



# Popular Culture and the Military

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## Abstract

This chapter consolidates just over 100 books and journal articles at the intersection of the military and popular culture in the social science and humanities studies literature. All studies are English language publications and focus on popular culture and the military in the United States and the United Kingdom. The studies coalesce around 18 distinctive topics known as genres in the popular culture literature. The genres include literature/books, films, television, mass media, music, video games, board games, fashion, photography, and sports. Eight emerging genres include food, technology, graffiti, scandals, social

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media, toys, celebrities, and comics. Most studies are published in the journal *Armed Forces & Society* followed by the *Journal of Popular Culture*; *Critical Military Studies*; and *Media, War & Conflict*, among other journals, books, and edited volumes. Qualitative methods and films dominate the popular military culture studies. Popular military culture is a burgeoning subdiscipline.

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**Keywords**

Popular culture · Military · Genres · Films · Music · Television · Fashion · Video games

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**Introduction**

There is no seminal work in the study of popular culture and the military. Indeed, there is no single, overarching theory of popular culture (Danesi 2019). Further, a scan of treatments of popular culture textbooks show that they regularly do not include references to the military, war, soldiers, or the armed forces. When there are exceptions, the studies focus on a specific form of popular culture with a military reference such as film (Boggs and Pollard 2007) or gender (Frühstück 2007). Popular culture scholarship certainly emerges out of or at least alongside the study of cultural sociology (Grindstaff 2008). One reason perhaps for the military omission is that the study of military culture has traditionally been oriented toward an integrationist model at the suppression of a fragmentation orientation (Winslow 2007). The former relies more on traditional positivistic epistemological approaches to studying the military such as surveys and experiments. These strategies for research have long been embraced by science and are well-grounded within and restricted to the military institution. Fragmented models rely more on qualitative and interpretive methodologies such as ethnographies, interpretive work, and participatory action research. These methods are less anchored in the military institution and scholars using these latter techniques are less emic in the military. This disjuncture likely contributes to the lack of synthesis of studies of popular culture and the military. Yet despite the orientation, there are in recent years numerous desperate and rich studies.

Conceptually, social scientists connect more with Grindstaff's definition of popular culture referencing Mukerji and Schudson as "...the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population" (Grindstaff 2008, pp. 207–208). Similarly, there is resonance with the reference to Williams on the four common uses associated with the word popular: "...that which is well liked by many people, that which is deemed unworthy or inferior, work deliberately seeking to win favor with people, and forms of culture made by people themselves" (Grindstaff 2008, p. 207).

One shining beacon on the hill of popular culture scholarship is that it is concomitantly becoming more sociological and more interdisciplinary. This potentially benefits social scientists and those that study the military as much of the

scholarship is inter- and multidisciplinary. This makes the future study of the intersection of popular culture and the military vibrant, fruitful, exciting, and penetrating. However, Grindstaff warns that sociologists, anthropologists, historians, political scientists, and others may become lost to the study of popular culture as the preoccupation with mass media (e.g., television and films) is at risk of monopolizing the field. Our way ahead here does not necessarily show this to be the case. But the reader should be warned. The publication of military studies has spread rather wide but prudently around popular cultural topics – what popular culture scholars call genres – “the books, movies, television programs, and websites [etc.] that are produced for mass consumption” (Danesi 2019, p. 41). The audience consumes different forms within the genre. The audience refers “to the typical readers, spectators, listeners, viewers, and web navigators attracted to a certain genre” (Danesi 2019, p. 41).

This chapter is informed by mostly scholarly literature at the intersection of popular culture and the military. Primary sources for searching included such scholarly journals as *Journal of Popular Culture*; *Armed Forces & Society*; *Journal of Critical Military Studies*; *Journal of Military Behavioral Health*; *Military Psychology*; and *Media, War, and Conflict*, among less ubiquitous others. From here published books on the topic were sought out – with most co-located in the book review sections of these journals. Additionally, Google Scholar searches using key terms such as “popular culture,” “material culture,” “nonmaterial culture,” “military,” “war,” “soldiers/marines/sailors,” and “armed forces” yielded sources. Featured are 104 mostly scholarly sources limiting inclusion to recent or stand out selections anchored in a specific genre. Ultimately, the genres featured below include 10 salient areas: literature, films, television, mass media, music, video games, board games, fashion, photography, and sports. An 11th genre represents a set of emerging topics including food, technology, graffiti, scandals, social media, toys, celebrities, and comics. The chapter concludes with popular culture topics holding nascent potential at the intersection of the military.

