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Gender and militaries:

The importance of military masculinities  
for the conduct of state sanctioned violence

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### **Abstract**

Feminists have long argued that gender has historically shaped and continues to shape who fights and dies, and in defence of whom. This chapter explores how state militaries continue to rely on gender constructs to motivate predominantly male soldiers to conduct acts of state sanctioned violence. It examines how gendered norms shape how militaries organize themselves and prepare for war, despite overwhelming evidence that the presence of women and sexual minorities has no discernible negative impact on military cohesion and performance and that soldiers do not need to bond socially in order to fight. It argues that militaries remain highly masculinised institutions because this is how militaries desire to see themselves and how most of their male members desire being seen. The masculinized character of military culture

and identity thus remains significant; it facilitates war, even if it does not actually enable soldiers to kill and be killed.

## **Introduction**

Western armed forces, as we would recognize them, emerged with the establishment of the modern state in the seventeenth century. Max Weber (1991, p. 78, emphasis in original) famously argued that the modern state is best thought of as ‘a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory’; as such, military violence might be considered ‘the raison d’être of the state’s existence’ (Malešević 2010, p. 26). Whilst Weber may have overlooked the significance of non-state actors in armed conflict (Kaldor 1999), he recognized war and military violence as profoundly social; that war makes states, societies and individuals, as much as states make war (Malešević 2010). Feminists have also long argued that gender plays an integral role in the formation and practice of political phenomena and social activities, and perhaps chief among these are associations between war and manhood (Tickner 1992; Goldstein 2001). Indeed, the relationship between armed force and masculinities is possibly the most salient and cross-culturally stable aspect of gendered politics; and nowhere is this notion of war as a man’s game more entrenched than in state militaries. The preservation of the military as an exclusively male domain has only been challenged relatively recently and minimally by the widening of recruitment practices. Most state armed forces continue to marginalize women and sexual minorities in ways that foster particular ideas about manhood, machismo and military service. Gender continues to shape who fights, who dies and in defence of whom.

In this chapter, I explore dominant, salient constructions of gender in militaries, focusing in particular on ways in which certain ideas about masculinity are fostered in military environments. My aim is to demonstrate how armed forces continue to rely on gender constructs to motivate predominantly male soldiers to conduct acts of violence sanctioned by the state. The chapter begins with an overview of some of the most prevalent ways in which associations between masculinity and military service have been established, before moving on to consider why it might be that militaries continue to foster these associations, despite growing demands for wider inclusion of all citizenry. The chapter concludes that ultimately, the military remains the most ‘prototypically masculine of all institutions’ (Segal 1995, p. 758) because this is how it sees itself and how most of its male members want to be seen. Gendered norms continue to shape the ways in which militaries organize themselves and prepare for war despite overwhelming evidence that the presence of women and sexual minorities has no discernible negative impact on military cohesion and performance and that soldiers do not need to bond socially in order to fight. The masculinized character of military culture and identity thus remains significant; it provides ‘the means of action’, even if it does not actually provide the ‘ultimate ends’ (Farrell 1998, p. 410). It facilitates war, even if it does not actually enable soldiers to kill and be killed.

### **Bodies of men**

Militaries, often described as bodies of men, have and continue to be overwhelmingly comprised of men.<sup>1</sup> The image of the soldier hero is a robust and highly influential

form of idealized masculinity, particularly in the contemporary Western world; it pervades popular culture (toys, comic books, films, TV series, museum exhibits and video games) and dictates the support of 'our boys' in real war situations. A 'popular masculine pleasure-culture of war' (Dawson 1994, pp. 3-4) ensures that whilst most men are not soldiers, many still aspire to militarized symbolism. Activities dominated by men such as contact sports, reckless driving, risk-taking in business and acts of violence and aggression, can all be thought of as 'ritualized combat' (Connell 2000, p. 214).

