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Masculinities, War and Militarism

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the pioneering scholarship of feminists and other masculinities scholars who first drew attention to the connections between masculinities and militarism, many of whom argued that masculinities are causal in militarism and war. It goes on to highlight the work of scholars who complicated that original insight by drawing out attention to the multiplicity of masculinities at play in militarism and war, and their inherent contradictions and instabilities. It concludes with a discussion of the question of whether and how masculinities can be unravelled in the service of peace.

Introduction

What is the connection between masculinities and militarism? Is the concept of masculinities a useful one for understanding militarism and war? How do we challenge and transform violent, militaristic or misogynist masculinities as part of a strategy for peace? This chapter starts by introducing the pioneering scholarship of feminists and other masculinities scholars who first drew attention to the connections between masculinities and militarism, many of whom argued that masculinities are causal in militarism and war (Cockburn 2010). The second section discusses the work of scholars who complicated that original insight by drawing out attention to the multiplicity of masculinities at play in militarism and war, and their inherent contradictions and instabilities. The final section highlights the scholarship that concerns itself with the question of whether masculinities can change, and whether this facilitates peace.

Masculinities, War and Militarism: Making the Connections

Numbers of female military personnel may be on the rise, but militaries remain dominated, as they have for centuries, by men. Few feminists or other scholars of masculinity argue that this male-dominance of militaries is explained by biology. The idea that your biology determines your

behaviour and that boys are just born more aggressive than girls is just not credible, as numerous studies now show (Fine 2005; Jordan-Young 2011). Men do not dominate in the world's militaries because they are naturally more violent, aggressive and tough, feminist scholars argue, but because in many cultures across time and space proving oneself on the battlefield has been deemed an important way to prove oneself a man (Goldstein 2003; Cockburn 2007). This is evident in the clichés the military will "make a man of you" and "turn boys into men" (Hockey 2003, p15). Boys and men are socialized into thinking that being tough, being aggressive, being in authority, in control, are important markers of being a man. To different degrees, and in different ways in different parts of the world, many still bring up their children with the messages that "boys don't cry", that they have to be brave, and to learn to stand up for themselves in a fight (Connell 2000).

To those who doubt that aggression is socially constructed, pioneer of feminist International Relations (IR) Cynthia Enloe points to the way that soldiers are trained in the military. "If masculinity in the raw were sufficient, there would be little need for the sweat, blisters and humiliations of basic training" (Enloe 1993, 55). In his hefty volume on *Gender and War*, Goldstein concurs, arguing that the reality of combat is fear and confusion, and that there is much evidence to show that men on the whole find combat horrible and unnatural. Why else, he writes, would we need conscription and harsh discipline in training, punishment for desertion, and rewards (both material and non) for fighting? (Goldstein 2003, 253). Masculinity is an "artificial status which is typically constructed around a culture's need for brave and disciplined soldiers" (Goldstein 2003, 283).

As another pioneering feminist scholar of military masculinities, Sandra Whitworth puts it: "Military training helps to nurture the exaggerated ideals of manhood and masculinity demanded by national militaries," (2004: 242-3). The transformation of boys into men, for her, is "accomplished through the denigration of everything marked by difference, whether that be women, people of colour, or homosexuality. It is not by coincidence that the insults most new recruits face are gendered, raced and homophobic insults: young soldiers are learning to deny, indeed to obliterate, the 'other' within themselves." Similar processes are found across a range of contexts, such as Turkey (Altinay 2004), South Africa (Cock 1994; Shefer and Mankayi, 2007), and the UK (Hockey 2003; Woodward 1998). Considering some of the violence experienced in war – the evidence that "that women have been raped with penises, fists and miscellaneous weapons, their breasts cut off, their foetuses sliced out" (Cockburn 2007: 248), and that battlefield accounts report the obvious sexual pleasure some men take in killing and in other forms of violent abuse directed against women, men and even children (Ruddick 1983: 483), many feminists argue that to understand war and its perpetuation we need to bring into view some of the "uncomfortable *cultural* realities of training and fighting" (Cockburn 2007: 248). "War as institution is made up of, refreshed by and adaptively reproduced by violence as banal practice, in the everyday life of boot camp and battlefield. Masculinity in its various cultural forms is an important content of that cycle: masculinity shapes war and war shapes masculinity (Cockburn 2007: 249)".