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## Genres

### Literature and the Military

Literature and the military include both nonfiction and fiction books. For nonfiction, Woodward and Jenkins (2018) in *Bringing War to Book* provide insights to representations of war and the military experience treating them as process and social production. The book explores and provides a somewhat how-to on military memoirs. They study 250 military memoirs published since 1980 about the British armed forces. They also utilize available interviews from published military memoirists who tell stories about their books. Major themes they unearth include: the description of the military memoir; motivations for writing; authors’ reflections on their readerships; inclusions and exclusions within the text; the memories and

materials drawn upon; the collaborations with a range of others to get to print; and even the design of unique covers.

Many service members and veterans write autobiographies. Kleinreesink (2014) provides comprehensive analysis of nonfiction, autobiographical books, published between 2001 and 2010 in Dutch, English, or German in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands. These books mostly deal with the Afghanistan deployment. Most notably for the study of popular culture, the audience is the public writ large. The book attempts to answer four distinct questions: (1) who writes an autobiographical book about deployment in Afghanistan? (2) Who publishes such books? (3) what is the content? and (4) why do they write?

Using both a mixed-method quantitative and qualitative, cross-national, and interdisciplinary approach, foremost, there is a direct proportional relationship between the number of soldiers having Afghanistan deployment experience and the number of books produced by country.

Scholars have gone in depth on individual books as well. Rosenhaft (2019) uses historical examples of what is referred to as “military marginalia” interpreting WWI-era best-selling memoirs. Further, old memoirs can take on new life in the twenty-first century (Samet 2019).

To say that books and the military are passé is to be mis-informed. Bakken (2020), Samet (2007), and Fleming (2005) have offered up sweeping accounts as civilian faculty members at US military academies.

In terms of fictional books and the military, Harper (2001) offers a content analysis of cusp twenty-first century best sellers for their treatment of the military, service members, and war. Anchored within the civil-military gap conceptualizations of the 1990s, he discovers lacunae on military topics in the top selling fictional books of the era. But he does not view this as problematic – the nation was not at war. The last 20 years may prove right as the world waits for a content analysis to be conducted of recent books. Further, a subgenre has emerged in military fiction: popular military romance fiction (Kitchen 2015).

## Films and the Military

Films and the military is the most prominent genre of the 18 covered in this chapter. One of the first films ever made could be labeled a military training film titled *A Cavalryman Mounting and Dismounting from his Horse in the Acceptable Military Style*. The modern military and film are intimate. They benefit society, soldiers, the war effort, the military, and arts institutions, and in many cases, they even conspired (Wasson and Grieveson 2018). Fictional military films as well as documentaries are popular forms of entertainment and are even teaching and learning tools.

The fictional war film is considered a subgenre of films more generally. Films about most wars exist (Doherty 1999) as do topics in and around war such as Nazism (Birdwell 2000), propaganda films (Donald 2017), and the veteran (Katzman 1993).

Researchers have conducted examinations of particular military and war topical representations in films including descriptions of military culture (Harper 2001),

perceptions of military leaders (Kremble 2007), the “leaving no soldier behind” creed in two highly popular films – *Saving Private Ryan* and *Black Hawk Down* (Samet 2005); uniformed heroes in a bureaucratic context (Lee and Paddock 2001); psychiatry (Tsika 2018); boredom (Ender 2012); military horror films (Hantke 2010); military comedies (Erickson 2012); military women (Donald and MacDonald 2014); African-Americans in the military (Reich 2016); the navy (Raynor 2007); military leader-follower relations (Warner 2007); and military children (Ender 2005). Finally, Lawrence Suid (2002) provides a comprehensive resource of brief descriptions and novel insights to military films dating back to 1911. A table in his appendix provides a list of hundreds of military films and the five degrees of cooperation, in any, the Pentagon provided on the films.

