# SOLDIERS HOME: POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS, WARRIOR MASCULINITY, AND THE (RE)FRAMING OF CARE

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ABSTRACT

The United States military has long been considered a proving ground for masculinity and encourages servicemembers to adopt a warrior mindset of bravery and toughness at the expense of vulnerability. Such a mindset often proves troublesome for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as it dissuades them from seeking care in the form of therapy. This article argues that contemporary recommendations to attune therapy to embrace military masculinity in an attempt to make it more appealing to veterans are misguided. Ernest Hemingway's 1925 short story "Soldier's Home" dramatizes how an appeal to normative forms of masculinity as an entry point to post-combat healing risks a rejection of care entirely if this type of masculinity is ever questioned. The substitution of a care-receiving process by a masculinity-affirming process that he cannot accept leaves protagonist Harold Krebs with no choice but to refuse it and flee his hometown after returning from service in World War I. To demonstrate alternative possibilities, the article then examines George Saunders's "Home" (2013) and Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) as texts that explore how interrogations of military masculinity itself can contribute to the healing process. In both texts, the protagonists realize that manhood means more than protection and violence, which engenders an acceptance of care. While neither text offers a complete resolution by its end, they both gesture towards the necessity of changing perceptions of manhood fostered by the military. To conclude, the article references Walt Whitman's *Memoranda During the War* as one historical precedent that demonstrates how certain types of vulnerability are acceptable and necessary, even during wartime.

**Keywords**: masculinity; wartime; Toni Morrison; Ernest Hemingway; Walt Whitman.

In the 1865 version of *Drum-Taps*, Walt Whitman includes a relatively short poem titled "The Veteran's Vision."[1] The speaker begins by sketching the domestic scene where he finds himself, with his "wife at [his] side slumbering," his infant child sleeping not far away, and the war "long over" (Whitman 1865, 55). As he "wake[s] from sleep," the veteran is overtaken by an intense flashback. This vision commands his senses as he "hear[s] the sounds of the different missiles," "see[s] the shells exploding," and

[1] "The Veteran's Vision" was added to the 1867 version of *Leaves of Grass*. Subsequently, it was retitled "The Artilleryman's Vision" and included in the "Drum-Taps" cluster of future versions of *Leaves*. Edits to the poem after its initial publication were minor.

"breathe[s] the suffocating smoke"—all while witnessing the cannon fire, rifle shots, cavalry charges, and chaos erupting around him (ibid.). Despite a "devilish exultation" that the veteran feels in response to the cannon fire, the vision is not sterilized or romanticized, as he sees "[t]he falling, dying" and "the wounded, dripping/and red" (56). The poem ends not with the veteran snapping out of his vision and back to the peace and comfort of his domestic life but with the veteran still inside of this flashback that "[pressed] upon [him]," leaving his fate ambiguous (55). Before World War I's 'shell-shock,' before World War II's 'combat fatigue,' and over 100 years before the term "Post-traumatic stress disorder" was first published in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1980), Whitman recognized and explained how the conclusion of combat does not simply equate to a return to normalcy—in any sense—for the now-veteran.

The visions of Whitman's poem highlight an enduring issue that has persisted and possibly intensified as war has evolved over the past century-and-a-half. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website (2022), between 11% and 20% of American veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom have PTSD, while 12% of Gulf War veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress. For Vietnam Veterans, the percentage is estimated to be about 30. According to other studies, as many as 45% of "recently returning veterans meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD" (Neilson et al. 2020, 579). For thousands upon thousands of individuals, the mind and the body become perpetual vessels of war even when removed from the literal battlefield.

Advocating therapy for veterans with PTSD and combat-induced mental distress seems like a clear and relatively simple solution to providing care for individuals who need it. After all, both prolonged exposure and cognitive processing therapy are "empirically supported" treatment methods for PTSD (Neilson et al. 2020, 580). The complication that prevents this clear and simple solution from being an easy solution is that veterans often balk at the proposal of therapy because it seemingly goes against the toughness, fearlessness, and stoicism required to serve in the military. This disconnect and the underlying gender expectations it stems from is where I seek to intervene.

In this article, I examine the intersections between masculinity, wartime, and care. After sketching what I refer to as the warrior ethos—a longstanding attitude of toughness, imperviousness, and domination fostered by the American military—I turn to contemporary studies that link this expression of manhood with PTSD and studies that suggest attuning therapy to embrace the warrior ethos worldview. I argue that Ernest Hemingway's 1925 short story "Soldier's Home" reveals the problems with a masculinity-centered approach to post-war decompression by dramatizing how a rejection of normative forms of manhood risks a wholesale rejection of care. Echoing the predicament Hemingway dramatizes, George Saunders and Toni Morrison acknowledge the failure of the warrior ethos in modifying care but also evoke an alternative solution. I contend that the protagonists of Saunders's "Home" (2011) and Morrison's *Home* (2012) interrogate military masculinity itself, positing that *it* is the component requiring change. As explored in each version of 'home,' the association between care-receiving and femininity, childhood, and weakness exacerbates the anxiety to receive care. Instead of reframing care to fit within the boundaries of 'acceptable' expressions of masculinity for the veteran, these protagonists experience moments of revelation that expose the myths of the warrior ethos. In these cases, recalibrating masculinity enables care which engenders the possibility for healing.