Perpetrating acts of violence does not come naturally to men, however. As Connell (in Higate 2003a, pp. 210-211) argues, whilst almost all soldiers are men, most men are not actually soldiers; likewise, 'though most killers are men, most men never kill or commit assault; [and] though an appalling number of men do rape, most men do not'. Thus whilst in most societies men structurally and interpersonally dominate most spheres, it is important to try to understand how individuals can be simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged by coexisting hierarchies of gender, race, class, age and so on (Miller 1997). Such hierarchies exist even among men who share certain ascriptive categories and occupy similar social positions. For example, refusing to engage in heavy drinking might constitute some men as 'less manly' in the eyes of other men of the same class and racial background. The ways in which various configurations of manhood sustain the dominance of men as a social group in militaries and in civilian society are therefore multiple and complex.

Connell (1987; 1995) is perhaps most associated with examining how different types of masculinity interrelate and intersect with other social categories. Central to her analysis is the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity', a gender practice that exemplifies currently accepted legitimations of unequal social relations sustained

through corresponding cultural ideals and institutional expressions of power (Connell 1995; Hooper 1999). Hegemonic masculinity not only concerns cultural dominance more widely but also hierarchical social orders among men; for example, ethnic minority masculinities are often subordinated to ethnic majority ones (Connell 1995); and it is normative – it represents an ideal – so the number of men achieving and practising it will be small. Importantly though, whilst hegemonic masculinity may be more aspirational than actual, many men will still gain from the circulation of hegemonic ideas about masculinity because it underpins male privilege (Farough 2003; see also Connell 1987). War and its technologies can confer a ‘virile prestige’ on those at the tail end of conflict situations as well as the rough and tough combat soldier (Kimmel 2004, p. 274; see also Cohn 1987; 1993; Enloe 2004). All this points to the socially constructed and contingent nature of gender relations; to the notion that gender roles and war roles are inextricably linked (inter alia Elshtain 1995; Goldstein 2001). Typically, men have been encouraged into combat through the cultural equation of manhood with heroism in battle and women have been manoeuvred to support war and the men who wage it, as witnesses, mothers, sweethearts and nurses (inter alia Enloe 1988; 2000).

This separation of roles means that within many societies there is a salient belief that military service turns boys into men (inter alia Morgan 1987; Hockey 2003) but as young men are not ‘natural-born warriors’ they must become soldiers (Snyder 2003, p. 191). Basic military training is a key site for such transformational relationships between men, their bodies and the military (Janowitz 1974). Stripped of close ties to civilian life, recruits learn the value of appearance, respect for superiors and traditions, cleanliness, obedience, rules for displaying aggression – rituals, initiations and uniforms that all foster a ‘cult of toughness’ (Barrett 2001; see also

Hockey 1986; Hale 2008). Some activities, such as the maintenance of uniforms and of the cleanliness of accommodations (which are sex segregated), are more commonly associated with femininity but become controlled masculine activities in masculinized spaces (Woodward 2003). They can be just as important to the 'reproduction of a military way of life' as learning to be physically and mentally ready to fight because they 'promote a homosociability that works to exclude those who do not, or cannot, also perform this warrior ideal' (Atherton 2009, pp. 826, 834). As Green *et al* (2010) argue, coping with the stresses of military life is often a significant way for recruits to prove their manliness, but it is also possible for caring forms of masculinity to coexist with hyper-masculine traits if, in caring for their fellow soldiers, individuals are contributing to a sense of camaraderie. Essentially, 'hegemonic masculinity in the military incorporates aggression, violence and macho behaviours on the one hand and a caring, sharing ethos based on strong inter-dependent bonds on the other' because both are seen as conducive to cohesion among military recruits and therefore military effectiveness (Green *et al*, 2010, p. 1485).

Other activities are aimed at making the bodies of male recruits both 'a site of suffering and a vital resource', a site for the exhibition of worth or failure as men (Higate 1998, p. 180). Repetitive and physically gruelling activities emphasize to each recruit that 'just getting dressed in uniform is not going to make you into a soldier' (Ministry of Defence in Woodward 1998); they provide recruits with a sense that they are being given a 'thrilling experience that cannot be had elsewhere' that offers 'appropriate recompense for their efforts to achieve bodily and emotional self-control' (Sasson-Levy 2008, p. 314). In the midst of these masculinized rituals, recruits are often told that their physical inadequacies make them 'girly' or 'gay' (Hockey 2003) or are stereotyped 'by gender, nationality or race regardless of zero-tolerance policies

on discrimination, bullying and harassment' (Adult Learning Inspectorate 2007, p. 27).