In addressing the connection between masculinities, militarism and war, it is not just the links between men and violence that feminists highlight. Other aspects of masculinity are important – military men are socialised into thinking that it is manly to protect women and children, that it is manly to take risks (not play safe), be active not passive, competitive not compromising, to be brave not cowardly, and so on. These different aspects of militarized masculinity constitute one half of an "elaborate gender ideology" (Enloe 1983, 211) which encourages men to believe their role is to fight

and protect, and women that theirs is to look after the "home front", the "Just Warrior and Beautiful Soul" of war's ongoing mythology (Elshtain 1982; 1987; also see Tickner 2001: 57).

The results of this socialisation of recruits into militarized masculinity are the routine workplace discrimination and harassment, the sexual exploitation and violence, and the greater efforts required to be accepted that female military personnel report and researchers document (Carreiras 2006; Herbert 2000; D'Amico and Weinstein 1999; Woodward and Winter 2007; Mathers 2013: 140-145). The United States military has been shaken by a succession of sexual exploitation scandals, but these highly visible incidents are arguably just the tip of the iceberg (Enloe 2007: 106-115) – not just in the US but in many armed forces (Mathers 2013: 144; Obradovic 2014). Studies of US military veterans since the 1970s found that 71 per cent of the women said they were sexually assaulted or raped while serving, and that some 80 per cent of military sexual assaults are never reported (Benedict 2009). As Congresswoman Jane Harman put it, "Women serving in the U.S. military are more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire in Iraq" (cited in Benedict 2009). High rates of domestic violence (see for example Harrison 2003); prostitution around military bases (see for example Enloe 2000); the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war (Leatherman 2011); and the realisation that soldiers serving as peacekeepers also have perpetrated sexual violence (Westendorf and Searle 2017) consolidated the feminist case that militarized masculinities constitute a major barrier to feminist goals of gender equality and peace.

One of the reasons feminist and other scholars argued that militarized masculinities are so important is because of the evidence that ideas about masculinity forged through military training and culture also influence civilian men. From Samuel Johnson's 1778 assertion that "every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier," to ongoing valorisations of military culture in many societies today, there is much evidence for Morgan's (1994) view that constructions of masculinity and femininity in the military context shape the entire gender order (also see Segal 1997; Connell 1995, 213). Constructions of gender within militaries shape masculinities in obvious places, other institutions in the security sector (such as the police, private security, and ministries of defence), but also in public life more broadly. The outcome is that it is hard for many men, particularly those in positions of authority and leadership, to be seen as too risk-averse, compromising, or conciliatory. It becomes hard, in particular, for any man, especially leaders, to admit to vulnerability and interdependence, of either themselves or their state. Instead, they are compelled to pursue weapons and policies that perpetuate the myth of the possibility of perfect security, perfect invulnerability (Cohn 1987; 2013). President Trump and his sabre rattling might be the most extreme example, but ideals of masculinity arguably work in subtle ways to constrain leaders of all stripes.

Masculinities, Militarism and War: Complicating the Connection

Feminists and other critical masculinities scholars have gone beyond *making the connections* between masculinities, militarism and war, however, and have sought to show how complex this relationship is. Some fear that in emphasising the mutually reinforcing nature of masculinity and militarism – that war makes men and men make war – scholars can reify the very gendered dichotomies they aim to challenge (Dawson 1994: 16-17). Stern and Zalewski (2009, p.616) call this the 'sex/gender paradox' or 'predicament', the way that feminist interventions end up reinvoking

the "very grammars that initially incited them as narratives of resistance" and becoming complicit in the violences they seek to ameliorate.