## THE STRENGTH OF A WARRIOR

In *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire 1898-2001*, Aaron Belkin (2012) argues that military service became the "dominant paradigm for male authority" in the United States after the conclusion of the Spanish-American War (16). For individuals who want to "prove their manhood" (ibid.), military service allows them to demonstrate that "they [are] not 'sissies'" (Phillips 2006, 4). For individuals less aligned with traditional masculinity, the crucible of training and combat enables them to "attain masculine status" (Belkin 2012, 42). While Belkin orients his analysis at the turn of the 20th century, U.S. government and American culture at large have played on this association between the military and masculinity from the Civil War

up through the present to bolster recruitment efforts for various branches of the armed forces, justify political positions, or glorify the soldier at home.[2]

Much has been written about military masculinity and the military's celebration of "traditional masculine values" that includes a "hypermasculine" adherence to heterosexuality, physical fitness, and aggression as well as a distaste for "expressing emotion" and an aversion to "being *feminized*" (Richard and Molloy 2020, 687).[3] As noted by Hyunyoung Moon (2022), the Army "officially adopted the term 'warrior' as an ideal for its troops" in the early 2000s when it incorporated a set of principles called the "Warrior Ethos" into the "Soldier's Creed"—which must be memorized by all soldiers (181). The "Warrior Ethos" reads as follows: "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade" (U.S. Army 2022). Moon argues that the Army's recruitment campaigns of 2018 and 2019—respectively titled "Warriors Wanted" and "What's Your Warrior?"—present true warriors as those who adhere to "the masculine soldier ideal" despite the Army's apparent attempt to expand the definition of who and what roles qualify one as a warrior (190). Furthermore, Moon asserts, "gender integration policies and broadened roles of women servicemembers" have done little to alter the "firmly planted" impression that "warrior" is synonymous with "masculine" (ibid.). Thus, I find the term warrior ethos fitting to describe the brand of masculinity lauded by the military. By promoting attitudes associated with masculinity/hypermasculinity, the military encourages a type of warrior mindset in those who serve that simultaneously encourages bravery, resiliency, and toughness and diminishes vulnerability.[4]

A critical reading of the four sentences that comprise the "Warrior Ethos" passage reveals military masculinity's deceptive complexity. The first sentence that

[2] For examples throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, see Eleanor L. Hannah's "From the Dance Floor to the Rifle Range: The Evolution of Manliness in the National Guards" (2007), Kristin L. Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (1998), Christina Jarvis's *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity during World War II* (2004), and Kathy J. Phillips's *Manipulating Masculinity: War and Gender in Modern British and American Literature* (2006).

[3] See Richard and Molloy's "An Examination of Emerging Adult Military Men: Masculinity and U.S. Military Climate" (2020).

[4] These values are all explicit or implicit pillars of the "Soldier's Creed."

demands soldiers put the mission first effectively extols a type of surrender by elevating an external, shared goal above an individual's needs, wants, preferences, and safety. The next two sentences repudiate surrender in refusing to quit or accept defeat; these sentences reflect the fearlessness and courage associated with military hypermasculinity. The final sentence gestures towards a notion of brotherhood, which is a type of caring. If we are to take the "Warrior Ethos" as the U.S. Army's working definition of qualities that make a warrior, commitments to service and fostering community appear integral. These values should come as no surprise, as depictions of servicemen throughout American history often focus on camaraderie—from *Drum Taps* (1865) to *Band of Brothers* (2001) and beyond. However, the line is drawn between these commitments and being weak/vulnerable. Thus, the problem with the version of military hypermasculinity that I refer to as the warrior ethos is *not* that it rejects all forms of caring. Rather, the issue rests in how it encourages an unflinching attitude of fortitude, strength, and mastery over the self.

While the warrior ethos may have merits in a combat situation, it results in a clear predicament when it comes to soldiers who require mental health care post-deployment, as the vulnerability and openness that therapy often requires are antithetical to the warrior mindset. A study by Matthew Jakupcak et al. (2014) found that "greater endorsement of emotional toughness [defined by responses to questions about how soldiers ought to express or refrain from expressing their problems and fears] was associated with increased likelihood for a positive screen for PTSD and depression" (102).[5] Furthermore, veterans who suffer from PTSD symptoms but believe in higher levels of emotional toughness "may be especially avoidant of" therapy that includes discussing events that involve feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, or fear (103). The authors of the study surmise that men who endorse "traditional male gender ideologies may be drawn to military service, in which endorsement of emotional toughness is further reinforced," which creates a self-perpetuating cycle (Jakupcak et al. 2014, 100).

[5] This is not to say that a belief in emotional toughness causes PTSD. Rather, emotional toughness can "exacerbate emotional distress and delay treatment-seeking for mental health concerns" (Jakupcak et. al 2014, 100).