## Television and the Military

Television is younger than film, but like film, TV is burgeoning in its relationship with the military. Television became ubiquitous in American homes in the 1950s, purchased by families, and watched regularly by Baby Boomer children. Those children received a diet of programs in the military television genre including shows such as *West Point, U.S.A.* (1956); *Combat!* (1962); *Hogan's Heroes* (1965); and later *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970); *Jag* (1995); *Band of Brothers* (2001); *The Unit* (2006); *Generation Kill* (2008); and the recent *Seal Team* (2017). In fact, Michael Herr (1977) argues in his best seller, *Dispatches*, that Baby Boomer men went into combat in the jungles of Vietnam with images in their mind of the role of soldier socialized by the earlier television shows and films they watched as children.

The 1990–1991 Persian Gulf War is the first TV War – essentially shown live around the world. Scholars soon argued TV did not serve as an unbiased arbitrator but as culpable, positioning the politics of war (Kellner 1992). The TV and print media press pool has had a contentious relationship dating back to Vietnam (Paul and Kim 2004). Television news outlets have relationships with the military and respond to the leadership (administrations) relative to the military and war aims (Takacs 2012). Boggs and Pollard (2007) are on par with an emerging critical approach dating back to the Gulf War in the early 1990s emphasizing the culpability between Hollywood TV and film and the military.

Television can shape the historical, social, and political narrative of the military and war through documentaries such as *America's Most Wanted: Terrorists* (Takacs 2012, pp. 42–43) or the popular documentaries such as *Civil War* or *Vietnam* by Ken Burns. Beginning with the all-volunteer force in the United States in 1973, television became a medium for military recruitment commercials (Dertouzos 2009). Military recruitment advertisements are diverse, involved, and transformational rather than informational (Park et al. 2017). Moreover, such TV ads are persuasive (Fu 2013).

Themes in television (and film) include the American as underdog, insurgent, and pivoted against tyranny (Hill 2014). The intersection of TV and military vary in the kinds of methods used including experimental designs (Teigen 2012) and qualitative methods, especially visual analysis (Penn and Berridge 2018). Content analysis of

television content from communications studies is a particularly prominent and notable method.

One example, using focus groups of active duty military members, military veterans, and military family members in the United Kingdom, Parry and Thumin (2017) conduct a novel and fascinating study of these three groups reaction to popular TV media portrayals of contemporary military experiences. More broadly, they find and conclude that popular media are a key component in the civil-military media project of reconciliation and awareness-raising.

## Mass Media and the Military

The US military receives limited and restricted mass media coverage outside of war time. Exceptions are coverage of veterans – those having left the organization or when significant events occur such as the Walter Reed Army Medical Center scandal where *Washington Post* reporters Dana Priest and Anne Hull (2007) covertly and undercover reported on horrific conditions at the hospital in the care of injured soldiers. Historically, in the United States, reporters had limitless access to battlefields dating back to the American Revolution. The 1960s and Vietnam War changed access – as television became a pervasive medium for US households to receive visual access to the battle zone (Segal 1975). The First Gulf War in 1990 allowed for real-time live coverage of war with embedded reports – known as the “CNN War” – war became live and global for multiple publics (Cooper 2003). Interestingly, letters that were once considered private – such as US Civil War letters written by soldiers and loved ones – became public over time – with lag time, unlike soldier and loved one blogs from the home and war fronts today that go live immediately (Knickerbocker 2005).