Scholars have highlighted the huge variety in military masculinities (see, for example, Enloe 1983, 1993; Hooper 2001). If we consider the masculinity of the officer class (authoritative, well-bred, well-educated, commanding), the masculinity of the infantry private (tough, aggressive, hard-drinking) and the masculinity of the engineer (skilled with machines, mechanics, technology), for example, we can see that they are all recognizably masculine, but all very different. As such, masculinities scholars have stressed the importance of recognising that masculinity always intersects with other aspects of identity – class, nation and race in particular – in the construction of military identities (see Kirby and Henry 2012; Woodward and Duncanson 2017). Some scholars thus focus on teasing out the specificities of militarized masculinities in different national contexts (see for example Ashe 2012; J. L. Parpart 2015; Oxlund et al 2010; Sasson-Levy 2003; Rones 2017). Others have teased out the relationship between gender and sexuality (Herbert 1998; Bulmer 2013). Some have highlighted the ways in which male recruits, for example, are arguably active participants in the construction of masculinities, not just moulded from above by military commanders seeking to fill the ranks (Morgan 1994; Connell 1995). Men consciously act in certain ways and this in part informs their masculinity – e.g. they pick their job specialisation (though that choice of course is also in some ways mediated by class, race, age and so on), they choose how much to buy into cultures of aggression.

A thriving scholarship considers "masculinities at the margins", in recognition of the fact that it is not just militarized masculinities in state militaries that drive militarism and war, but militarized masculinities in all sorts of contexts. Recent work on military masculinities includes research on terrorism (Messerchmidt and Rohde 2018) and rebel groups (Duriesmith 2016; Silva 2014); drone operators (Heyns and Borden 2017) and cyborgs (Masters 2005); deserters (Maringara 2017) and dissenters (Tidy 2016). Paul Higate has been a pioneer in this development, first editing a volume challenging the idea that military masculinities could only be found where there was a formal military setting (2003) and then again with his work on Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) (2012b, 2012a). Indeed, militarized masculinities in PMSCs have attracted much feminist attention (Eichler 2013; Chisholm 2014; Stachowitsch 2015). This research has highlighted, in Stachowitsch's (2015: 364) summary that private security constitutes a variety of masculinities, which integrate business, humanitarian, and militarized characteristics; that masculinities are being redefined in and through new security regimes; that security contractors make sense of their practices through the framework of masculinity; that masculinities serve to devalue the labor of men from the Global South; that masculinist perceptions inform redefinitions of security; and that masculinities are used to legitimize the outsourcing of security functions." Veterans have also become a popular subject of study, with Sarah Bulmer and Maya Eichler (2017: 175) persuasively arguing they "illustrate that the unmaking of a militarized masculine identity is never complete, much as the archetype of militarized masculinity can never be fully achieved."

Indeed, something that is often pointed to in discussion of military masculinities is contradiction (see for example Morgan 1994; Hynes 1998; Titunik 2008; Amar 2011; Basham 2012; Henry 2015). For example, in many ways the archetype of the masculine soldier is avoidance of emotion, holding one's fears inside, what is called in the UK, "the stiff upper lip", but, at the same time, soldiers often cry at the death or injury of a comrade, or express extreme anger, and when they do, this is rarely deemed inappropriate and chastised by other soldiers (Morgan 1994). Similarly, we think of

masculinity as involving authority, command, dominance – but soldiering involves more subservience, obedience and deference to authority than any other profession a young man could be in (Enloe 1993). Attention to looking good, to ironing clothes, to keeping your room tidy – all things usually deemed the preserve of young women, not men – are demanded and respected in the military (Hooper 2001). Belkin's (2011) study of US recruits found that they were routinely compelled to engage in behaviours that are supposedly disavowed by dominant forms of masculinity, such as military hazing rituals involving the penetration of other men, indicating that militarized masculinity is structured by contradictions deliberately designed to confuse recruits and ensure obedience.