Some have suggested that masculinity 'is achieved by the constant process of warding off threats to it...by the rejection of femininity and homosexuality' (Weeks in Gutterman 2001, p. 61); that recruits become men by proving they are not women or effeminate (Harrison and Lailberté 1997). Belkin's (2012, p.5) insightful work on the US military suggests however, that hegemonic military masculinity often involves the marginalization of women and sexual minorities and homoeroticism; an embrace of the masculine/unmasculine. Belkin (2012) suggests the resultant confusion of this duality disciplines soldiers and brings them into conformity with military aims. For Higate (2012), homoeroticism can also help soldiers overcome some of the brutality of military service through a sense of closeness to others. Alongside these analyses, and following Kaplan (2005; 2006), I want to suggest that desire also plays a central role in facilitating homoerotic rituals: both the desire between (heterosexual) men, and the desire of men to maintain their social and institutional dominance. In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary to examine further how women and sexual minorities have been characterized in militaries. As I suggest below, these characterizations involve a simultaneous warding off and embrace of the unmasculine, and an ongoing reconfiguration of what it means to be a man, so that the desires of military men to engage in homosocial and homoerotic rituals can be fulfilled.

### **Distractions and disruptions: women in armed forces**

One of the most salient aspects of warfare is the construction of ‘men as warriors and of women as worriers’ (Yuval-Davis 1997, p. 94). Whilst all soldiers are implicated in violence by extension of enlisting, hegemonic masculine ideals obscure the fact that most servicemen, as well as servicewomen, do not serve in combat positions, do not kill anyone and may not even engage in violence (Higate 2003a). The cultural purchase of the notion that men are natural born killers obscures this, however and men and women often experience military service in very different ways as a result.

The general pattern of women’s mobilization in the West has been inclusion in times of necessity and exclusion or limitation at all others (Noakes 2006). Though servicewomen nursed the wounded in nineteenth century wars, and nursed, catered, administrated, drove and maintained vehicles in the First and Second World Wars, it was only in the late 1980s that women in most Western forces began taking on more combat-related roles (see Woodward and Winter 2007 for a comprehensive overview). Scholarly debates on women’s mobilization, particularly in close combat, are rich, numerous, cross-cultural and well-rehearsed. They generally coalesce around ‘two ostensibly distinct yet fundamentally related issues: women’s rights to serve and their capacity to serve” (Kovitz 2003, p. 2, emphasis in original). Conservative opponents tend to argue that masculine privilege is necessary to motivate men to fight and that the presence of women threatens this (inter alia Gat 2000; Van Creveld 2000a; 2000b; Frost 2001; Holmes 2003). Liberal and civic republican feminists have challenged this on the grounds that military service is a (pre)condition to full-citizenship and that women have a right, and even a duty, to enlist (inter alia Steihm 1982; Feinman 1998; Kennedy-Pipe 2000). Others have problematized women’s service on the grounds that it militarizes them (Tiffany 1981; Klein 2002), normalizes masculine military culture (Sasson-Levy 2003), or violates the peaceful nature of

women (Ruddick 1989). These perspectives have in turn been criticized for ignoring women's militarism and violence (inter alia Bourke 1999; Sjoberg & Gentry 2007), men's pacifism and conscientious objection (Bibbings 2003; Conway 2004) or male victimhood (Jones 2006). Others have pointed to the ethnocentrism of many of these debates; the notion of choice all too often obscures how for some women, especially in the Global South, armed struggle may be a matter of survival rather than deliberation (inter alia Yuval-Davis 1997).

A number of Western state armed forces, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel and more recently, the United States, have removed longstanding bans on women serving in close combat roles, those where hand-to-hand fighting is most likely. Women's participation in close combat remains minimal and liminal in these militaries however; and in the UK, women are (at the time of writing) still excluded from close combat due to concerns about the impact that their presence might have on male bonding and unit cohesion.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, women have been characterized as potentially disruptive to male bonding, by introducing sexual tensions and cultural otherness into all-male units, or as distractive to male soldiers, who, it is assumed, may react more emotionally to the injury or death of a woman soldier than that of a man (Woodward and Winter 2004; Basham 2009a).<sup>3</sup> Though the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that soldiers bond through a shared commitment to tasks and military commands and not interpersonal links (inter alia MacCoun et al 2006; King 2006; Basham 2009a), and that women often contribute to rather than undermine cohesion (Harrell and Miller 1997; Kier 1998; Ministry of Defence UK 2002), by virtue of 'being non-men' women are 'intrinsically' problematic for state militaries (Woodward and Winter 2006, p. 57). Combat exclusions, whether historical or ongoing, mean that combat remains the primary measure of women's abilities (Kovitz

