

I am an American Soldier: Motivational Aspects of Soldiering in Gulf War Memoirs

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**I am an American Soldier: Motivational Aspects of Soldiering in
Gulf War Memoirs**

Završni rad

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Abstract

Motivation is an important part of everyone's life, but it might be even more important in drawing people into the military and, almost certainly, the war. This paper analyzes characters from five Gulf War memoirs in order to find the motivational aspects which influenced their decision to enlist. The surveyed memoirs are Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles* (2005), Nathaniel Fick's *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (2005), Chris Kyle's *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History* (2011), Kayla Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army* (2005) and Matt Gallagher's *Kaboom: Embracing the Suck in a Savage Little War* (2010). The specific motivational aspects of each of the soldiers have been derived from their memoirs by analyzing their writing. Those have then been sorted into categories which were used in the empirical studies from the field of psychology. Studies surveyed for the purposes of this paper are: "Towards an Understanding of Army Enlistment Motivation Patterns" by Pliske et al. and "Enlistment Motivations of Army Reservists: Money, Self-Improvement, Or Patriotism?" by Gorman and Thomas. The categories of "self-improvement", "money" and "serve" have been derived from the Gorman and Thomas's study. It has been found that the motivational aspects of soldiers derived from the memoirs and those derived from the empirical studies match to a great degree; hence, a conclusion is drawn that people drawn to the military calling have similar motivation for enlisting.

Keywords: Motivation, Gulf War memoirs, Gulf War, enlistment

Introduction

This paper analyzes the motivational aspects of soldiering in five Gulf War memoirs: Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles* (2005), Nathaniel Fick's *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (2005), Chris Kyle's *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History* (2011), Kayla Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army* (2005) and Matt Gallagher's *Kaboom: Embracing the Suck in a Savage Little War* (2010). The memoirs are presented chronologically, based on the time of service of their authors. Before getting into the memoirs themselves, the reader is introduced to some necessary background information which will ensure better comprehension later on. First, the term motivation is defined and further expanded, so that the reader can get a better idea of what the focus of the paper is. Secondly, the history of conscription in the USA is presented to show how the government enticed citizens to join the military in the past. Thirdly, a summary of Persian Gulf Wars is provided to supply the context of the conflicts described in the memoirs. Furthermore, the motivational aspects of the authors are derived from their writing and are organized into three categories: "self-improvement", "money" and "serve". These categories have been derived from the psychological empirical study "Enlistment Motivations of Army Reservists: Money, Self-Improvement, Or Patriotism" by Linda Gorman and George W. Thomas.

1. Theoretical Background: Motivation

In order to understand the motivational aspects of soldiering in the Gulf War memoirs, it is necessary to introduce the terms which will be used and also to resolve any possible misunderstanding which may come about when using them. In her article “Motivation: The Psychological Factors That Guide Us” Kendra Cherry explains that “motivation is defined as the process that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviors.” In other words, it is what makes people do what they do, be it getting up early for class or joining the military. It is important to accentuate that motivation, contrary to popular belief, is not only the initiator of the act, but that it also “guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviors,” as it can be noticed in the provided definition. The guiding and maintaining part of motivation is better noticed when discussing the three components of motivation: “activation, persistence and intensity” (Cherry). Activation is the initial act, such as joining the military; persistence signifies the amount of effort an individual is willing to invest to overcome obstacles, such as finishing the military drill; and intensity is reflected in the passion and commitment with which one is moving towards his goal (Cherry). It is also important to differentiate between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation:

Extrinsic motivations are those that arise from outside of the individual and often involve rewards such as trophies, money, social recognition or praise. Intrinsic motivations are those that arise from within the individual, such as doing a complicated cross-word puzzle purely for the personal gratification of solving a problem. (Cherry)

Activation, as a component of motivation, is a well-researched topic with an abundance of conducted studies. The motivation of soldiers for joining the military will be examined in the following two studies: "Towards an Understanding of Army Enlistment Motivation Patterns" by Pliske et al. and "Enlistment Motivations of Army Reservists: Money, Self-Improvement, Or Patriotism?" by Gorman and Thomas. The former study will provide a wider theoretical background for the topic of motivation, while the latter one will be referred to throughout the paper, due to its simplicity, i.e. the use of only three categories.

