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# Militaries, Gender and Peacekeeping: an Identity Perspective.

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This paper explores the relationship between military identity, gender and peacekeeping. Drawn from a wider study on military peacekeeping identity, it considers how extant research, positioned within an interpretive narrative framework, can be used to examine the process through which women and men construct professional military identities. This perspective is largely underrepresented in military research, with previous studies confined to exploring the utility of identity - how it can be manufactured, regulated and aligned with military values. The paper stresses the need for research that emphasises the subjective practices and consequences of gendered identity work within military organisations.

Identity can broadly understood as an individual's conception of their 'sense of self'. This paper adopts, as its starting point, Brown's (2015) definition that identity refers to "the meanings that individuals attach reflexively to themselves" (p. 23) when attempting to answer the questions "who am I?" and "how should I act?". A focus on language in identity studies challenges the idea that we possess a single stable self (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Instead, identity is viewed as comprising of "a reflexively ordered narrative, its construction being stimulated by social interaction and ordered by institutionalised patterns of being and knowing" (Thomas, 2011, p. 168-169). In this way, identity is produced and performed in social interactions, continually cast and recast through internal and external conversations (Athens, 1994; Musson & Duberley, 2007; Brown, 2019). Dominant discourses, such as those that exist in society and organisations influence the way we talk about ourselves. Discourse "governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about … how ideas are put into practice and regulate the conduct of others (Hall, 2001, p. 72). Discourses such as gender and nationality shape how we understand our lives, and therefore have the power to constitute self-identities and define their boundaries (Riley, Robson & Evans, 2022). Foucault (1988, p. 18) referred to dominant discourses as "regimes of truth" that normalise and naturalise how we understand our world. It follows therefore that individuals draw on discourses as a way of thinking about who they are and should be in particular contexts.

An understanding of gender identity is increasingly recognised as important in organisational studies and contributes to our understanding of how women and men position themselves in the workplace. Research into constructions of gender identity in organisational contexts points to "the more or less distinct forms of subjectivity (values, self-understanding,

ways of thinking and feeling)" of what it means to be female or male (Alvesson, 1998, p. 970). Writers (Goffman, 1979; West & Zimmerman; 1987; Butler, 1993; Kondo, 2002) frame gender as a practice or performance, "a 'system of action' that is institutionalised and widely recognised but also is dynamic, emergent, local, variable and shifting" (Martin, 2003, p. 351). For Goffman (1979) gender is a 'performance' and this performance is informed by a structurally or culturally defined set of rules based on what society views as appropriate gender roles; "[if] gender is to be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex…then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates" (Goffman, 1979, p.1). These acts do not occur in a vacuum but rather are informed by structural or cultural rules based on what are 'regarded' as appropriate gender roles. West and Zimmerman (1987) expand on this idea, framing gender as an accomplishment where individuals create gender for themselves and others in specific contexts. They see gender as present in all social roles, not a social role in itself and if "individuals 'fail' to do gender correctly, it is they who are judged, not society" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 146).

Ethnographic research by Kondo (2002) frames gender as a "strategic narrative assertion", relational and negotiated. In the workplace, gender identities are dialogically constructed through interactions between individuals and the gendered assumptions that are socially embedded in organisations (Stead, 2017). Butler (1990) states that gender is something an individual does or performs rather than who they are. She argues that gender identity is not based on an 'essential' sense of self, but instead is a consequence of repeated gender performance which she terms performativity or "'the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being'." (Butler, 1990, p. 33).

This review will firstly explore gender identity as a discursive practice in military organisations before applying this understanding to overseas military peacekeeping deployments, arguing that the mere presence of women is not sufficient for transformational structural and cultural change.

## GENDER IDENTITY IN MILITARY ORGANISATIONS

The term 'gendered organisation' refers to institutions where women and men are located in differently valued social spaces or activities, and their choices have different and unequal outcomes (Wade & Ferree, 2019). Acker (1990) was one of the earliest advocates of this idea. She claims that masculine institutions have built into them an implicit model of a worker; rational, analytical and tough minded, dedicated to their work over and above any other commitments.

> To say that an organisation, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. (Acker, 1990, p. 146)

Similarly, gendered occupations are stereotypically construed as male or female, such as nursing, firefighting, policing and the military. Despite an increase in the number of women in male dominated professions, women may find that they are assigned to 'feminized' jobs within these occupations, for example, Grube-Farrell (2002) identified how women police officers are frequently allocated roles which involved counselling, social support or working with female offenders. Gendered organisations prescribe a set of normalised expectations

against which identity is measured (Dunn & Creek, 2015). These norms are implicated in a "socially constructed performance of gender in which masculinity can be and is performed by men and women alike" (Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2008, p. 133-134). Professionalism, or what it means to be a professional in highly gendered organisations has been identified as inherently intertwined with norms of masculinity, referencing "long working hours", competitive cultures and the perceived exclusion of women on the basis of motherhood (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019, p. 478)

Military organisations are highly regulated environments, rooted in tradition and history with precise templates of military practices, discipline and leadership. Leonhard (2019) writes that militaries legitimise their existence and subsequent actions based on the dichotomies of war and peace embedded as core values in societal discourses. Associated with these values are a number of binary constructions, "friends and foes, heroes and victims, ... warriors and peacekeepers" (Leonhard, 2019, p.307). Professional military identities are linked to an understanding of how militaries function, and also provide an important source of collective identification defining what it means to be a soldier (Caza, Vough & Puranik, 2018). Militaries can be conceived as one of the most "prototypically masculine of all institutions" (Segal, 1995, p. 748) and are widely recognised as a site of hegemonic masculinity that reinforces, reproduces and perpetuates the construction of masculine identities (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985; Connell, 1987; Higate, 2003). The basis for this dominant identity is rarely questioned (Pendlebury, 2020).