As many as 1,600 reporters covered the Iraq War with another 600–700 embedded with units (Paul and Kim 2004) – notably 139 had been killed in Iraq by December 2006 (Ender 2009). Research has compared the reporter vantage points (Aday et al. 2005). Embedded reporting continues at this writing and there appears to be legal justification for maintaining their access (O’Neil and Rosenthal 2003). Survey research reports praise from media executives and approval from the public (Paul and Kim 2004). Research on Army wives shows a convoluted relationship with live TV coverage of war (Ender et al. 2007). News reporter Martha Raddatz (2007) describes the spin of actual events in her book *The Long Road Home* where TV and radio news reports about a firefight in the Sadr City section of Baghdad “. . . neighborhood of Baghdad left four U.S. soldiers dead and at least forty wounded” (pp. 231–232). Recent studies of print media and the military seem conspicuously absent with a few exceptions (Fahmy and Kim 2008; King and Lester 2005; Schwalbe 2006). This despite what appears to be an abundance of stories written about service member experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## Music and the Military

Music and the military are inextricably linked. So much so, militaries have their own bands. In the German Bundeswehr, women's roles were even confined to two – military bands being one (Kümmel 2002). While songs and themes have existed throughout military history and wars (Sweeney 2001), WWII likely has the most songs directly related to the war. Jones (2006) estimates that 1,700 military and war-related songs produced by professional songwriters are archived and available. In the content analysis for themes, a range surface that kept the war in the public's consciousness and boosted morale on both the war and home fronts. Themes found include isolationism, the draft, army life, patriotism, popular personalities, rationing, coping, girlfriends, victory, and homecomings. Bing Crosby's "I'll be Seeing You" and the "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" by the Andrew Sisters topped the popular music chart on radio during the period. The new link between soldiering and popular music support continued after the war. The biggest pop star on the planet, Elvis Presley fulfilled his military draft requirements during the 1950s with ginormous fanfare and he later wrote the popular song "Soldier Boy" in 1960.

As the Vietnam War gets underway in the 1960s, a host of social and technological movements collided during this period merging music and the military. The major three changes included the inexpensive and easily obtainable 45 rpm record became accessible to the masses, radio programming diversified, and finally, cultural mores were challenged and changed (Perone 2001). Popular music related to war decidedly took a different turn. While WWII music generally supported the war and home front efforts, Vietnam era music became far more critical, counter-cultural, anti-war, anti-military, and subversive. Songs during this period also dealt with the plight of the soldier – "I Gotta Get Out of this Place" (1965 by *The Animals*) – and some pro-government songs as well.

More recent examinations of war, the military, and popular music have become increasingly complex. Musicologists have offered insights to war and music during the recent war in Iraq (Daughtry 2015; Pieslak 2009). They tackle fascinating topics relating music to military recruitment, combat motivation, personal experiences, and soldiers creating their own music. Pieslak (2009) also has a fascinating chapter where he begins an examination of two musical genres and their comparative treatments of war and the military: rap and heavy metal.

The past two decades has seen the complexity increasing in the study of war, the military, and music. For example, rock bands, such as Queensrÿche, are doing military concept albums featuring soldiers. Marital or military music has a long tradition in the military; however, individual soldiers are producing their own music and music videos while in war zones for personal and commercial uses. Further, some have argued there is a militarization of popular music and videos (Gault 2018) and there is even an argument for the weaponizing of popular music (Gorton 2015).

## Video Games and the Military

*Call of Duty* (2003) is one of the most popular video games on the planet. It is a shooter game set originally in World War II but subsequent versions are set in more modern war contexts. Estimates are that 40–50% of US army soldiers and military academy cadets play video games fairly frequently (Orvis et al. 2010). While video games are not exclusively used by male youth, millions of military age teenagers and youth play the games.

Bos (2018) provides an in-depth empirical study of the popular game *Call of Duty* from a political geography perspective. Using a multi-method approach including 32 interviews and the collection of video ethnographic data, he connects the macro geopolitical to the micro, everyday individual video gaming in and around playing a virtual war. The study makes three notable contributions: (1) provides specific details on players; (2) focuses on the social and consumptive spaces of the popular culture within the context of the domestic at the intersection of the private, public, and virtual; and finally (3) contextualizes the broader social, material, and technological relations that are reinforced, broadened, and contested at the geopolitical level.

Mantello (2017) argues that *Call of Duty*-type military shooter video gaming is a new subculture that has evolved in post-9/11 world. The subculture has grown from a marginal, excessively violent fantasy game perhaps counter to the culture to one of social acceptance where military life has become normative in the domestic sphere. Moreover, the game has merged with the social reality of simulated military training – what Baudrillard would dub hyperreal (not the surreal). And thus, the games become a popular socializing agent, preparing youth for their future training in military roles. Additionally, he highlights how the games are cultural and economic as much as technological. Thus, the games now are no longer entertainment for the popular culture but are political as well.