Pliske et al. found that there are six factors which underlay recruits' enlistment motivation: “self-improvement, economic advancement, military service, time out, travel, and education money” (8). These factors were drawn from a number of choice answers for the possible recruits. The two choices which were significantly higher in percentages than others

were: “chance to better myself” and “skill training opportunities” (Pliske et al. 23). Accordingly, it is possible to conclude that the dominant factor for joining the military is “self-improvement”, which belongs in the realm of intrinsic motivation. In the second study by Gorman and Thomas a similar approach was used: recruits’ answers were grouped into three categories: “money”, “self-improvement” and “serve” (591-592).

The “money” category included those who said that they joined to “earn more money,” because they were unemployed, or to get “money for college.” Those classified as joining for “self-improvement” were those who wanted to be away from home on their own, who wanted to “better” themselves, who wished “to get away from a personal problem,” who needed to “prove they could make it,” or who wanted to “get trained in a skill.” The “serve” category included those who answered that they joined to “serve their country” or because it “is a family tradition to serve.” (Gorman and Thomas 591-592)

The results show that the most dominant motivation for enlisting is “self-improvement”, followed by “money” and lastly the need to “serve”. The intrinsic motivation proved dominant again, but it was closely followed by extrinsic motivation. These empirical results represent a general overview of motives for joining the US military. The categorization found in the Gorman and Thomas’ study will be used as a means of analysis for the type of motivation in the actual memoirs.

2. Historical Overview of Soldiering in the USA

The previous chapter may have left the impression that motivation plays a key role when it comes to joining the military, but that is not the case. Conscription or drafting, i.e. compulsory enrollment of persons for military service, is a well-known term in the history of the USA. According to Timothy J. Perri, conscription was used even before the Civil War: “Decentralized militia drafts were used in the Indian wars, the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812” (qtd. in Perri 429). During the Civil War itself, The Enrollment Act of 1863 was passed, and it “completed the transition to federal control of recruitment and national conscription” (Perri 430). Perri adds that it was possible for an individual to avoid the military service for three full years by paying a “\$300 dollar commutation fee” (430), which was common practice until July 1864 when President Lincoln eliminated the option. During the First World War “a draft of individuals was adopted” (Perri 432). This draft was done with the help of “selective service” (Perri 432), which meant that “the military . . . chose only those with the lowest value elsewhere” (qtd. in Perri 432). In other words, those who were of greater use to the country on their current positions usually were not drafted for military service. In the Second World War things worked differently: “The draft was enacted in September 1940. Once the United States formally entered the war, the first few drafts were by lottery; after that, the oldest ones in the eligible pool were drafted first” (Perri 433). Even though there were no official selective services, Perri notes that local draft boards usually chose the unmarried workers over married men and fathers; besides, farmworkers were often exempted from military service. During the Vietnam War USA relied on drafting to ensure the sufficient number of military personnel to the point that in 1969 “88 percent of the infantrymen in Vietnam were draftees” (qtd. in Perry 434). According to Chambers II, the events and consequences of Vietnam War, which caused many protests, have put pressure on the congress “to reform or eliminate the draft.” This led to the forming of All-Volunteer Force and the suspension of compulsory draft registration in 1975 so that “in the post-Vietnam era, the military relied entirely on volunteers” (Chambers II). This leads us to the conclusion that in today’s US military, people join the service voluntarily and the role of motivation is much greater than it once was. Furthermore, many will derive their motivation from the firmly established American values, such as self-improvement which is considered to be “one of the most important values . . . of America” (Kearny, Kearny, and Crandall 41). Other American values include patriotism, which has been referred to as “the ‘national religion’ of the United States” (Kearny, Kearny, and Crandall 45), along with rugged

individualism and manliness, which is linked to an image of “a man who has been made physically tough and rugged [and] is skilled with guns and other weapons” (Kearny, Kearny, and Crandall 61). In the following paragraphs the motivation of several soldiers will be inspected through their stories, which have been shared in written form, in their memoirs.