The idea that masculinities are multiple, contradictory and involve agency has become widely accepted. However, as Charlotte Hooper has argued, it puts feminists in something of a conundrum:

> "if men routinely exhibit so-called feminine characteristics, and if the similar activities and qualities can be labelled masculine or feminine depending on interpretation and a change of emphasis, and if the term *masculinity* has no stable ingredients, then why take the claims of feminists seriously at all?" (Hooper 2000: 62-63).

This is why many scholars have found Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (see Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985) to be so useful, the idea that masculinities are not merely multiple and equal but rather exist in relations of hierarchy, dominated by a loosely coherent and evolving hegemonic form. As the Gramscian origins of the term hegemony suggest (see Gramsci 1971), hegemonic masculinity dominates not through force, but through consent. In other words, the majority of men (and women) respect and value this way of being a man, even if the majority of men do not enact it. It is context dependent, but in many militaries it is associated with the practices, skills, and symbolic importance of combat (toughness, endurance, courage, action, risk-taking), often with hard-drinking, heterosexual prowess, and disdain of homosexuality, but also often with the authority and control of the commanding officer. It is a cultural ideal, but it has important material effects – certain ways of acting are privileged: competition over compromise, action over consultation, force over talking, etc. and certain people are privileged – those men who most resemble the hegemonic model.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful because it has enabled critical scholars to reconcile the multiple, dynamic and contradictory nature of masculinities with insights into the connection between masculinity and militarism (Hutchings 2007). Specifically, itt has helped them think through how the ideal of the combat-experienced commanding officer is not the only form of masculinity, but it is a very powerful model, which, through consent, has dominated as one form of 'ideal man'. The idea of hegemonic masculinity helps explain the way that although the ideal masculinity in any context may shift, it is always valorised over that which is designated feminine. It is as a result of this ongoing privileging of the masculine over the feminine that certain advantages (wealth, respect, power) stay in the hands of men (some more than others) both within and beyond the military (Connell 1987; Hooper 2001; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

That said, the concept of hegemonic masculinity may raise as many problems as it solves. If hegemonic masculinity is not a personality type, but rather *the way in which particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth* (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985), and how they make their dominance seem natural and legitimate, can there ever be change which challenges the power

of hegemonic masculinity? A concept which does not allow for progressive change, for the dismantling of the idea that aggression, risk-taking, conquest and so on are some sort of ideal, is of limited use to critical scholars. Connell, however, always stressed that hegemony may fail, and several scholars have attempted to develop this strand in Connell's thinking in order to aid feminism's project of unravelling hegemonic masculinity (Christensen and Jensen 2014; Duncanson 2015).

Others think the concept is flawed because it fails to capture what is going on empirically: being a member of the military or a military-like institution is *not* necessarily the most accepted or most respected, let alone the most hegemonic, way of being a man, even in conflict-affected situations. The military or insurgents may be seen by affected communities as unwanted outsiders, while unarmed, civilian community leaders are treated with far more respect (Myrttinen, Khattab, and Naujoks 2017). Indeed, scholars increasingly call for more attention to be given to the masculinities at play in militarism and war that are *not* associated with power, violence, or heroic protectors of the weak and vulnerable (Parpart and Partridge 2014; Chisholm and Tidy 2017). In many conflict-affected areas, the concept which is perhaps more relevant is that of "thwarted masculinities," that is: "masculinities of men who are bound by expectations of living up to dominant notions of masculinity in the face of realities which make it practically impossible to achieve these, leading to frustration and at times various forms of violence, against both others and oneself" (Myrttinen, Khattab, and Naujoks 2017, 108; also see Dolan 2010). And of course, many men and boys are simply vulnerable, more than anything else, in wartime; and dominant norms of masculine strength can, seemingly paradoxically, increase this vulnerability (Myrttinen, Khattab, and Naujoks 2017).

