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# Beyond the Downside of War and Stress: A Commentary on Danieli

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**Abstract.** This article describes areas of psychological functioning that are often ignored or discounted by authors commenting on the psychological effects of war.

Yael Danieli (2002) has written a book with data from anecdotes and empirical analyses that underline the noxiousness of psychological stress experienced by selected classes of noncombatants in war. Of great interest is that these classes do not comprise the commonly perceived classes of civilian victims targeted by or caught in the middle of opposing military and paramilitary adversaries. Instead, the book focuses on people who not always but often choose to be in the firing line—even if their choices vary from an intention to stop the firing, to aid commonly perceived victims, to report on the firing, to be where the action is, to make a living, to find fame, to find or act out an ideology, or to seemingly have no conscious intention at all. Danieli categorizes these classes as peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers, and representatives of communications media.

A main conclusion of the book is that the noncombatants who choose to be in the firing line will experience ineluctable psychological trauma. And this trauma will arise both through the intrinsic nature of their social roles and in interaction with longstanding and recently appearing contextual variables of war. An example of the former would be a deep sensing over time of the deaths, injuries, diseases, and deprivation of combatants and commonly perceived classes of civilian victims. An example of the latter would be the intentional targeting for death of peacekeepers, aid workers, and media representatives by combatants.

That Danieli provides a competent description of the noxious psychology of war can be well supported by reading the book. That Danieli provides a complete description of the psychology of war cannot be so well supported. In fact, a huge lacuna in the author's coverage can easily lead to an equally huge lacuna in the reader's understanding. That is, seekers of the total experience of war will nowhere find the positive psychology of war.

Outside of Danieli's book there are anecdotal data and empirical studies bearing on war's psychological benefits. For combatants, these data can be gathered from mythologists and historians of war going back to the beginnings of intellectual history to war correspondents in a contemporary gathering at a bar or private home. For the classes of noncombatants chosen for study by Danieli, the data are more likely to reside anecdotally in the bars, private homes, and other social gatherings as well as in published journalistic and biographical accounts.

What are the elements of the positive psychology of war? They include the exhilaration of being shot at without experiencing the supreme physical sacrifice or without negative physical consequence, the confidence of self-mastery and self-efficacy, the intrinsic satisfaction of doing one's job well, the adaptive narcissism of being caught up in some cause bigger than oneself with that something becoming part of the self, fulfillment of filling a sense of full or partial emptiness with an experience not experienced by most people in the world, and the notoriety of being there.

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This advocacy for the positive psychology of war is not a critique of Danieli for not writing a book that, perhaps, was not chosen to be written. Instead, in a social context of commercial communication that embraces victimization as entertainment value that is good for business and of antimilitarism as political correctness, a book not chosen to be written becomes a book that cannot be chosen for it would seem as if there is nothing there to be written. As well, even those therapists who make their livelihoods on the real and alleged victimization of others might find better therapeutic efficacy through a comprehensive perspective of the psychology of war. Finally, the good news for war's entrepreneurs and the bad news for others is that war's omnipresence is founded on its positive psychologies of self as well as its negative psychologies of the self and others. (See Bolton, E. E.; Glenn, D. M.; Orsillo, S.; Roemer, L.; & Litz, B. T. (2003). The relationship between self-disclosure and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder in peacekeepers deployed to Somalia. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 16*, 203-210; Britt, T.W. (2003). Aspects of identity predict engagement in work under adverse conditions. *Self & Identity, 2*, 31-45; Danieli, Y. (2002). Sharing the front line and the back hills: International protectors and providers: Peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers, and the media in the midst of crisis. Baywood; Rosen, G.M. (1996). Posttraumatic stress disorder, pulp fiction, and the press. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry & the Law, 24*, 267-275; Summerfield, D. (2002). Effects of war: Moral knowledge, revenge, reconciliation, and medicalised concepts of "recovery". *British Medical Journal, 325*, 1105-1107; Thucydides. (2003). *History of the Peloponnesian War*. (R. Warner, Trans.). Viking.)