3. The Persian Gulf Wars

The events retold in the memoirs all occurred in the Persian Gulf Wars, so it is necessary to provide a brief summary of the happenings which took place during those conflicts. There are two major Persian Gulf Wars and both will be presented in the following lines.

According to Anthony H. Cordesman, the First Persian Gulf War had two phases: Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Operation Desert Shield occurred as a defensive operation after the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990. The invasion came to be because Saddam Hussein saw a solution to Iraq's economic problems in annexing Kuwait, and hence, their oil reserves. Cordesman notes that most Gulf States, along with a great deal of European countries and the US, condemned the invasion, which resulted in operation Desert Shield, i.e. "a largely defensive operation in which the United States and Saudi Arabia rushed to build up the defensive forces necessary to protect Saudi Arabia" (Cordesman 544). This led to a buildup of military force on both sides. Cordesman recorded that a deadline of 15 January 1991 was given to Saddam Hussein to withdraw his forces from Kuwait lest the nations allied with Kuwait be forced to act; Hussein did not waver so President Bush put into action Operation Desert Storm, i.e. a military offensive. The US, British and Saudi forces easily established air dominance and Cordesman adds that Iraq's main method of retaliation "consisted of launching modified surface-to-surface Scud missiles against targets in Saudi Arabia and Israel" (545). On 24 February 1991, the land offensive was inbound, and according to Cordesman it "had two principal thrusts: a massive, highly mobile 'left hook' around and through Iraqi positions to the west of Kuwait to envelop the elite Republican Guard; and a thrust straight through Iraq's defenses along the Kuwaiti border designed to fix the forward Iraqi divisions" (545); poor training of Iraqi troops, along with their low morale, resulted in their withdrawal from Kuwait on 26 February and a cease-fire which was officially signed on 6 April, 1991.

The Second Gulf War, or better known as the Iraq War, was initiated on 19 March, 2002, (Lerner). According to Lerner, the cause of the war was Hussein's production of unauthorized weapons, i.e. weapons of mass destruction, along with the development of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. After further investigation in Iraq "The United States, United Kingdom, and Spain put forth a resolution that simply declared Iraq in material breach of 17 prior UN resolution." After further refusal of cooperation by Iraq, along with

many diplomatic rows between the Western countries, a 48-hour deadline was issued on March 17, 2002 to Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq or face war (Lerner). Once again, Hussein did not budge so the “U.S.-led and U.K.-led forces launched aerial attacks against Iraq on the evening of March 19, 2002 (March 20, 2002, in Europe and Iraq)” (Lerner). The allies took control of the greater part of the country by mid-April 2003 when Hussein’s army and government collapsed; attention was further directed toward restoring order in Iraq, as well as establishing a new Iraqi government which, according to The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, officially ended in December 2011.

4. Motivational Aspects of Soldiering in Gulf War Memoirs

4.1. Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles* (2005)

Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles is a Gulf War memoir written by Anthony Swofford who served as a marine sniper during the First Gulf War. In 1990, he was deployed in the Saudi Arabia, expecting action, but receiving boredom. During his deployment he had not fired a single bullet in combat and had left the desert with a sedated experience of war. Nevertheless, he wanted to be there and went through hell during his training; none of that would have been possible without a strong motivational compass guiding him.

At the age of twelve, Swofford was not exactly what one might consider Marine material. He attended a Boy Scout camp and requested to leave it a week early because he was unable to deal with the unfavorable conditions there: “. . . I missed my mother, I had no friends at the camp, the food was lousy, I was afraid of showering in public . . . and the leader of the camp was grouchy and probably a drunk” (Swofford 127). These conditions do not seem much different than those one might expect in a military training camp, so a question arises: What would make a young man want to return to such a place after “escaping” from one as a child? A spark of his military career was ignited in 1984, when he was a fourteen year old boy. Swofford found out about a bombing in Lebanon which resulted in “killing [of] 241 U.S. servicemen, mostly marines” (Swofford 127). Parts of his motivation can be obtained from the following lines:

As I folded my newspapers each morning, staring at the front-page images of the marines, the carnage crept into my brain, and also the sense that my country had been harmed and that I was responsible for some of the healing, the revenge. My country had been attacked, and I was a part of my country. Before me my father had gone to war and also my grandfather, and because of my unalterable genetic stain I was linked to the warrior line. (Swofford 128)