2003). Women in more combat-focussed roles or those opting for close combat are gender non-conformists; and they often find themselves subject to harassment and discrimination as a result (Basham 2013).

### **Boys will be boys**

The exclusion of women from close combat in spite of the evidence on cohesion and social demands for equality, demonstrates the power that armed forces exercise vis-à-vis their role in applying state-sanctioned violence (Dandeker and Mason 1999; Basham 2009a; 2009b). Indeed, such dispensations saturate military culture with a sense of entitlement, contributing to their, at times, rather anti-democratic yet dogged insistence that they have a need to be different from the society they serve.<sup>4</sup> This attitude is especially discernible in the ways that military authorities tolerate and indeed encourage certain types of misbehaviour by servicemen. The US military suggested ‘boys were simply being boys’ when dozens of women aviators were sexually harassed and assaulted by servicemen during the 1991 Tailhook incident (Kasinsky 1998); when a 12 year-old Okinawan girl was raped by three US military personnel in 1995, Commander of the Asia-Pacific Forces Admiral Richard Macke pronounced, ‘What fools!...for the price they paid to rent the car [used to abduct and rape their victim], they could have had a girl [prostitute]’ (quoted in Takazato 2000, p. 43). Following the 1994 rape and murder of Danish tour guide Louise Jensen in the holiday resort of Ayia Nappa by British soldiers, military commanders insisted the problem was that the soldiers were cooped up, easily frustrated and bored (Enloe 2000). The normalisation of sexual abuse, or merely promiscuity, among military

men, especially when contrasted to the idea of women soldiers as disruptive sexual objects, demonstrates the perceived importance of sex to motivating servicemen. Whereas other rule breaking behaviour such as stealing is not tolerated, the denigration of women, because of its perceived value in sustaining the hegemonically masculine culture of militaries, not only frequently goes unchecked, but is enabled.

It is not only following incidents of extreme (sexual) violence against women (and indeed men – see Whitworth 2004) that this is the case. Everyday practices involving the denigration of women and the reinforcement of hyper-masculinity are also frequently overlooked or encouraged by military commanders, despite being officially banned. Military authorities facilitate or overlook the desires of soldiers for ‘birds, booze and brawling’ (Hockey 1986) through measures such as sexually denigrating women through language in training, providing cheap alcohol in military messes<sup>5</sup> and overlooking altercations between soldiers and locals in garrison towns the world over. Western militaries also have longstanding relationships with prostitution; from the Cantonments Act of 1864, which structured the sex trade within British military garrisons in India as part of a broader plan to regulate commercial activities in military towns (Enloe 2000), to ensuring that prostitutes were ‘organized to service’ British servicemen in Belize in the 1980s (Kane 1993, p. 966), to ongoing visits by US Navy warships to Pattaya, Thailand for ‘rest and relaxation’ which have regularly recurred since the Vietnam War. Throughout history ‘military authorities, with varying degrees of coyness’ have not only overlooked the sexual appetites of servicemen seeking but have actively sought ‘to provide outlets for the sexual needs of their men...highlighting the well-established gendered contrasts between active masculine animality and female passivity’ (Morgan 1994, pp. 166-167).

The creation and perpetuation of rumours about the sex lives of servicewomen by servicemen has also been identified as a significant form of gendered harassment in the US and UK militaries (Miller 1997; Basham 2013). Whereas sexual bragging and sex are deemed normal for any red-blooded male, women soldiers are promiscuous and deviant. Women's bodies fulfil a symbolic, and integral, role in male military bonding therefore, but their actual presence is a different matter. Women's bodies are also often regarded as weak, leaky and reproductively problematic (inter alia Theweleit 1987; Miller 1997; Van Creveld 2000a; Czerwinski et al 2001; Höpfl 2003; Taber 2005), reinforcing the idea that women are not naturally suited to military service whereas men are (Basham 2013). Servicemen often perceive militaries 'as being in essence "macho" and physically demanding' and women as 'not strong enough physically or emotionally to do the job to the required standards' (Rutherford et al 2006, p. 9; see also Taber 2005; Sasson-Levy 2008).