Another 2014 study linked PTSD in the military with anticipated enacted stigma (AES)—"an individual's belief that others will react in a hostile or discriminatory manner if they seek help for psychological distress" (Blais et al. 2014, 116). This study found that "[h]igher AES was associated with lower likelihood of support seeking," while also noting that AES itself "may be related to military culture or male gender norms that equate vulnerability…with weakness" (118). Three years later, a study by Heath et al. (2017) examined the relation between restrictive emotionality (RE)—defined by J.M. O'Neil as "restrictions and fears about expressing one's feelings" (193)—and military servicemen who experience mental health concerns. With the hypothesis that a combination of masculinity and military culture (both of which promote RE) in a high-distress environment may create a "perfect storm" for help-seeking stigma (194), the authors found that "both RE and distress were uniquely associated with higher levels of [help-seeking] stigma in this sample of men who have served in the military. Thus, military men who may be in need of services may also be the most likely to experience stigma associated with seeking mental health service" (195).

Examined in conjunction with one another, these three studies demonstrate an alarming link between the warrior ethos and the hesitancy veterans experience when it comes to undergoing post-combat therapy. Veterans who endorse emotional toughness are more likely to screen positive for PTSD, and those who have a higher anticipated stigma of suffering from PTSD have a lower likelihood of seeking support. An even greater resistance to seeking support is found in individuals who fear expressing their emotions. All three studies note that normative versions of masculinity encourage traits and attitudes that negatively contribute to PTSD in veterans (i.e. toughness, AES, and RE), resulting in a vicious circle. The toughness endorsed and promoted by the military exacerbates PTSD symptoms, while the hesitancies to express emotions and vulnerabilities associated with traditional forms of masculinity and bolstered by the combat environment hamper support-seeking. Indeed, the military creates the perfect storm for individuals not only to develop PTSD but to keep their struggles to themselves.

To combat this bleak conclusion, some scholars and researchers have offered suggestions based on these and similar findings to make therapy for combat related mental afflictions more palatable for veterans by changing perception rather than changing the process. For example, Blais et al. (2014) advocate "[c]ampaigns promoting access to mental health care" that address "service members' perceptions that people will react negatively to them if they seek help," such as the slogan that "[i]t takes the strength and courage of a warrior to ask for help" (118). Shields et al. (2017) extend this argument by claiming that "veterans who experience lingering effects of trauma or other mental health challenges may begin to narrate their symptoms and any mental health diagnosis as 'failure' or weakness—a fall from masculine grace" (217). Based on themes found in an examination of 15 veterans' narratives about their engagements with mental health treatment post-deployment, the authors claim that the large-scale hesitancy in veterans to seek care for their mental afflictions is rooted in notions of how men should act rather than an aversion to the therapy itself, prompting three suggestions: altering language to make care more "culturally appropriate" for the warrior ethos, recasting therapy as "proof of compliance" to military masculinity, and denoting participants as active rather than "passive recipient[s] of care" (223). Through these suggestions, the authors of this study believe that veterans will be more willing to seek the help they need and find a type of care they can rationalize as acceptable.

## A LIFE OF COMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Recalibrating veteran therapy to account for and even encourage the warrior ethos may not be the best answer. Writing well before PTSD was a defined and named condition, Ernest Hemingway—a wounded veteran himself—dramatized the experience in a way that reveals several flaws with the coupling of reintegration into civilian life and traditional masculinity.[6] For the most part, Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925) focuses on the life of Nick Adams from childhood to his military service in WWI, culminating with

[6] Hemingway served as a Red Cross ambulance driver in Italy during World War I.

his process of making peace with his war experiences in "Big Two-Hearted River." Breaking away from the Adams saga, "Soldier's Home" offers a protagonist in Harold Krebs who faces the same problem with returning to civilian life but from a different perspective with different results. Upon return, Krebs is ignored. He "came back much too late" for the people in his Kansas home to care (Hemingway 1925, 69). Once Krebs "felt the need to talk" about his war experiences, "no one wanted to hear about it," including his parents (69). Instead of listening to their son, Krebs's parents believe that the best thing for him is to have "a definite aim in life" by getting married and starting a career like his peer Charley Simmons (75). Through this belief, they appeal to a normative masculinity as a way to assuage Harold's wartime baggage; they transform the care-receiving process into a masculinity-affirming process.

Through this setup, the text poses and explores three problems regarding achieving catharsis only through an adherence to traditional masculinity. First is that for Krebs to realize such an ideal at home, he must occupy a paradoxical space that requires childlike behavior. If he wants to go out in the evenings to meet young women, he needs his father's permission to use the family car. At the breakfast table, his mother talks to him like a child, reminding her "dear boy" (75) not to "muss up the paper" before his father gets a chance to read it (73). When she gets upset, Krebs refers to her as "Mummy" and says he will "try and be a good boy for [her]" (76). Essentially, Krebs must embrace infantilization to arrive at the form of manhood his parents seek. While scholars like Milton Cohen (2010) would argue that this paradox demonstrates the "lies…[and] game-playing rituals" endemic to Krebs's hometown—in contrast to the "remarkably 'positive'" and "uncomplicated" masculine pursuits afforded to Krebs by his combat experience (163)—the contradictions and mixed messages of masculinity are far from a civilian-exclusive issue for Krebs. He wrestled with them during his time overseas when he and his fellow soldiers oscillated between boasting about constantly needing a