Swofford's main motives are thus: revenge, patriotism and “heritage”. The term “heritage” denotes the notion of a connection to the military calling through family tradition. Revenge and patriotism are closely connected here because he felt that he needed to protect his country and also revenge it, i.e. all the soldiers who gave their lives in the military

service: “I would war and fight and make good for those poor boys dead in Lebanon, . . . for all of the marines of all time killed and dead in all wars and all cheap moments of peace” (Swofford 131). His “heritage” gave him a sense of duty and tradition to take up the military calling, as did the men in his family before him. Needless to say, this was important to Swofford, but there was something much more important to him: becoming a man. As he watched the marines, he saw them as men; he admired them and wanted to be like them. As he puts it, he was “a boy falling in love with manhood” (Swofford 128). His understanding of manhood intertwined with the image of the marines and war: “I understood that manhood had to do with war, and war with manhood, and to no longer be just a son, I needed someday to fight” (Swofford 128). Swofford later says that he believed that his joining the Marine Corps was due to his “heritage”, but eventually he realized that it had nothing to do with that or with his “desire for combat, for killing, or for a heroic death, but rather [it] was based on my intense need for acceptance into the family clan of manhood” (203). Besides his need to be accepted into the clan of manhood, he joined the Marine Corps because of his need to find a stable home: “I joined the Marine Corps in part to impose domestic structure upon my life, to find a home” (Swofford 145). Swofford fostered a fear of homelessness due to the many homeless people at the time and his unstable family situation which might have rendered him homeless as well; this played a minor role in his decision making. All of these factors led to him signing the enlistment contract at the age of seventeen and half (Swofford 208), after he had decided his destiny “at the ripe age of fourteen” (Swofford 131).

Taking a look back, there were five aspects which determined Swofford’s future in the Marine Corps, the most dominant one being becoming a man, followed by revenge, patriotism, “heritage” and finding a home. The focus here is mostly on the component of activation, i.e. joining the military and making that first step. Using Gorman and Thomas’ three categories, “money”, “self-improvement” and “serve”, it is noticeable that Swofford falls in the two latter categories. When talking about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, it is arguable that he was dominantly intrinsically motivated as his main goal was to become a man, which has no extrinsic reward besides itself.

4.2. Nathaniel Fick's *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (2005)

One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer (2005) is a Gulf War memoir by Nathaniel Fick, a United States Marine Corps officer who served in the War in Afghanistan and the Iraq War, i.e. the Second Gulf War. He describes his journey through the marine hierarchy, from the elementary training in the Officer Candidate School (OCS) to his position in leading the Second Platoon of Bravo Company of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion. 1st Reconnaissance Battalion is considered to be the cream of the crop in the United States Marine Corps and being competent to lead a platoon in it is quite admirable. All of the effort Fick invested during his journey was supported by his strong motivation.

From the very beginning of the memoir, Fick expressed his dislike of the general public in the form of his opinions of his college friends: "Others headed off to law school or medical school for a few more years of reading instead of living. None of it appealed to me" (4). He did not identify himself with the average members of the society and saw a form of an escape in joining the marines. He was influenced by Tom Ricks when he said that "the military should be representative of the people. It should reflect the best of American society, not stand apart from it" (Fick 5). For him "The Marine Corps was a last bastion of honor in society, a place where young Americans learned to work as a team, to trust one another and themselves, and to sacrifice for a principle" (Fick 5). There was greatness in the military calling, and he wanted to achieve it. At the beginning of his journey, at the OCS, he was satisfied because he "had the feeling that the Marines were a world apart" (Fick 7), which meant that he had successfully distanced himself from the average society. Even after a gruelingly difficult test in the OCS, one which might make a man want to quit, he looked at the ordinary citizens and said: "Clean people, well-fed, rested, in control of their days. I realized I wouldn't trade places with any of them" (29). According to Peebles, "true masculinity is to be distinguished from 'society,' which is characterized by softness and sameness and, one assumes, feminization" (68). In his desire to rise above the average man, Fick sought his access into the clan of manhood. After all, Fick was "excited about cultivating his competence, endurance, intelligence, and most of all, manhood" (Peebles 66). Later on, when he got to Infantry Officer Course, Fick noted that "if the Marine Corps was a last bastion of manhood in American, IOC was its inner sanctum" (45). His desire of achieving manhood is shown here once again: "Fick wants to go all the way, to penetrate in to the deepest, most untainted center of masculine identity, where maleness has not been softened or compromised" (Peebles 68). Besides Fick's desire to rise above the average