Jarvis and Robinson (2019) provide a recent and rich foundation on military video gaming scholarship. Setting the stage with an overview of contemporary scholarship on war and global politics, they emphasize three distinct ways where the ephemeral notion of “temporality” manifests in military videogames: (1) historical background; (2) the setting and structure of games; and (3) the duration of games. These features provide a useful framework where types of military videogames: mainstream military shooters, critical military shooters, critical procedural military games, and civilian-centered military games, can be studied.

The rise of the so-called military-entertainment-complex is nowhere as rich as in the study of video gaming. The military shooter and related games extend far into popular culture. The extent is revealed in video gaming profits that exceed music and film entertainment combined. Further, video gaming has implications for other social institutions beyond the military especially education.



## Board Games and the Military

Traditional board games might seem obsolete and innocuous following the ubiquitous video games, but they are fruitful areas of inquiry and remain popular around the globe. Among the most popular and best-selling board games include four war-games: *Risk*, *Axis and Allies*, *Stratego*, and *Battleship*, not far behind chess, checkers, and backgammon. Further, games generally, and board games specifically, have a long history in military training. Indeed, to war game is to use a wall, sand, table, or screen as a collectively accessible surface to study the battlefield. Four games are showcased below with popular potential that purport to educate and train in and around the military.

Military students, typically U.S. Army majors, at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC), at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, USA, received instruction in a low cost, board game to enhance visualization and description skills (McConnell and Gerges 2018). The game is based on a nineteenth century Prussian board game called *Kriegsspiel* (trans. war game). The research instructors use a quasi-experimental design with a control group – in this case, 79 students learning traditional tactical instruction. The experimental group consists of 32 who play the role-playing war game. The research instructors added outside observers not familiar with game for great objectivity. As expected, the experimental group outperformed overall and did so in four unique ways. The authors hold that the findings might have application in nonmilitary contexts, in particular those involving leaders and followers in emerging threat and opportunistic environments.

Similarly, Ender (2004) has successfully modified one of oldest and most popular board games on the planet – *Monopoly*. It is considered the leading proprietary game in the Western Hemisphere. Published in 43 countries, most people have familiarity with the game. The objective of the traditional game is based on one primary rule, to become, as the *Monopoly* rules state “. . .the wealthiest player through buying, renting, and selling property.” In the Ender modified version, players are assigned to military families of different ranks and all the rules including costs and payments are adjusted to the sliding scale of military ranks. For example, when passing “Go,” an officer, a Lieutenant Colonel (a LTC is a higher ranked military officer usually with 12–14 years of service) receives \$2,000; a lower middle socioeconomic class Warrant officer (W4, a higher ranked specialized officer with 12–15 years of service) receives \$1,500; a working socioeconomic class senior sergeant (E9 – Sergeant Major, a higher ranked enlisted soldier, with 17–20-plus years of service) receives \$1,000; and finally, a lower working socioeconomic class enlisted sergeant (E5 – Sergeant, with 4–6 years of service) receives merely \$500. Likewise, rules for going to and getting out of jail are differentiated based on socioeconomic status. The game is a visceral social inequity teaching and learning tool for anyone affiliated with the military or not. The game is concomitantly both familiar and novel, inexpensive, experiential, and simple. It has been successfully adopted with civilian high school students across the United States, cadets at West Point, and civilian graduate and undergraduate students.

While not a military game per se, Hoy (2018) reviewed the war-gaming literature and developed his own board game called *Policing the Sound*. It “. . . is a game-based learning activity derived from archival research that attempts to challenge players’ assumptions about criminality, government power, cultural production, and source base by allowing players to make decisions within a constrained historical environment” (p. 119). Notably, Hoy successfully taps, from student feedback and internal and external observers, into the popular experiential features of gaming in a novel and impactful way with both undergraduate and graduate students to experience and empathize with history.

