



Meaning as a Mission: Making sense of war and peacekeeping

Michaela Schok

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War and peacekeeping leave an indelible memory in the minds of veterans, especially when they have faced life-threatening events or lost a comrade in combat. These personal tragedies are devastating and set in motion a search for meaning about why they happened and what makes life valuable. Each veteran must find his own answers to these existential questions to regain a sense of control over the emotional impact of his experiences. Some veterans find it so problematic to make sense of the harsh reality they faced in the war zone that they lose their faith in a just world. Nightmares and intrusive thoughts, reminding them of what happened during their mission abroad, haunt them and may ultimately result in posttraumatic disorder. Fortunately, most veterans are eventually able to make sense of their war and peacekeeping experiences. The central aim of this thesis is to explore the significance of meaning in the process of cognitive adaptation after military deployment among Dutch veterans who were deployed during war and peacekeeping operations. A cognitive perspective was chosen to explore the ways in which veterans make sense of their war zone experiences and find personal significance in these events. Empirical data were collected by questionnaires and complemented by in-depth interviews of veterans.

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