member of the society and of achieving manhood, he had the military “heritage” in his family, which was also a source of motivation, even though a minor one. His grandfather was a Navy officer who “had served in World War II” (Fick 4) and his father was an army man who “was proud to have been a soldier” (Fick 5). His “heritage” did not play a big role in his decision making, but it did link him to a warrior line, and that is what Fick wanted to become: “I wanted to be a warrior” (4). Fick possessed a strong desire to improve and better himself. His attitude was ‘improve or die trying’: “I wanted something more transformative. Something that might kill me – or leave me better, stronger, more capable” (Fick 4). He found appeal in choosing the most difficult of options and, obviously, thrive in them; this is also how he chose the marines: “Whereas the other services listed their benefits, the Corps asked, “Do you have what it takes?” If I was going to serve in the military, I would be a Marine” (Fick 5). This showed again in his training at The Basic School where he set his eyes on the prize of becoming an infantry officer, which would be possible for only ten percent of the group: “I nodded but knew that only one thing would satisfy me: infantry officer” (Fick 33). Fick’s desire for self-improvement was almost limitless; he always wanted to see if he was capable enough: “I wanted to be tested, to see if I had what it takes” (Fick 33). He wanted to improve himself by pushing himself to his limits and, in doing that, becoming a better person, and inevitably, a better leader. Finally, Fick was a patriot: “I wanted to go on a great adventure, to prove myself, to serve my country” (4). He did not put much emphasis on his sense of patriotism, but it was there when he first joined the military.

All in all, Fick was motivated by five factors, most dominant being self-improvement, followed closely by rising above the average society and becoming a man, and lastly by “heritage” and patriotism. The emphasis is on the motivational component of activation, i.e. joining the military, as well as on persistence and intensity because of his insatiable drive for self-improvement. In Gorman and Thomas’ categories, “money”, “self-improvement” and “serve”, Fick falls heavily into the “self-improvement” category and is hence intrinsically motivated.

4.3. Chris Kyle's *American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History* (2011)

American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History (2011) is a Gulf War memoir written by Chris Kyle, a United States Navy SEAL sniper who served in the Second Gulf War, also called the Iraq War. Over the years Kyle has served four tours in Iraq and has built up a great reputation. He became the most lethal sniper in the US military history with a total of 160 confirmed kills, but in fact the number was much greater since it included only those enemies who passed away in sight, i.e. were confirmed. In his memoir he also tells about the shot he took from the distance of 2100 yards (1,920 m), which is considered to be the longest successful shot in history. Chris Kyle has achieved a great deal in his service, and has returned to war four times; he would not have been able to do that without a strong source of motivation leading him on.

Chris Kyle was not always a military man and he did not commit to the military life very early: "I decided I would go to school first, then join the military. Heck, the way I looked at it, doing that meant I could party for a while before getting down to business" (Kyle 10-11). As a student of agriculture he said that he "had given some thought to the military. My mom's dad had been an Army Air Force pilot, and for a while I thought of becoming an aviator. Then I considered becoming a Marine—I wanted to see real action. I liked the idea of fighting" (Kyle 10). Kyle also had a military "heritage" in his family, but it did not play a big role in his decision making; he did it because he liked it. There was no great motive pulling him towards the military; one day he simply decided that he had been fooling around long enough: ". . . I would quit college, stop ranching, and go back to my original plan: join the military and become a soldier. Since that was what I really wanted to do, there was no sense waiting" (Kyle 11). Needless to say, Kyle was not drawn to the military just because he liked the idea of fighting. To give a sense of where he was coming from, here is a statement from the beginning of the memoir: "If I had to order my priorities, they would be God, Country, Family" (Kyle 9). Throughout the memoir, Kyle convinces the reader of his firm faith, so it is not very surprising when he puts God at the top of his priority list, but it does come as a surprise that he puts country ahead of family. After his wife gave birth, he felt the need to get back to his job shortly after: "I felt bad about leaving Taya. She was still healing from the birth. But at the same time, I felt my duty as a SEAL was more important" (Kyle 41). This shows exactly how big of a patriot he was, and patriotism did play a great role in his military career. He had a strong feeling of responsibility towards his country: "I wanted to do what I'd