## Fashion and the Military

The uniform has long played a significant role in providing symbolism for the military. The military uniform, in most contexts, serves as a marker between and within groups, highlighting and downplaying statuses, provides legitimacy, suppresses individuality, and facilitates social control. Tynan and Godson (2019) provide an introduction and some chapters on the social-historical meaning of uniforming institutions including the military. Likewise, Tynan (2016) provides a framework upon which to study and make sense of material and visual culture in and around the military. In a special issue on textiles and the military, researchers put forth that materials comprise a range of popular equipment including uniforms, blankets, tents, “. . .sails, pouches, caparison, parachutes, early model airplanes, camouflage nets, dinghies, body armor and more . . .” (Galster and Nosch 2010, p. 1). The military can also influence the society. Paul and Birzer (2004) argue critically that civilian police forces are militarizing and one form of militarization are uniforms – especially those that simulate combat. Militarized uniforms here on the one hand are sought to further the legitimacy of the police force, but ultimately separates the police officer further from the public and ultimately reinforces and perpetuates power differences with the public they are attempting to serve. Further, camouflage is the technology of concealment and has been diffused into the arts, community, and social movements (Behrens 2012).

Popular culture likewise adopts parts of the military uniform. Langkjaer (2010) draws connections between the youth counterculture of the 1960s and US military in Vietnam. For example, rock star Jimi Hendrix wore military style jackets on stage and around town (notable Hendrix had been drafted and served in the 101st Airborne Division in the early 1960s). The 1960s counterculture movement mocked the uniform creating anti-war fashion. Finally, not limited to the United States, Kinsella (2002) argues that modernism, militarism, and the uniform are inextricably linked in Japanese culture – especially among youth to include schoolgirls. And likewise, Playboy magazine centerfolds curiously forged toughness through wearing of masculine clothing such as combat boots (Began and Allison 2005).

## Photography and the Military

Photography is born in France in 1825 and by the time of the US Civil War, military photography is in the war zone. However, the technology proved primitive and could not be reproduced in printed publications for the masses. By WWI, photography is a hobby of millions and photography is being used both by and against the military as reconnaissance, propaganda, and for personal consumption. Today, digital, photographic images are ubiquitous.

Foremost, soldiers take their own photographs in the modern war era. Jakob (2017) argues that war trophy photography is a new soldier practice at the intersection of combat photography and war trophy collections. Reviewing some of the salient literature on the long history of photography capturing war and brutality, he emphasizes how early photographs evolved from being staged for posterity and mass remembering. He uses three specific photographs: one each from World War I, World War II, and Abu Ghraib in Iraq via both a comparative historical approach and visual semiotics on the reproduction of emotions. This study is less about the capturing of violent acts rather on representation and circulation of these acts via images.

Two other studies focus on imagery in and around the military and a specific subgroup within the military – women. First, McEntee's (2018) research takes on the representation of military women in news photography. She reviews the history of women being photographed in war with the first images emerging in newspapers in 1901. Using gatekeeping theory with special emphasis on visual and war-time gatekeeping coupled with a grounded theoretical approach and a mix-methods qualitative design, McEntee gets direct thoughts of editors and producers who decide how military women are photographically represented in combat roles in print and broadcast media respectfully. While equality is espoused when wanting to present both men and women in combat roles, there is some hesitation on the part of the journalism gatekeepers when it comes to the depicting women in violent combat roles.

Another study unobtrusively examined online comments to two different images of military women breastfeeding: a 2012 image of two Air Force mothers breastfeeding and a 2015 similar image of 10 Army mothers breastfeeding. The former is framed negatively and the latter more positive and progressive (Midberry 2017). The keen dissection of just over 1,000 comments contextualizes the image with the narrative and finds that various discourse themes are deployed by the audiences including military masculinity, nationalism, sexuality, motherhood, women's progress, and good worker. The study concludes that more research in this genre would be fruitful as the current discourse is harmful to women and children.