woman and claiming "girls mean nothing" (Hemingway 1925, 71).[7] This contradiction begs the question about which is the more masculine position: needing a girl (signaling virility but also dependence on another) or not thinking about girls ever (signaling an independent stoicism but also an implied asexuality or homosexuality). Both at home and in the military, then, the path to being a real man remains murky and paradoxical. The second problem the story explores is how advocating a normative masculinity enables its unchallenged continuation. Krebs enjoys the solitude of reading and the dark of the pool hall—both of which point to a more private and contemplative life than that of the husband/careerman. Since this lifestyle deviates from the expected masculinity of young men in this town, Krebs's parents attempt to force him to 'become a man' through a process that can only be considered a distortion of care.[8] Mr. and Mrs. Krebs never attempt to understand their son's needs, for they continue to advocate a lifestyle for him that he is incapable of handling at the moment. Similarly, regarding the question of needing girls in the army, Krebs claims that "you did not have to think about it" because when you really needed a girl, you simply got one (72). In effect, any interrogation of what *actually* makes one a 'real man' is stifled because the decision-making process lies beyond the soldier and in the hands of the Army itself to determine what is normal—just like how Mr. and Mrs. Krebs determine that a job and a girlfriend are the best things for their son. Rather than interrogate this form of masculinity, using it as part of the healing process simply assumes that it is somehow natural as opposed to constructed and, perhaps, flawed.

Finally, Krebs's eventual fate demonstrates the consequences of hinging a post-combat return to normalcy on masculinity. Psychological recommendations assume that altering care to comply with the warrior ethos makes it palatable. What happens if that masculinity is questioned? In the story, Krebs does not simply accept the norms of

[7] Aaron Belkin (2012) makes a convincing argument that military masculinity, in both its formation and practice, is full of contradictions, mixed messages, and seemingly incompatible dualities, ultimately claiming that "the ideal of American military masculinity is premised on a simultaneous renunciation and embrace of the unmasculine" (33).
[8] According to Nel Noddings (1984), "Whatever the one-caring actually does is enhanced or diminished, made meaningful or meaningless, in the attitude conveyed to the cared-for" (61). Other care theorists like Joan Tronto take issue with this argument about care being a dyad but recognize that care, at its core, is about relationships.

masculinity that his parents, peers, and town advocate. Both his time in the army and his time at home as a veteran demonstrate for Krebs how masculinity is fraught with contradictions and no easy answers.[9] For someone who tries to "keep his life from being complicated" Krebs's understanding of manhood only gets more muddled as he is pushed to embrace it (76). Unable to reconcile masculinity and care, Krebs's only option is to flee, for the supposed solution simply breeds further confusion. If the 'acceptable' conduit for care is a questionable masculinity, a rejection of that masculinity risks an ensuing rejection of care.

## RETURNING HOME: POSSIBILITIES FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION

Where Hemingway dramatizes the complications of relying on normative forms of masculinity to assist in making peace with wartime experiences, George Saunders highlights the shortcomings and faults of the warrior ethos itself. In "Home," Saunders (2013) pits recently returned veteran Mike against a society that does not endorse or praise the warrior ethos, along with personal demons of memories of his actions during deployment in the Middle East, and his own combat-induced mental distress.[10] The plot consists of a string of episodes where Mike and his interpretation of masculinity are rendered impotent, culminating in Mike's recognition that he needs help and needs to change.

Part of Mike's conflict upon his return home is how he is disregarded by those who do not want to deal with him. The text employs repetition to great effect, and one of the most obvious repetitions is the phrase "Thank you for your service." Mike's mother's landlord (Saunders 2013, 180, 181), employees at an electronics store (184), the sheriff (189), and his brother-in-law Ryan's father (194) all thank Mike for his service. However, rather than coming off as a sincere expression of gratitude for the horrors and

[9] One of the story's most common motifs is the practice of lying. The construction of 'true' masculinity may be another lie present.

[10] "Home" was originally published in *The New Yorker* in 2011. It was later released in Saunders's *Tenth of December* collection in 2013.

suffering Mike endured, "the thanks comes across as shallow, disconnected," and patronizing (Richtel 2015). None of the individuals who thank Mike for his service show any interest in either him or his experiences; they simply use the phrase to address them and disregard them. Denied a voice, Mike symbolically embodies the childhood that he lived prior to serving in the military—the childhood in the same town, house, and circumstances he returns to after the war.

In addition to being disregarded by those he encounters, Mike realizes that he has been unmanned quite literally, as a new man has replaced him in all his relationships. Harris, his mother's latest boyfriend, continuously inserts himself into Mike's life as if he were a source of authority and wisdom. When Mike first returns home, Harris asks Mike's mother "How long's he staying?" as if Mike's presence both intrudes upon his property, and Mike himself is incapable of answering (Saunders 2013, 171). Multiple times, Harris asks Mike about "the worst thing [he] ever did" while serving because telling him about it would be "[g]ood for the soul" (191). Far from serving as a confidant, Harris functions as both a replacement father figure and an obstacle between Mike and his mother. Mike's most agonizing example of emasculation through dispossession, though, is his now ex-wife Joy and her new husband Evan, whose relationship developed while Mike was overseas. Evan has literally replaced Mike as the man of the house, preventing Mike from entering to visit his two children and now ex-wife. Though Mike served as a protector and provider prior to deployment, his return finds him as a son without a father, a husband without a wife, and a father without children.