Unravelling Militarized Masculinities for peace

Some of the scholarship which calls for attention to non-violent and non-hegemonic masculinities at play in militarism and war is explicitly focused on the normative project of dismantling violent masculinities and promoting more egalitarian models in the service of peace. The evidence that men predominate across the spectrum of violence led Connell to conclude that any "strategy for peace must concern itself with this fact, the reasons for it, and its implications for work to reduce violence" (2000: 22). The beginnings of such a strategy were fleshed out under the auspices of UNESCO in the late 1990s (see Brienes et al 2000). Many initiatives have followed, such as efforts to unravel the links between weapons, masculinities, and violence as part of the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants after war (see Theidon 2009) or to transform masculinities in war-affected contexts through group education or community outreach (see Myrttinen et al 2014; Wright 2014).

Several scholars have addressed the question of whether the post-Cold War shift in many western militaries away from wars of territorial defence towards peace, humanitarian and stabilisation operations changed militarised masculinities. Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia (Whitworth 2004; Razack 2004) and American "humanitarian soldier-scholars" (Niva 1998; Khalili 2011; Dyvik 2016) and British "forces for good" (Duncanson 2013; Welland 2015) in Iraq and Afghanistan have been presented (by themselves, their militaries and in national and international media and policy discourses) as "tough but tender" (Niva 1998: 118); as skilled in such tasks as, for example, the provision of humanitarian aid, escorting children to school, negotiating ceasefires, and

communicating across cultural divides as fighting. In scholarship on all these cases, however, the authors caution to be wary of ascribing progress to these new masculinities. All too often, the masculinity of the altruistic, humanitarian soldier of the western military is constructed through implicit or sometime explicit comparison with those who are portrayed as the hypermasculine belligerents, the uncivilized barbaric hordes consumed by ancient hatreds, or the feminised civilian population, the weak, passive victims of war. "Softer, kinder" masculinities thus appear always to entail new race or class oppressions. The reason these masculinities are so problematic is that this discourse, this "powerful and seductive story of the West bringing human rights and democracy to non-Western countries" (Razack 2004, 47), distracts from the root causes of conflicts, which can be found firstly in the legacies of colonialism, cold war superpower politics, including surplus armaments, and secondly, the neoliberal economic policies which have dominated the global political economy since the 1980s. Nonetheless, some scholars retain optimism that taking more seriously the masculinities of peacebuilders, including resisters and conscientious objectors, (Conway 2014; Duncanson 2013; Myrttinen at al 2017) may be a potential resource for peace.

The lesson from this scholarship on peacebuilder masculinities is perhaps threefold. First, to unravel hegemonic militarized masculinities in the service of peace, it cannot be enough for the military *practices* that are seen as manly to change. There also has to be change in *relations* between military personnel and both real and imagined others in order challenge the power relations at play in gender. Relations of hierarchy, oppression and exclusion must be replaced with relations of equality, empathy and mutual respect. Second, if there is insufficient attention to intersections of masculinity with other vectors of identity (such as race, class, or sexuality), change in masculinity can reinforce oppressions along these other axes. This implies that a strategy for peace would need to include encouraging respect for multiple ways of being a man in military contexts and more fluid identities, recognizing similarities, interdependence, and mutual vulnerabilities. Third, there is little to gain from military masculinities being redefined in less violent ways if broader social, political and economic forces, which drove the interventions into Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan, are not simultaneously challenged.

Despite the introduction of complexity and dissenting voices over the years, feminist and other critical gender scholars continue to find the relationship between masculinities, militarism and war an important area of study. They tend to proceed mindful of the complexities, the contradiction and dynamism, and the challenge of theorizing power relations without cementing them. But the original contention, that socially constructed gender norms which associate masculinity with power, violence and control play a role in driving conflict and insecurity, remains an important motivation and guiding insight for many scholars, and prompts research which is, few would contest, needed now more than ever.

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