## Sports and the Military

General Douglas MacArthur is famously quoted as saying, “Upon the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that upon other days and other fields will bear the fruits of victory.” Sports and the military; the military and sports – they have long been hand in glove. Anchored in the work of Tilly and in particular Lasswell’s garrison state, Vasquez (2012) argues that military institutions shaped college football in the United States as it is known today. Partially ignited by the support around the army and navy service academies and WWI and later WWII, coupled with conscription, interest in football spread from the military into the civilian society. Military units played football and members evolved into the formation of the country’s first collegiate athletic conference and the National Collegiate Athletic Association. American football further institutionalized and expanded globally as Seifried and Katz (2015) found that the US military allowed senior officers and officials to manufacture bowl games and used American football across the world from 1942 to 1967 as both product and source of innovation. The games helped with mass mobilizations and training of men for the major and different war efforts that occurred during the mid-part of the twentieth century.

More generally, scholars have expanded the aperture of the impact of sport on military operations. Cárdenas and Lang (2018) review the literature and conduct interviews with German and Colombian military officers to investigate if and how sport may be used to advance the success of peace support operations. Similarly, researchers use interviews to explore how competitive sports, in this case the Invictus Games, may or may not leverage the promotion of health and wellness in military veterans (Roberts et al. 2020). Hinojosa et al. (2019) use Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital to understand veterans’ greater rates of musculoskeletal disorders compared to nonmilitary civilians.

One element of sports and the military is the separation of the two institutions. However, Penn and Berridge (2018) study football (soccer) and the military in Britain and find “invisible nationalism” to be the norm rather than the exception where the presence of the military at major British sporting events is hidden in plain sight – in other words, it is both highly visible and culturally and politically not visible. Magraw (2019) discusses the legal implications of “paid patriotism” in the form of military salutations not at professional American football games where much press coverage has been concentrated, but in the flourishing Major League Soccer (MLS) as well.

The relationship between the military and sports appears fairly wide open for inquiry. Vasquez (2012) calls for sociohistorical studies connecting the military with other sports such as equestrian competitions and winter Olympic biathlons. Long distance and marathon runners appear to be increasingly members of their county’s military – the U.S. Army had 11 soldiers participate in the 2016 summer Olympics in Brazil in 2016. A dearth of research on the relationship between the military and sports in a handful of areas remains and could be fruitful. Football is the dominant subject, both European and American football. Noticeably absent is the intersection of the military and women’s sports, and less prominent, individual sports such as

tennis, golf, and swimming. The existing research does span the spectrum of research methodologies, distributed mostly in qualitative research with some quantitative studies as well. Country-specific and cross-national studies are warranted.

## Emerging Genres and the Military

There are emerging genres at the intersection of the military and popular culture covered less in the literature but are worthy of explicating herein. Many of the genres may not be thought to link to the military. These topics include food, technology, graffiti, scandals, social media, toys, celebrities, and comics.

For example, for many readers, the MRE (Meals, Ready-to-Eat) is a staple link between the military and food. However, the topic covers more than MREs to include a more broad-based examination of industrial/institutionalized food that is inexpensive, imperishable, storable, and transportable (Marx de Salcedo 2015).

Today, popular culture intercedes some in the processes of adopting military technologies that blur the lines between civil and military domains (Van Creveld 1988). Many devices invented for military purposes have moved into the government and commercial sectors. Perhaps no other device originally invented for military purposes and adopted to commercial purposes is computing (Arquilla 2003). Critical reviews argue that the intersection of the civilian and military and technology is war fought via real-time networks and live-computer and television feeds viewed by all constituents concomitantly and perhaps even fought by cyborgs (Der Derian 2009). President Barack Obama is the first US President to rely increasingly on drones – aerial vehicles without physical pilots on board – for military missions and the first to use them more than manned aircraft or ground troops (Kreps 2016). Drones, sometimes called UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), have numerous military and civilian concerns including proliferation within and across national borders, safety, and privacy. Drones have implications for popular culture given their perceived and potential surgical implications in a military context including governmental, commercial, and private usages.