Mike's version of masculinity—the more traditional, tough, military masculinity—seems to suffer the same displacement that Mike does. In some instances, it has been rendered powerless, such as when Mike attempts to intimidate his mother's landlord into letting her stay in the house through physical force; the landlord simply calls the sheriff and a moving company. Elsewhere in the text, a New Age, softer masculinity replaces any trace of traditional or military masculinity, such as the electronics store that features male employees bringing shoppers espresso and cookies as they browse (184). Mike's description of his encounter with Evan, though, epitomizes

the combination of traditional masculinity's displacement and neutering. When Evan tells Mike how difficult it was for him and Joy to acknowledge their feelings for each other while also acknowledging that Joy's then-current husband was serving in the military, Mike starts to feel "like a chump" (187). He equates it to "being held down by a bunch of guys so another guy could come over and put his New Age fist up [his] ass while explaining that having his fist up [Mike's] ass was far from his first choice and was actually making him feel conflicted" (187). In this situation, Evan renders Mike completely vulnerable and powerless by expressing his emotions and avoiding confrontation. Mike, the tough, violent veteran, has no response. He simply takes Evan's verbal fisting and leaves, accentuating how, back home, a sensitive masculinity subordinates military masculinity.

Though the world and relationships Mike returns to after his service consistently disarm the warrior ethos by resisting the toughness and dominance Mike attempts to impose, it is not the first time that this version of masculinity has failed him. Recalling a pond cleaning job he performed in high school, Mike relays that each time he brought his rake to the gunk, he ripped open the swollen bellies of dozens of tadpoles. When he tried to save them, he realized that doing so only "torture[d] them worse," yet he persisted because the only way to rationalize the unintended carnage "was to keep doing it, over and over" (200). He concludes his recollection and analysis by claiming, "Years later, at Al-Raz, it was a familiar feeling" (200). While Mike's dubious actions at Al-Raz that haunt his return home are never explicitly revealed, they lie in the space between the two poles of being a warrior: protecting those entrusted to you and destroying those opposed. Evidently, Mike initially sought to protect at Al-Raz, but this protection turned into violence that he normalized to himself by refusing to stop.

As a man and as a warrior, Mike consistently experiences mixed messages that leave him in a liminal space between how men should act and how far is too far. The fineness of the line is only emphasized by the military as a whole, as Mike both receives

a Silver Star and is court-martialed for his battlefield actions.[11] Further complicating things is how, despite the court-martial, Mike is "cleared … of that [charge]" (191). Like Krebs, Mike's understanding of masculinity is less of an anchor that he can grab ahold of in times of uncertainty and more of a confounding presence.

The story's conclusion indicates that this confounding presence of warrior masculinity is precisely what Mike needs to part with to address his struggles. As much as Mike wants to find fault in the New Age man, it proves difficult for him. His sister's husband Ryan is not a hitter like his mother initially believes, but an active, present, and sensitive father. Evan is not quite a "selfish-dick" (187), but a man who expresses his emotions and tries to mitigate conflict. Perhaps due to the influence of these other characters who are not as bad as Mike initially assumes or perhaps because Mike's life experiences have not quite brought him to a point of no return, he has a revelation in the story's closing paragraphs. Seemingly at a breaking point, Mike returns to Evan and Joy's house intending to make them and his two children "be sorry for what had happened to [him]" (201). When he sees that his mother, sister, Harris, Ryan, and Ryan's parents are there as well, "the coming disaster [expands] to include the deaths of all present" (201). However, something "[softens] in [him]" when he sees how weak his mother looks (ibid.). Upon witnessing her vulnerability, Mike's mindset changes from murderous rage to docility, and he recognizes that he needs these people, for they are his only chance to be brought back from the edge he nearly falls from. He realizes that he cannot heal on his own, and tenacity, dominance, and destruction will not solve anything.

Mike's seemingly abrupt change of heart at the end of the story is an epiphany, not a surrender. Recognizing his own caring impulse towards his mother, Mike creates a dichotomy between violence/dominance/power and empathetic care; the two impulses are juxtaposed with one another rather than synthesized in some sort of shoehorned fashion. For the first time, Mike resists embodying the 'tough-guy,' and, in

[11] According to the U.S. Department of Defense (2012), Silver Stars are awarded for "gallantry in action" either "against an enemy of the United States" or "in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force."

doing so, he sees its incompatibility with the path forward towards making peace with his haunting wartime experience. It is hard to imagine Mike becoming like Ryan or Evan, but it is not hard to imagine him shifting his hardline stance on masculinity in favor of relationality and openness—for both his own sake and for that of those around him. Mike's future may be ambiguous, but this culminating moment where he recognizes care, not toughness, as necessary offers the possibility for growth and healing.

## HERE STANDS A MAN

Where Saunders's "Home" culminates with a recognition that the warrior ethos needs to change to accept relational forms of care rather than reject them, Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) illustrates a complete journey from that ethos steeped in traditional masculinity to a caring alternative in its depiction of protagonist Frank Money's journey back to his hometown of Lotus, Georgia.[12] Like "Soldier's Home" and "Home," *Home* is a story where the returned veteran must reckon with the empty promises of traditional masculinity. Unlike these other texts, though, trauma around masculinity is much more important to Frank's growth, leading him to find and embrace a suitable form of care and a suitable interpretation of manhood.