Each of these mythologies reproduces state militaries as masculinized institutions. The capabilities of individual servicewomen are always secondary to upholding the self-identity of armed forces and in this sense, women's bodies not only reinforce the hegemony of men as a social grouping in the military, but also men's rightful place as society's warriors. Though the military is by no means the only site where all-male groups tell sexual jokes, stories of sexual conquest, share pornography and denigrate women (Higate 2003b), these activities can make men of recruits in military environments (Morgan 1987). Furthermore, when situated within wider, axiomatic narratives about the life and death stakes of military service they neutralise challenges to existing military practices. These gendered practices enable war-making; they make hyper-masculine responses to global conflict that little bit more reasonable (Tickner 2002). Militaries pander to the desires of military men not

because they need to maintain fragile bonds between them, but to maintain the military's institutional identity as a masculine domain in which real men are prepared to fight.

### **Heterosexual potency**

In December 2010, the US Senate repealed the US military's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Harass' policy,<sup>6</sup> which had been in effect since the early 1990s. The policy meant that any member of the US forces who did not self-identify as heterosexual could be discharged if their sexual orientation was disclosed. Not asking, telling or harassing someone about their sexual orientation was therefore imperative, although evidence suggests that harassment was common and often vicious (Frank 2009). Up until 2000, the British armed forces also routinely excluded sexual minorities from its ranks. Homosexuality was 'considered incompatible with service in the Armed Forces'; it was thought to 'cause offence, polarise relationships, induce ill-discipline, and, as a consequence, damage morale and unit effectiveness' (Ministry of Defence UK 1996, p. 7). It was only after a 1999 European Court of Human Rights ruling that the British military had contravened the right of sexual minorities 'to respect for private and family life' (Council of Europe 1999),<sup>7</sup> that the policy was overturned. Right up until the day before the ruling, military commanders resisted (Belkin and Evans 2000). This is perhaps unsurprising given that the British military characterized sexual minorities as 'threats' to operational effectiveness (Ministry of Defence UK 1996) and national security (Skidmore 1998); as 'ill' (Belkin and Evans 2000); 'unnatural' (Muir 1992; Heggie 2003); and sexually predatory, especially towards

younger recruits (Muir 1992; Ministry of Defence 1996; Belkin and Evans 2000; Heggie 2003).

Though the idea of uniform heterosexuality has always functioned more ‘at the level of rhetoric rather than reality’ in militaries (Higate 2003a, p. 209; see also Simpson and Zeeland 2000; Frank 2009; Bulmer 2013), and evidence suggests the inclusion of sexual minorities has had no impact on military effectiveness (inter alia Frank et al 2010), militaries continue to be sites where a demand for heterosexual potency is evident. The private/public dichotomy, much critiqued by feminist scholars for relegating women to the private sphere as an apolitical site that makes ‘possible the masculine space of public’ (Masters 2009, p. 33), is also ‘perhaps the most fundamental spatiality of sexual citizenship’ (Bell and Binnie 2000, p. 4). As Braidotti (2002, p. 80) notes, ‘the economic, cultural and symbolic importance that Western culture has attributed to sexuality’ means that sexual difference has become a central, though hardly unique, site for the constitution of subjectivity. Indeed, Western thought and culture are structured and fractured by ‘a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century’ (Sedgwick 2008, p. 1) when the ‘homosexual became a personage’ (Foucault 1990, p. 43). Indeed, the principal way in which gender regulates people’s daily lives is through the fiction of binary sexualities, the hetero and the homo. In excluding sexual minorities from their ranks, militaries, have reinforced heteronormativity, ‘a discursively produced pressure that requires everybody to position oneself’ in relation to a salient and prevalent notion of what constitutes heterosexuality on a daily basis (Motschenbacher 2010, p. 16). Heteronormativity constructs a ‘presumptively heterosexual world’ (Chamallas 1998, p. 309) and thus has the potential to

marginalize anyone who does not fit neatly with assumptions about the normalcy of heterosexuality.