Another unlikely topic is graffiti. There may actually be a long history of military graffiti dating back to the Civil War of what one publication calls “war graffiti” – where the omnipresent and infamous, “Kilroy Was Here,” was the Banksy of his time (Bratten 2018). The late military sociologist Charles Moskos is noted for his observations suggesting should one want to understand what is on the minds of soldiers, look for their graffiti in and around the barracks.

Military scandal regularly captures the public’s attention. From sex liaisons to a range of abuses of power and white (green) collar crimes, the military as an organization is rife for misconduct and public scrutiny. The Tailhook Scandal – a U.S. Navy convention of fixed-wing pilots held in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 1991 is perhaps the most notorious military scandal in recent history. The “Fat Leonard” navy scandal is more recent (see Bakken 2020 for these and other military US military scandals).

A handful of scholars are beginning to make sense of scandals in a military context. Crosbie (2014) writes about the concept of “feedforward” in contrast to feedback, as a strategy to “get out in front” in military public discourses. Australian researchers have written about scandals in their military including a social autopsy of The Skype Affair and argue for anchoring scandals in the broader field of scandal research – scandalology (Andrews et al. 2019). Closely linked to scandal is the spectacle of celebrities in the military (Yeo 2017).

Social media will no doubt become a field for study at the intersection of the military and popular culture. Notably, Cornelius and Monk-Turner (2019) recently conducted a content analysis of military-oriented social media memes linking them to sexual harassment and assault.

From G.I. Joe action figures to Barbies in military flight suits and toy M16s and M4s, children’s toys are wildly popular and likewise are material cultural artifacts worthy of analysis (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2009). Brilliantly, Loarridge (2019) examines the cast-lead toy soldier linking it to the broader socio-political military British and German empires.

Comic strips have long been a part of the military experience. Cartoonists such as Ernie Pyle (erniepile.org2020) during WWII and Gary Trudeau’s *Doonesbury* post-9/11 have highlighted war (Barker and Sabin 2012). Similarly, superhero characters are featured in and around the military (Detora 2009).

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## Conclusion

This chapter consolidates approximately 100 social science and humanities studies at the intersection of the military and popular culture. It provides a review of a range of desperate social science and humanities studies across a scope of topics at the juncture of popular culture, the military, and war. Most studies are English language publications and are of the popular cultures and militaries of the United States and the United Kingdom. Much of the work utilizes qualitative research but scholars should not methodologically limit their future work. The review is not exhaustive, yet just over 100 sources are reviewed that are salient in the literature. By using the most recent literature, the reader should be confident they can mine the references for older and no doubt worthy shares of the canon. The studies included here coalesce around 18 distinctive topics known in the popular culture literature as genres. The genres include literature/books, film, television, mass media, music, video games, board games, fashion, photography, and sports, including the emerging genres of food, technology, graffiti, scandals, social media, toys, celebrities, and comics. No less popular culture genres with potential nascent links to the military include popular art (e.g., National Endowment for the Arts), monuments (e.g., confederate monuments and war memorials), architecture (e.g., fortifications), language (e.g., SNAFU), theatre (e.g., *A Soldier’s Play*), pornography (Berger et al. 2019), dance (Reason 2017), transportation (e.g., the Jeep and Hummer), and of course, the internet (Golan and Ben-Ari 2018).

The articles and books cogitated here are oriented in journals that are either popular culture or military prevalent such as the *Journal of Popular Culture*; *Media, War & Conflict*; and *Armed Forces & Society*. The research referenced here is laudable and can serve as foundational scholarship and/or be replicated and expanded. Similar to the popular culture field more generally, films, TV, and mass media have dominated the field. Likewise, interdisciplinary scholarship is increasingly the norm in popular culture studies and appear to be the case in popular military culture studies. Further, future research should consider combining the genres. For example, a study of the intersection of military and war with comics, music, film, and video games as popular culture – the four genres are but one permutation that could be consolidated. Moreover, scholars should consider more nuanced study within a genre to examine subgenres. For example, military comedy films or sex and gender representations in military video games. All the genres and subgenres appear ripe and fruitful for future scholarship in the subdiscipline of military popular culture studies.

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Civil-Military Relations: What Is the State of the Field](#)
- ▶ [Dynamic Intersection of Military and Society](#)

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