been trained for. American taxpayer had invested considerable dollars in my education as a SEAL. I wanted to defend my country, do my duty, and do my job” (Kyle 27). He defined his sense of patriotism as “the sort of thing that if it has to be explained, you’re not going to understand” (31). Sense of patriotism is something that drives the motivational car of Chris Kyle: “I’ve lived the literal meaning of the ‘land of the free’ and ‘home of the brave’. It’s not corny for me. I feel it in my heart” (32). All of the SEALs he served with had the same viewpoint on patriotism: “For myself and the SEALs I was with, patriotism and getting into the heat of the battle were deeply connected” (Kyle 32). Besides patriotism, his fellow SEALs and the heat of battle were also a source of motivation for Kyle. He cared deeply about every man he served with: “There were few, but even a single American life is one too many lost” (8). Even though he went to Iraq to liberate the country from Hussein’s dictatorship and establish a new government, he did not see it that way:

But I didn’t risk my life to bring democracy to Iraq. I risked my life for my buddies, to protect my friends and fellow countrymen. I went to war for my country, not Iraq. My country sent me out there so that bullshit wouldn’t make its way back to our shores. I never once fought for the Iraqis. I could give a flying fuck about them. (Kyle 75)

His sense of duty lies in his loyalty to his country and his fellow soldiers. When a member of his team got seriously injured in action he felt responsible for it; he felt that he had failed and wanted to take his place: “I’d seen a lot of action; I’d had my achievements. I had my war. I should have been the one sidelined” (Kyle 103). Even after his own medical problems forced him out of the conflict, he felt guilty because he was unable to protect his fellow soldiers: “To be honest, it felt a little like I was ducking out on my boys, running away because my heart was pounding funny, or whatever the hell it was doing” (Kyle 125). Besides the loyalty to his fellow fighters, he survived the war because he enjoyed the battle: “I do not choose the wars. It happens that I love to fight” (Kyle 41). During intense fighting in Iraq, Kyle felt exhilaration: “Fuck, I thought to myself, this is great. I fucking love this. It’s nerve-racking and exciting and I fucking love it” (Kyle 30). Before a big military operation, he was quite excited to do his job: “Man, this is going to be good, I thought. We are going to kill massive amounts of bad guys. And I’m going to be in the middle of it” (45). Kyle enjoyed his line of work and did not feel any guilt about taking so many lives: “. . . when God confronts me with my sins, I do not believe any of the kills I had during the war will be among them.

Everyone I shot was evil. I had a good cause on every shot. They all deserved to die” (Kyle 130).

To sum it all up, the motivational aspects in Chris Kyle's case are: patriotism, “heritage”, sense of duty to his fellow soldiers and a love of fighting, the dominant one being patriotism, followed by his sense of duty toward his fellow soldiers, love of fighting and lastly “heritage”. In this case the focus is on the persistence and intensity during his service. When it comes to Gorman and Thomas’ three categories, “money”, “self-improvement” and “serve”, Kyle falls heavily in the last category, as he did see the time he had spent in Iraq mainly as a service to his country. He was intrinsically motivated during his service as he did not pursue any extrinsic rewards.

4.4. Kayla Williams' *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army* (2005)

Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army is a Gulf War memoir by Kayla Williams, a linguist and an intelligence specialist in the United States Army who served in the Second Gulf War, i.e. the War in Iraq. In her memoir she described the experiences she had as a woman in the military, as well as her motivation for enlistment.