The 'inscription of heterosexuality into all aspects of culture' in armed forces persists, even in those militaries where sexual minorities are admitted (Higate 2003a, p. 209; Basham 2013). From uniform regulations that 'satisfy a male definition of attractiveness', and only make sense 'within a heteronormative paradigm' (Skidmore 2004, p. 234), to evidence that disclosing a minority sexual orientation is seen as 'ramming homosexuality down people's throats' (Heggie 2003; Basham 2013), the normalization of 'straightness' continues. As scholars of hegemonic masculinity have suggested, whilst it often benefits men through the control of women it affords, perhaps the 'crucial difference between hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities...is the control of men' it facilitates (Donaldson 1993, p. 655). This may explain why some gay men in hyper-masculine institutions engage in the same 'quest for accomplishing and proving their masculinity' as their heterosexual counterparts; why they perform hegemonic or aspirant masculinities in order to avoid being 'unmasked' (Kaplan and Ben-Ari 2000, p. 428; Carver 2006; Yeung *et al* 2006).

Whilst heterosexuality may be the norm in state militaries, 'homoeroticism...[has played] a long-standing part in the military bonding experience' (Snyder 1999, p. 153; see also *inter alia* Zeeland 1995; Wither 2004; Whitworth 2004). For example, various state navies participate in versions of the ceremony known as 'crossing the line', an officially prohibited but tolerated and commonly practiced ritual which has been conducted since at least the sixteenth century. Crossing the line takes place when naval vessels pass through the equator; it usually involves heavy drinking, nudity, the ritual humiliation of junior recruits and

the simulation of sexual acts, particularly anallingus in which sailors retrieve objects from other sailors' anuses (Hersh 2002; Bronner 2006).

Others have argued that the significance of hazing and homoeroticism to 'fratriarchy', or 'the rule of brothers' in militaries and other macho, heteronormative enclaves warrants further consideration (Higate 2012). Belkin (2012) demonstrates how the 'embrace of the unmasculine' is just as significant to the performance of heterosexual masculinity in armed forces as the marginalization of sexual minorities and women; and Bulmer (2013) has shown how the integration of sexual minorities can simultaneously reproduce and trouble military patriarchy rather than fully subverting or being subsumed by it. The policing of hetero/homo boundaries - what Eva Sedgwick (2008) famously refers to as the epistemology of the closet - therefore reveals much about the need to maintain the innocence of homosocial/homoerotic practices in militaries and the complexities involved in doing so. Following Sedgwick, Kaplan (2005, p. 573) has argued that male 'emotional and sexual expression is often suppressed in the interest of maintaining power', and one of the primary effects of the hetero/homo binary is to inculcate fears about the uncertainty and ambivalence that surrounds sexual orientation (Sedgwick 1985),<sup>8</sup> so that the unmasculine must, rather than being rejected outright, necessarily be recovered as a masculine pursuit. For servicemen, rituals and practices with homoerotic overtones might be best thought of therefore as 'a semi-arbitrary form of communication, involving multiple markers of humour and aggression that serve to produce and validate closeness and affection', rather than being an indication of repressed homosexuality, for example, though the latter is of course possible (Kaplan 2005, p. 591). Gestures and practices involving sexual simulations and nudity when represented by the male soldiers engaged in them as jokes can thus enable them to express closeness, friendship, and a desire for one

another, without fear they will be labelled gay. A primary reason for marginalizing or denying gay personnel is, therefore, 'to protect homoerotic military rituals' so boys can play with boys, 'and not get called queers, and not get called girls' (Zeeland 1995, p. 6; see also Britton and Williams 1995; Snyder 1999). Acknowledging the presence of a gay man in an all-male unit could threaten 'the possibilities for love among heterosexual men' (Phelan 2001, p. 61); and so where 'male bonding is prescribed, homosexuality is proscribed' (Tosh 2005, p. 38).

