

Worksheet 3: **The public perception of the war cripples**

Exercise 1: Read the information text below and note important facts.

Exercise 2: Compare document M1 and the postcard Q1 with the documents M2 and M3. Represent the attitude of the authors to the war invalids. Work out possible differences and think about the reasons for their attitude.

Information text:

With the onset of World War I began the thinking about the time after the war. How would it look like? The Germans believed in a victory, but the extent of the sacrifice which they would take was uncertain.

The first indications of the intensity of the war came in fall of 1914, because of the first returning of the severely wounded soldiers. The civil society was shocked when the young men with amputations, facial injuries, blind or with a "Combat stress reaction", an acute behavioral disorganisation, came back home.

They made aware that the new weapons could do a lot more injuries than expected.

So in the First World War died ten million soldiers over a period of 52 months. "Twenty million men were severely wounded; eight million veterans returned home permanently disabled."¹ Alone in the German Reich one and a half million men returned home as disabled persons.

The soldiers who died in the war were worshipped as war heroes. But the invalids, who gave their bodies as a 'sacrifice for the fatherland' [...] and survived only through the scientific progress in medicine, didn't get any adoration.²

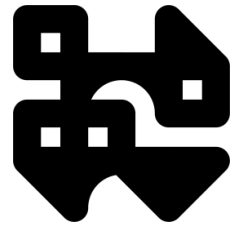
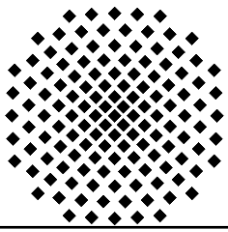
The reason is that the public appearance of war invalids was little to compare with a hero. The increasing number of begging war veterans who were unable to work because of their injuries was another trigger for the society to despise the returning soldiers. In addition, they often linked war cripples with the lost war.³

Gists from the information text:

¹ Cohen, Deborah: Will to Work. Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany after the First World War. In: Gerber, David (Ed.): Disabled Veterans in History. Michigan⁴ 2003. P. 295-321, P. 295. Cf.: Bihr, Simon: Entkrüppelung der Krüppel. Der Siemens-Schuckert-Arbeitsarm und die Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge in Deutschland während des 1. Weltkrieges. In: NTM. Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin 21 (2013) P. 107-141, P. 107.

² Kienitz, Sabine: Der Krieg der Invaliden. Helden-Bilder und Männlichkeitskonstruktionen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. In: Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift 60, 2001. P. 267-402. P. 378.

³ Ibidem.: P. 377-378.



Text M1: Part from “Deutsche Blätter für Kriegsverletzte” (German magazine for war invalids), 1915.

“[...] There is only one way to get over this word [war cripple], namely to relearn and not to understand a cripple as a deterrent picture of misery, but the brother who is now closer to me than before. You, young man or young lady [...] take the mutilated hand and shake hands warmly – it was lost for you; and you, hero of the holy war, accustom yourself to the idea that you are a bit crippled, but still the same person; if you struggled through this, than you have won and a golden treasure in your heart, which will give you the chance to live the rest of your life laughing and god trusting.”

Text M2: “There is no sense for German heroes who gave there lifes and health for the German people.” (1921)

Text M3: The number of begging invalids, while “showing obtrusive their suffering, go begging and made especially the streets and big cities to ugly places” (1919) increased constantly.



Image Q1: A convalescents –Who is cared by faithful love (Author’s translation), dated to April 1915.

Comparison of M1 & Q1 with M2 & M3:

Text M1: HSTAS: M 1/8 Bü 256. Deutsche Blätter für Kriegsverletzte. Zentralorgan für die gesamte Kriegswohlfahrtspflege 7, 1915. P.3. (Author’s translation)
Image Q1: n.p.: Der Genesende – Wen treue Liebe sorgend hegt. Courtesy of: <http://www.bildpostkarten.uni-osnabrueck.de/displayimage.php?album=105&pos=85> (23.02.2015).
Text M2: n.p.: Was Kriegsbeschädigte hoffen!. In: Zentralblatt für Kriegsbeschädigte und Kriegshinterbliebene 6, 1921. Cited after: Kienitz 2001: P. 378. (Author’s translation)
Text M3: n.p.: Gegen das Betteln von ‚Kriegsbeschädigten‘. In: Deutsche Tageszeitung 587, 1919. Cited after: Kienitz 2001: P. 378. (Author’s translation)