Williams has been heavily influenced by the men in her life, and her decision to join the military is no exception. The men who influenced her were her two boyfriends: Rick and Douglas. Rick was the controlling, traditional type and she joined the military, in part, to get away from him: "My decision to join the military was not just a decision to get away from him. In part it was. I admit that. But certainly not entirely" (Williams 38). Besides Rick, there was Douglas, the abusive type she met when she was eighteen. Even before the military, he influenced her decision to finish college, after she had willingly dropped out: ". . . Douglas, who was knocking me around, persuaded me to finish college after all. Get out of Columbus. Get a degree. Not end up a loser like these losers" (Williams 31). She described him as "a real arrogant son-of-a-bitch who wanted to be a Marine" (Williams 40). Their relationship included quite a bit of violence and yelling; he often discouraged her and pointed out his opinion that she would never make it in the military because she "could never handle people yelling at [her]" (Williams 40). This mistreatment was actually the source of motivation that drove Williams into the military:

So, five years later, I thought of Douglas when I enlisted. And even later still, during basic training, when I wanted so badly to quit, I thought of him yelling at me. Taunting me how I could never make it in the military. And I'd think: Fuck you Douglas. And I kept at it – to prove him wrong. (Williams 41)

Besides her need to prove her ex-boyfriend wrong, she had a need to prove something to herself: ". . . I've always believed that I have something to prove. Especially to myself" (Williams 24), this too played a role in her decision to enlist. An important part of that was overcoming her own fears: "I'm most afraid I'll pass up a chance to overcome my fears" (Williams 25). These two were vital factors for her enlistment:

I was feeling as if I had never really challenged myself. I felt I'd never learned how to fail. I'd never lost my fear of failure. I was at a point in my life when I

felt that if I didn't do something drastic, I was going to wake up in a house with a white picket fence and a minivan and kids who hated me. (Williams 32)

Accordingly, she joined the military since, as she said: "It appealed to me. It was a risk I was ready to imagine" (Williams 42). Another thing that motivated Williams to join the military was the fact that she liked being a part of a community, which could be traced back to her teenage years: "I did understand that the punk scene got me out of the house. Gave me a community. Like a family" (Williams 29). That was the same treatment she would receive in the military: "They don't give a fuck who you are, but you're wearing the same uniform and they immediately help you. That's the way it works in the military" (Williams 35). Furthermore, Williams joined the military for the financial security it offered: "They also talked up the benefits of enlistment – the cash bonus, the money for graduate school when I got out. It all sounded good to me. Enlisting meant I would not be geographically stable, but I would be financially stable" (41). When deciding which kind of contract she would choose, monetary offers played a great role in her decision making: "If I committed to five years active duty, however, I'd get fifteen thousand dollars cash for signing plus fifty thousand dollars for grad school" (Williams 42).

To sum it all up, Williams's motivation for joining the military was determined by four factors. The most dominant one was her desire to prove to her ex-boyfriend that she was capable of being in the military; furthermore, she wanted to prove things to herself by overcoming her fears, and finally she wanted to become a part of a community and become financially stable. The emphasis is put on the motivational component of activation, i.e. the reasons for making the first step of joining the military. When discussing the Gorman and Thomas' categories, "money", "self-improvement" and "serve", Williams can be categorized in the former two, i.e. "money" and "self-improvement". This makes her motivation both intrinsic and extrinsic because she did want to improve herself, but she also joined the military for the financial security it provided.

4.5 Matt Gallagher's *Kaboom: Embracing the Suck in a Savage Little War* (2010)

Kaboom: Embracing the Suck in a Savage Little War (2010) is a Gulf War memoir written by Matt Gallagher, a U.S. Army captain who served in the Second Gulf War, also known as the Iraq War. During his service, Gallagher was known for his popular blog on the events of the war. When he joined the army, Gallagher did not attach much importance to motivation.