The novella opens with Frank recalling a scene from his childhood where he and his sister Cee sneak into a fenced off field to watch several horses fighting with one another. As Frank repeats several times, the horses stick out in his memory for how they "stood like men," conveying his awe at their beauty and brutality (Morrison 2012, 3). As Frank and his sister begin to leave, they observe a group of white men pick up a dead black body from a wheelbarrow, throw it into a ditch, and hastily bury it. From the outset, the novel links masculinity and trauma for Frank. On a basic level, the fighting horses *stood* like men when they reared back on their hind legs. However, they stood

[12] Published in 2012 and set during the 1950s, *Home* functions as a bridge between "Soldier's Home" (published and set in post-WWI America) and "Home" (published and set in contemporary America).

like *men* because of their strength and power. The simile implies that, even at such a young age, Frank has a notion of what makes a man: authority, strength, brutality, dominance. The proximity of these two events seems to have a lasting impression; the "deep black" horse is the victor in the conflict with the rust-colored horse (4), but the black man, disgraced by the jabs of the spades pushing him into the ground, lacks any sort of power. While Frank does not know anything about the dead man at this point, the juxtaposition of the dead black man with the awesome, victorious black horse implies that survival, when it comes to blackness, requires traditional masculine strength.

It is worth noting that Frank's impression of masculinity does allow for a type of care from the very beginning. He believes that he must fill the role of protector for his sister, which he attempts to do as they both lie in the grass hiding from the group of men. Frank acts this way for Cee throughout the text from childhood (attacking a pervert watching her play baseball; teaching her which berries are poisonous; saving her from their grandmother Lenore's wrath) to adulthood (rescuing her from the eugenics experiments of Dr. Beau). While protection-as-care is not an illegitimate form of care work, Joan Tronto (2013) argues that men often benefit from a "protection pass" (72) that seemingly absolves them of any other caring duties that are interpreted as "more feminized" (79). Protection is "presumed to be individualistic" which detracts from relationality's importance to care work (94). Essentially, the protector role allows an individual to look out for another's best interest one-dimensionally without a reciprocal recognition of the other. When this type of care is yoked to masculinity, it reinforces notions of strength, toughness, and dominance, all of which deny empathy and openness.

The other set of traumas that affect Frank throughout the text occur during his military service in Korea, but, instead of shaping or reinforcing his interpretation of masculinity, these traumas interrogate it. The first two of these events revealed to readers are the deaths of Mike Durham and Abraham "Stuff" Stone, Frank's 'homeboys' from Lotus who also served in Korea. Frank's belief in the masculine protector role fails him in both cases. For Mike, Frank "fought off the birds" that sought to attack his

wounded friend and "held on to him, talked to him for an hour" to keep him awake (Morrison 2012, 103); regardless, "he died anyway" (103). For Stuff, Frank retrieved his severed arm blown off by enemy explosives and "stanched the blood" oozing from the remaining stump, but, like Mike, "[h]e died anyway" (103). Despite his best efforts, being the protector—the only type of man that Frank knows how to be—is not enough to save his homeboys.[13]

The third traumatic event that Frank experiences in Korea happens first chronologically, but Frank's shame causes him to lie about it to the narrator. Initially, Frank relays a story of a young girl who often scavenged for scraps near his post. He claims that one day, as his relief guard approached her, she touched his crotch and said something that sounded like "Yum-yum" (95). Horrified and possibly tempted, the guard shoots and kills her. Later, in a first-person account of his memory to the narrator, Frank comes clean. He admits, "*I shot the Korean girl in her face. I am the one she touched*" (133). In his confession, Frank also admits a crisis of masculinity prompted by his actions, questioning, "*How could I like myself, even be myself if I surrendered to that place where I unzip my fly and let her taste me right then and there?* [...] *What type of man is that?*" (134) [author's emphasis]. Just like his repression of the dead body in the novella's opening scene, Frank tries to dissociate himself from this memory and distract himself from having to face the truth of his actions. He admits that he emphasizes his grief about his friends' deaths as part of a coping mechanism to mask his shame for this incident, but doing so does not provide him any solace.

These three events in Korea instill in Frank an uncertainty regarding his interpretation of masculinity, for it fails him when put to the test. Just as significant in each case, though, is Frank's loss of control. With the deaths of his friends, no amount of protection or assistance can save their lives. With the young girl, his immediate instinct is to shoot her to snuff out temptation instead of restraining himself. According

[13] Clearly, Frank cares deeply for Mike and Stuff, and their deaths should not be construed as some sort of failure to care. Rather, the effects of their deaths on Frank and his eventual journey to come to peace with his war experiences emphasize that the problem with the warrior ethos is not an absence of care but a rejection of all forms of vulnerability.

to John Fox and Bob Pease (2012), trauma directly affects one's sense of masculinity precisely because it impacts one's sense of control. Initially, Frank spirals downward into alcoholism, recklessness, and a desire to reclaim his masculinity by rescuing Cee from Dr. Beau. However, Fox and Pease also argue that "[t]he experience of trauma is the regaining of this human wisdom of confronting the illusions of comprehensive mastery and of traditional masculinities" (28). If one can recognize that trauma-as-a-loss-of-control exposes a "failure in the model of manhood, and not in the man" (29), then that individual can use past traumatic experiences as points of growth and understanding. In *Home*, Frank mirrors this process. His journey throughout the text is about coming to peace with his past which ensues from his reinterpretation of masculinity and what it means to be a man.