Homoerotic rituals are not actually necessary to motivate soldiers to fight but they do form a significant part of the social activities that take place between men engaged in organized violence. Militaries are keen to accommodate these desires as a way for soldiers to 'let off steam' because of the salience of the notion that men make the best warriors, and the difficulties militaries face in motivating soldiers to fight. The desires of servicemen, who consider themselves heterosexual, to engage in homoerotic practices necessitates the denial or exclusion of those – gay men and women of any sexual orientation – whose sexuality (whether real or imagined) would undermine the innocence of these acts. Whilst homoeroticism and homosociability may be supplementary to the actual application of violence, the thrill of toying with sexual boundaries can facilitate social capital for the male heterosexual majority and in doing so reinforce the military's heterosexual and masculine institutional identity. Therefore when in the military, masculinity, homophobia, desire and homoeroticism all 'work in tandem to create a climate in which violent and demeaning hazing practices are more likely to be tolerated and even considered beneficial for young men' (Allan 2004, p. 282), this amalgamation of social practices can also work to the benefit of a wider assumed geopolitical system in which real men fight.

## **Conclusion**

Since their emergence in the seventeenth century, state militaries have been sites where associations between men, masculinity, violence and power have been normalized and habitually reproduced. Though men involved in military and militarized activities are in no way homogeneous, and a multitude of performed identities co-exist in armed forces, the historical, political, social and cultural association of men with war, their embodied status as men, and social discourses on gender, continue to converge in ways that enable and privilege masculinized ways of being and ensure that hegemonic ideas about masculinity remain relevant to the conduct of war. This is particularly evident when considering the ways in which women and sexual minorities continue to be characterized as inimical to military effectiveness and culture. Militaries pander to the desires of military men not because of the need to maintain social bonds between male soldiers as such, but in order to maintain the military's institutional identity as a masculine domain in which real men are prepared to fight. This distinction is a rather subtle one: military readiness may not require gender and sexual uniformity but the desires of military men for a boys' club may function as a carrot of sorts that makes it easier for military institutions to motivate their predominantly male soldiers to engage in violence. The participation of women in combat remains contingent because women's bodies fulfil important symbolic roles in male bonding, even though their actual contributions to military service may be valuable and even valued by servicemen. Similarly, whilst the sexual orientation of a soldier has no discernible bearing on his or her capability to fight, the desire of heterosexual military men to avoid being labelled queer and to play with

boys without the fear of being given this label means that heterosexuality remains integral to military culture and identity.

State militaries have and are often still able to evade some societal norms regardless of social, political and legislative challenges to the exclusivity of the military as a masculine domain. This is because as the institution responsible for conducting wars at the behest of and on behalf of the state, military authorities often claim that interfering with military culture and organization is a matter of life and death. As such, the desires of (heterosexual) military men to wage war continue to be prioritized by militaries. Perhaps therefore, the most important function of the reinforcement of longstanding military norms, in which heteronormativity and masculine domination are promoted, is to make the very existence of militaries possible by normalizing war as a manly pursuit.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, among the four largest financial contributors to NATO, women account for just 14% of military strength in the United States, 8.8% in Germany, 9.7% in the UK and 15.2% in France (NATO 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The most recent review of this exclusion in the UK, which took place in 2010, concluded that although the research on the impact of introducing women into all-male combat units was inconclusive, the exclusion of women from close combat roles should continue as a 'precautionary' measure, (Ministry of Defence UK 2010, p. 4).

<sup>3</sup> The notion that servicemen would react in an exceptionally emotional way if a woman was injured has long made the rounds in many state militaries (Gal 1986; Adie 2006). It flies in the face of popular culture and personal accounts of war that characterize infantrymen as bands of brothers who leave no man behind.

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<sup>4</sup> See Dandeker (2000) for a discussion of ‘the need to be different’ and also Forster (2006) for more recent challenges to this in the UK.

<sup>5</sup> Excessive alcohol consumption is more prevalent in the British military than in the general population, particularly among young, single men of the lower ranks (Fear et al 2007)

<sup>6</sup> The policy was mandated by US federal law hence the need for the US Senate to approve its repeal.

<sup>7</sup> The Convention was incorporated into British law via the 1998 Human Rights Act.

<sup>8</sup> Belkin (2012) argues that the US military’s (now repealed) Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Harass policy, and the confusion, uncertainty and ambivalence it fostered, is implicated in male-on-male rape and other forms of sexual abuse between men.

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