Gallagher was a young, irresponsible student whose sense of patriotism was non-existent: "I slept through 9/11. Both towers burned to the ground while I drooled on my pillow in my college dorm. I had decided to skip class that day, after a late-night video game marathon" (Gallagher 3). When the invasion of Iraq began, he was drunk and partying even though he was in the "'Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)" (Gallagher 4). He showed no interest at the time because he believed that the war "was only supposed to last a few months. The United States didn't do protracted conflict anymore, not after Vietnam" (3). When he finally did join the military, he showed no motivational background for his decision:

A nation at peace, a military at war – a military I joined, through a series of haphazard and bizarre events viciously underquantified and oversimplified by the word "life", as a young armored cavalry officer in the spring of 2005. Two and a half years later, I departed for an Iraq War preparing to enter its fifth year of blood bursts. (Gallagher 4)

He gave motivation no credit in his decision to join the military and put it all down to "life". When he went drinking with the other lieutenants they all trampled on the idea that motivation is important: "'For God!' we laughed. 'For country!' we cried, stumbling over one another. 'For the Red, the White, and the Blue!' we howled, between the bars" (Gallagher 5). They laughed at the thought that religion or patriotism could be a source of motivation for military service, but despite Gallagher's attempts to kill the notion that he was motivated to join the military, he failed.

It is arguable that Gallagher was motivated to enlist, but not for the conventional reasons. He did it because he wanted to escape the subculture he did not identify with and because he wanted to be a part of the history in the making. "American boy escapes" (Gallagher 2) is in the parenthesis of the first paragraph of the memoir, and he did escape. He

ran away from his cultural surroundings into the military. Gallagher was a part of the generation who had the mentality of the observers, people who did not do anything, but just watched: “I was born into a class, in a time, to a people, in a place where someone else’s sons and daughters served in the armed forces” (Gallagher 4). He was a part of that culture and he just so “happened to read too many damn books about soldiers” (Gallagher 4); soon enough, he stopped being a watcher, joined the military and became a doer. Later on he confessed: “I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way. History was happening” (Gallagher 4); so it seems that the desire to be a part of the history in the making also played a role in Gallagher’s motivation. He was attracted to the war whose “lure is the fundamental human passion to witness, to see thing, what the Bible calls lust of the eye and the Marines in Vietnam called eye fucking” (qtd in Peebles 23). In other words, he wanted to see the history be made, and be a part of it.

To sum it up, Gallagher did not think much of the role of motivation in the military service, but it is arguable that there were two motivational factors which led him on. Primarily, he wanted to escape the culture he did not identify with and secondly, he wanted to be a part of the history in the making. It is a subtle form of motivation that even Gallagher might not have been aware of, but it is revealed in his writings. The emphasis in his case is on the motivational component of activation, i.e. making the first step and joining the military. When talking about Gorman and Thomas’ three categories “money”, “self-improvement” and “serve”, Gallagher could fall into that of self-improvement since he did rise above the society that he did not identify with and became a doer. For the same reason he was intrinsically motivated for his actions, since there was no extrinsic reward leading him on.

Conclusion

In each of the memoirs the soldiers had their own sources of motivation for joining the military, derived from their own personalities.

Anthony Swofford's most dominant motive is to become a man, followed by the motives of revenge, patriotism, "heritage" and finding a home. Nathaniel Fick was motivated by five factors. The most dominant one being self-improvement, followed closely by rising above the average society and becoming a man, and lastly by "heritage" and patriotism. For Chris Kyle the motivational aspects are: patriotism, which was the most dominant one, his sense of duty toward his fellow soldiers, love of fighting and lastly "heritage". Williams' motivation for joining the military was determined by four factors, the most dominant one being to prove her ex-boyfriend wrong and to prove to herself that she can overcome her fears, which was followed by her wish to get into a community and become financially stable. Finally, Matt Gallagher was primarily motivated by the notion of escaping the culture he did not identify with and secondly by the idea of being a part of the history in the making. In most cases the focus was on the motivational component of activation, except in Fick's and Kyle's case that is also based on persistence and intensity. When it comes to Gorman and Thomas' three categories, "money", "self-improvement" and "serve", all the characters fall into the category of "self-improvement". Kyle and Swofford also fall into the category of "serving", besides the one of "self-improvement". Only Williams falls, besides the category of "self-improvement", into the category of "money". Also, all of the mentioned soldiers were intrinsically motivated during their service, except Williams, who was partially extrinsically motivated because one of the reasons she joined the army was for the financial stability it offered.

The analysis of these five Gulf War memoirs has shown that their authors were guided by similar interests in joining the army, which suggests that there might be a certain type of person that is likely to be drawn to the military calling. These American soldiers embody the common American values of self-improvement, patriotism, as well as rugged individualism and manliness.

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