Unlike Krebs or Mike, this journey to an alternative conception of manhood for Frank has an additional layer due to his status as a black man in 1950s America, for the traditional masculinity he endorses is, at its core, a "hegemonic white view of masculinity" (Harack 2016, 380). Throughout Frank's journey, his race impinges his ability to fully participate in American society and causes multiple roadblocks on his trip to Georgia, including being placed in a mental asylum and getting patted down by police officers. As Reverend John Locke tells Frank, even though Jim Crow is over, "[c]ustom is just as real as law and can be just as dangerous" (Morrison 2012, 19). Part of these dangers are internal as well, for Frank's status as a "traumatized black veteran is the epitome of the already fragmented black individual" (Ramírez 2016, 137). Part of Frank's quest, then, is to reach the wholeness of community that has the power to repair the fragmented self and reject the "model of rampant individualism" associated with the "white, hegemonic, male ideologies of progress" (Harack 2016, 372). These struggles highlight Frank's quest not just to understand what it means to be a man but what it means to be a black man.[14]

[14] For more on this racial quest, see Cucarella-Ramon (2017), "Any Man's Blues': Exposing the Crisis of African-American Masculinity in the Delusion of a Post-Racial United States in Toni Morrison's *Home*" and Harack (2016), "Shifting Masculinities and Evolving Feminine Power: Progressive Gender Roles in Toni Morrison's *Home*."

As a counter to the prejudice he faces, a consistent refrain on Frank's cross-country odyssey is the willingness of those whom he encounters to offer their assistance. In fact, "the sustenance and solidarity" of individuals with whom he has no prior relation prove invaluable to his otherwise "impossible" task of traveling from Seattle to Georgia (Ibarrola 2014, 115). From Jean Locke's sandwiches to Reverend Maynard's list of hotels in Chicago that will not reject a black man to Billy Watson's gifts of clothes and a place to stay, Frank witnesses the compassion of care and experiences the role of care-receiver. Just as significant as these caring acts are Frank's own opportunities to deviate from the role of violent protector. If opening himself to receive care is Frank's first step to changing his views of masculinity, his nonviolent interaction with Dr. Beau—who is guilty of performing eugenics experiments that bring Cee to the brink of death—functions as his second step. While "[t]houghts of violence…[rush] through Frank" (Morrison 2012, 109) as he prepares himself to retrieve Cee, he confronts the doctor with a "quiet, even serene, face" (111). With the help of Sarah, Cee's coworker and friend, Frank simply scoops up his sister with "[n]o harm" to anyone (112). Reflecting on the relative ease with which he accomplished his task, Frank feels that "not having to beat up the enemy to get what he wanted was somehow superior—sort of, well, smart" (114). While he still functions as the protector in Cee's rescue, the nonviolence of the situation is not lost on Frank as a completely valid way to operate.

Upon his arrival in Lotus with the severely wounded Cee, Frank experiences a type of care that runs completely counter to his belief in protection. Led by Ethel Fordham, the women of Lotus take Cee away from Frank and into their guardianship. Frank is excluded from the recovery process because the women "[believe] his maleness would worsen her condition" (119). Frank's only understanding of care is to protect others from harm. Yet, to recover from Dr. Beau's torture, Cee needs the care of "country women who loved mean" (121). This tough love begins by disregarding sympathy and "[handling] sickness as though it were an affront" (ibid.). As her wounds begin to heal, Cee is reintegrated into the community of women through embroidering and quilting. Finally, she is privy to "the demanding love of Ethel Fordham" which strengthens her to as full of a recovery as possible (125). This three-step process of poignant action,

community building, and love upends Frank's entire understanding of what it means to care for another. Despite Cee's permanent infertility due to the doctor's experiments, the country women save her life because they understand that protective care is not helpful in this situation. Cee's recovery as well as her newfound strength and self-assuredness due to the process prompt Frank to recalibrate his belief in the possibilities of care.

The culminating moment of Frank's inner journey is a marriage of masculinity and care proper that simultaneously allows him to make peace with a past trauma while also providing him the opportunity to move forward and heal from his war experiences. After over a decade of repressing his memory, Frank inquires about the burial he and his sister witnessed as children. The men of Lotus reveal that the building on the farm held "men-treated-like-dog fights"— one-on-one battles to death for sport (138). According to Fish Eye Anderson, ten to fifteen years prior a boy named Jerome came to Lotus after being forced to fight his own father with a switchblade in one such deathmatch where "[o]ne of them had to die or they both would [be killed]" (ibid.). While Jerome initially refused to strike, his father insisted, telling him, "Obey me, son, this one last time" (139). Suffering much anguish, Jerome then took his father's life to save his own. After hearing this story, Frank gathers some tools, a piece of wood, Cee, and the quilt she had been stitching. The two of them return to the field, dig up the skeleton of the man they saw buried years ago, bring the remains to the riverside, and give him a proper grave, burying him vertically under a bay tree. Frank labels the grave with a wooden marker that reads "Here Stands A Man" (145).

