views towards veterans
  
2. Test for potential design effects
  - Deck effects
  - Order effects
  
3. Linear mixed-effects modelling (maximum likelihood)
  - Factors
  - Factors, Cross-Product Interactions
  - Factors, R backgrounds
  - ✦ - Factors, Cross-Product Interactions, R backgrounds

## Baseline Views towards Veterans

### Ratings Distribution (Before and after Transformation)



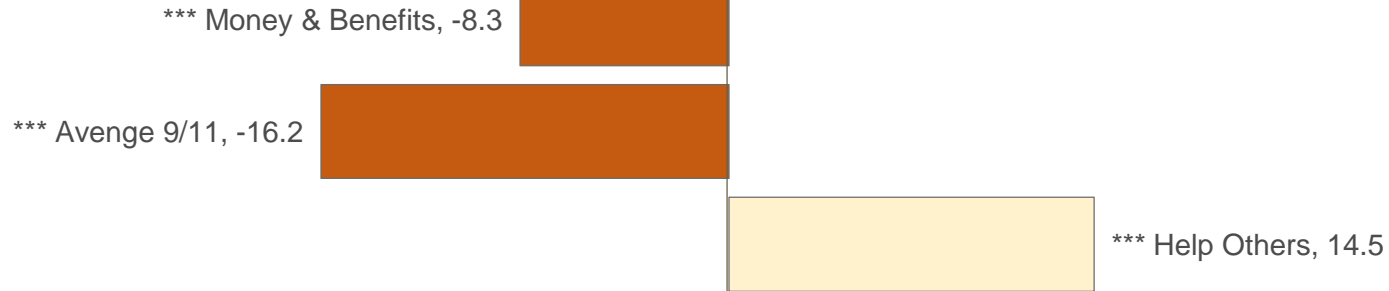
$n = 5,071$

Scale: -100 (Strongly Against) to 100 (Strongly For)

# Results: What makes people deviate from their baseline views towards vets?

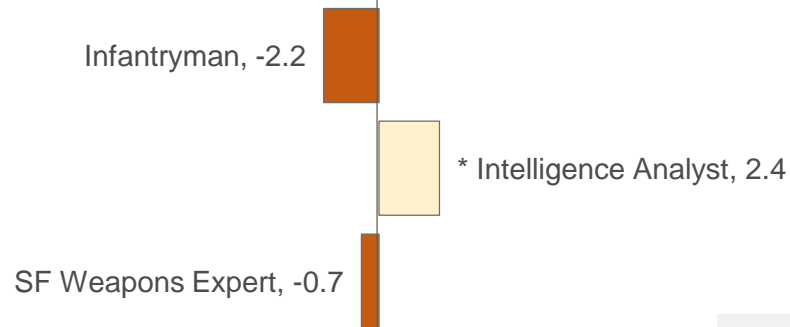
## Reason Joined Military

(Reference: Called up by new draft)



## Former Military Occupation

(Reference: Administrative Specialist)



n=5,071  
\*p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

# Results: What makes people deviate from their baseline views towards vets?

## DW Experience

(Reference: Had not killed enemy combatants)

\*\*\* Killed Enemy  
Combatants, -17.3

## Opportunity Sought

(Reference: Applied for your school)

Applied for job, 0.5

\*\*\* Courting best female friend, -7.9

\*\*\* Courting daughter, -9.9

## Interaction: DW Experience x Opportunity Sought

Killed x Applied job, -1.2

Killed x Courting friend, -0.4

\*\* Killed x Courting daughter, -7.0

n=5,071  
\*p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

## Discussion: The Social Contract between DWs and Outsiders

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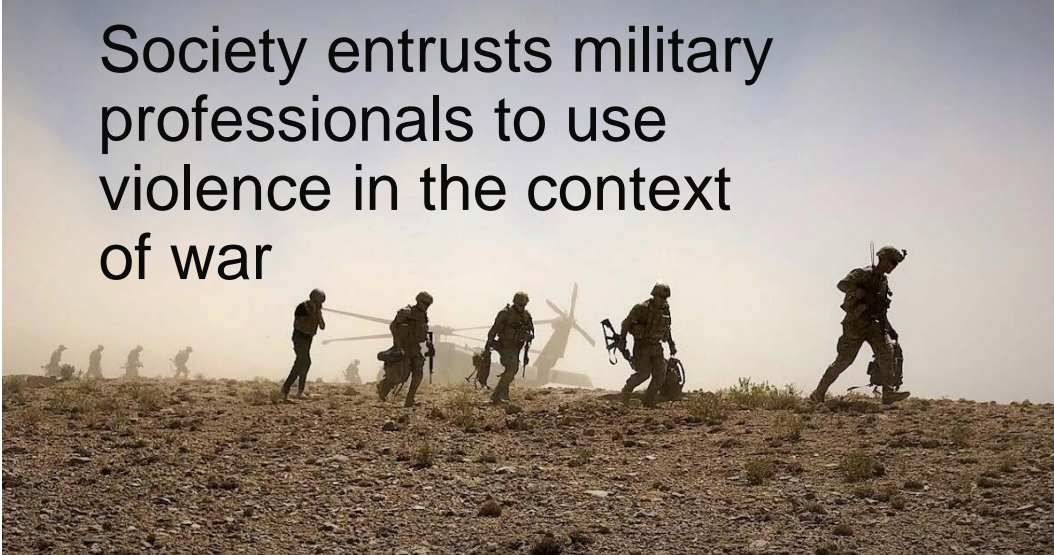


- On the surface, generally positive views towards veterans (baseline ratings)
- Picture changes when we look at which veterans people support and when

## Discussion: Entrusting Warfighting Capabilities

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Society entrusts military professionals to use violence in the context of war



Yet answering the call may incur social penalties (coefficients on killing enemy combatants & avenging 9/11)

- Consistent reactions across Rs
- Potentially mitigating circumstances (e.g., reason for joining) did not offset main effects

## Implications & Next Steps

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- Increase awareness of potential stigmas around warfighting
- Study yielded an important insight: altruistic intentions are highly favored by civilian gatekeepers
  - Raises Qs about whether “impression management” techniques could be helpful
    - More work needed to develop and test tools
- To truly “support the troops,” need joint efforts to rebuild consensus around expectations

**Questions or Comments?**



## **Backup Slides**

**Institute for Defense Analyses**

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# Controls

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- Male
  - 29-years old
  - White
  - Has bachelor's degree
  - Enlisted
  - Army
  - 6 years on active duty
  - Deployed to combat zone
  - Honorably discharged 1 year ago
  - Regular work, exercise, time with friends and family
- No physical or mental health issues

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# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

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13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT  Every society has dirty work that has to get done—what are the consequences of doing it? Despite public discourse to, “support the troops,” many post-9/11 veterans encounter social friction when reintegrating into civilian society. Using a factorial survey experiment, this study examines how members of the American public react to information about someone’s military past when evaluating veterans for professional and social opportunities. Findings show that people exhibit outwardly positive baseline views towards veterans. Nevertheless, any allusion to the use of controlled violence—the military’s “dirty work” and <i>raison d’être</i> —strongly and negatively impacted veterans’ prospects. The social consequences of dirty work were not offset by mitigating circumstances and were especially penalizing when veterans sought positions involving close and sustained contact with civilians. By showing that people can simultaneously support and judge what someone did in the military, findings highlight the need to reexamine what society expects from the military and the people who serve it.					
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