While neither Frank nor the narrator offer much commentary during this concluding episode to the novella, Frank's actions demonstrate a new understanding of care and masculinity that intertwines both. The bones that Frank buries are the remains of an individual who gave up his own life out of love for his son. He could not protect, so he gave himself completely for another. For these reasons, as Frank recognizes by the text's end, this individual is a man. Of course, this understanding of masculinity is very different from Frank's prevailing interpretation up until this point in the text. Similarly, though, Cee's recovery shows that there are different types of care from those assumed

by gendered expectations. Despite assumptions, having children is not the only type of care for women. Cee cannot bear children, but she can "know the truth, accept it, and keep on quilting," finding community in Lotus outside of an individual family unit (132). For Frank, being a strong, rough, violent protector is not the only valid type of care for men. While the horses in the opening scene stood *like* men, it was only by resemblance. Jerome's father *is* a man, and Frank recognizes it by the novella's end.

By altering his perception of masculinity and the possibilities for manhood, Frank can begin to make peace with his own war experiences that were crises of masculinity prompted by his belief in the warrior ethos. A masculinity that demands an individual always be in control, always hold a dominant position, never succumb to weakness, and not need anything from anyone is not a true masculinity because such demands are impossible to satisfy. Frank's new conception of masculinity by the text's end sets him on a path to be open with what he did in Korea and make peace. While the novella's ending does not depict all of Frank's problems as somehow 'solved,' it shows him burying his traumas—and that is a burying of coming-to-peace-with rather than a burying of repression. Open to other expressions of care and masculinity, Frank, alongside Cee, finally has an emotional and spiritual place that he can call home.

## THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

Reframing care to fit into the warrior ethos by making it a masculine endeavor seems wrong. Such a process simply enables a belief in military hypermasculinity to persist even though care itself rejects that worldview and the association between military service and a tenacious manhood is a construct that clashes with reality. Still, advocates for recalibrating care in a way that accounts for the warrior ethos are partially right; perception needs to change in order for servicemembers to accept the care that they need. However, instead of changing the perception of care to that of a manly endeavor, we need to change the perception that different types of care have no place in the warrior ethos.

This suggestion is not a well-meaning yet utopic fantasy, but an embrace of an under-acknowledged pattern of wartime behavior that stretches back in American

history to at least the Civil War. In *Memoranda During the War*, Walt Whitman (1875) details his experiences serving as a nurse of sorts in and around Washington D.C. between 1862 and 1865. While Whitman understood the medical staff's prerogative to abandon the ostensible lost causes in the overcrowded hospital wards, he also recognized the injustice of letting young men die alone, "without the presence of kith or kin," and sought to serve in this capacity (Whitman 1875, 44). For certain wounded soldiers, this would mean giving "little gift, such as oranges, apples sweet crackers, figs," (11) or small sums of money "to raise their spirits, and show them that somebody cared for them, and practically felt a fatherly or brotherly interest in them" (64). For others, gifts were not able to warm their spirits that "hunger[ed] and thirst[ed] for affection" (54). In these cases, Whitman offered his time, serving as a friendly face and confidant, which often included "[writing] all sorts of letters" for these soldiers, "including love letters, very tender ones" (14). And, sometimes, it meant offering them a kiss—a final moment of intimacy, affection, and love—as they breathed their last breaths.

Whitman enabled *and* encouraged Civil War soldiers to embody intimacy, closeness, tenderness, and affection, opening their eyes to the possibilities of accepting care during their most vulnerable hours. While electing the caring function of nursing along with the sacrifices it requires and the mental turmoil it instills may be considered an alternative conception of masculinity during wartime, Whitman actively encouraged an 'unmasculine' response from the soldiers he cared for during his nursing tenure. In this symbiotic way—both from and towards Whitman—*Memoranda*'s content offers a concrete example of empathetic caring of men, between men in a purportedly hyper-masculinized context that does not allow for such expressions of tenderness. Caring practices and attitudes are by no means foreign to military service—recall the camaraderie encouraged by the "Warrior Ethos" passage itself. However, it is this specific version of caring that encourages openness and vulnerability that expressly combats the hypermasculine nature of the military which contributes to the widespread incompatibility of veterans and PTSD therapy.

With this historical precedent in mind, maybe encouraging a certain type of vulnerability in the military has benefits, especially when it comes to the disconnect in

veterans who must transform from independent beacons of strength to emotionally expressive communicators in order to make peace with traumas caused by their service. If the "Warrior Ethos" passage itself accounts for an acceptable type of surrender and actively encourages brotherhood amongst soldiers, such a foundation is already laid. The first steps to a solution simply require a shift of emphasis to the principles/values behind *these* aspects of warriorhood deemed not only tolerable but necessary.

The position I put forth in this article is less of an argument against certain psychological recommendations than it is an advocation for a different perspective in the hope that it does not get lost or forgotten. Ultimately, the goal for each side is to encourage help for veterans suffering alone, in silence. While the works by Hemingway, Saunders, and Morrison are fiction and may not be *evidence* that altering the warrior ethos is a viable solution, they contain the same *truth* Whitman observed during the most catastrophic war to ever take place on American soil: maybe a caregiver and a care-receiver can both be warriors as well, for warriors are still humans.

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