Military organisations can be understood as "total institutions" where personnel live a "formally administered round of life" (Goffman, 1961, p. xiii). It can be argued that this operational "segregation from the larger civilian society has allowed [the retention] of many of the social and legal parameters of its historic roots" (Kovitz, 2003, p. 8). Historical, cultural and gendered norms combine to discipline an aspirational or ideal identity against which individuals measure themselves in their search for validation and fulfilment (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009).

Research in a military context has focused on the discursive construction of gender and how men, in particular, draw on themes of hegemonic masculinity to negotiate organisational situations and challenges (Barrett, 1996). McAllister, Callaghan and Fellin (2018) highlight how this hegemonic idea of military masculinity, discursively framed in military culture, is regarded as not only legitimate but essential to do the job. Drawing on Connell's (1995) conception of hegemonic masculinity, Barrett (1996) explored constructions of masculinity with officers in the US navy. He concluded that while the military is a gendered institution, it is also a gendering institution. Consistent with the identification of a 'hegemonic military masculinity' (Higate, 2003, 2016; Hockey, 2003), officers privileged accounts of "risk taking, discipline, tolerance of degradation, perseverance, rationality, absence of emotion and technological mastery" (Barrett, 1996, p. 140) in their narrative accounts. Combat-oriented militaries privilege skills related to warfare aligning identity with "the ideals of a warrior" (Kouri, 2023, p. 163). Discursive resources employed in constructions of valued masculine military identity are however more fluid than a simple binary warrior ideal. Research by Higate (2003) demonstrates that context often determines what characteristics are prized with men in support roles emphasising superior technical skills rather than physical dominance which would be seen as ineffectual in such spaces.

Several reasons can be identified to explain why militaries remain "inherently or essentially gendered" (Carreiras, 2010, p. 472). Firstly, their hierarchical structures tend to be centred around distinctly male and female roles (Mackenzie, 2015). Secondly, military organisations demonstrate a prevalence of "pervasive symbols, images and ideologies about femininity and masculinity" embedded in the culture, (Sasson-Levy, 2011, p. 383), and thirdly they display distinctive ways that gender identity is constructed and performed, imputing that because women are weaker, peaceful, or nurturing they are not capable of being soldiers (Muhr & Sløk-Andersen, 2017).

Despite a small increase in the representation of women in armed forces, this section will illustrate how the literature reveals persistent "tensions, constraints and difficulties that military women face when attempting to accommodate their gender and work status" (Carreiras, 2021, p. 11). In a review of the Australian Defence Forces attitudes towards women (Jenkins & Priday, 2017, pp. 9-10) noted that:

> Overwhelmingly members describe the opportunities in Army as open to people from all backgrounds. This is underpinned by an attitude that everyone is welcome, as long as they meet the required standards and conform to existing norms. Or, as one member put it, 'if you want to join a club you have to act like a club'.

Kaspersen (2023) writes that to be recognised by others as authentic and legitimate military professionals, individuals are required to emphasise certain aspects of their identity while concealing others to "demonstrate adherence to cultural norms and values" (Scott, 2015, p. 78). Individuals perform or 'do' certain identities aware that they are being judged or surveilled (Foucault, 1980) thus regulating their behaviour in line with normative expectations.

Research by Sasson-Levy (2001) with female Israeli soldiers focused on the way these individuals constructed their gender in the military. Drawing on Butler (1990), Sasson-Levy argues that "women soldiers in masculine roles adopt various discursive and identity practices characteristic of male combat soldiers" (p.9). Women employed strategies that paradoxically and simultaneously served to resist and comply with the dominant masculine discourse prevalent in the organisation. She identified three related practices in the construction of identity: mimicry, distancing and trivialisation.

Mimicry refers to "stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1990, p. 40). Sasson- Levy reports that female soldiers learned how to do 'masculinity' from instructors during training. They are restricted in their use of makeup, jewellery and perfume, effectively encouraged to conceal their femininity. They often adopted speech practices such as a lowered tone of voice and the use of foul language. Sasson-Levy (2001, p. 15) suggests that this reflects a perception that women "cannot command as women". The physicality of training becomes a goal in itself reinforcing inequality and serving to "naturalize and perpetuate socially constructed distinctions between men and women" (Sasson-Levy, 2011, p. 401). Closely related to mimicry is distancing. Distancing references a strategy where women seek to "distance themselves from identities and practices they perceive as traditionally 'feminine'. Rones and Steder (2017) argue that this 'distancing' results from being placed in a context where maleness is the norm putting pressure on women to symbolically change gender in their quest for acceptance. Similarly, Pendlebury (2020) demonstrates how female cadets attempted to 'cast off' their

femininity, "forced to perform or replicate a certain set of masculine traits before being deemed suitable to 'do the job'", (p. 177). Pendlebury argues that this attitude reflects adherence to a norm of extant physicality that has developed over years of male only participation. Women faced stark identity choices, if they chose to act in a feminine way, this emphasises their 'otherness', if they chose to perform the ideal identity they are seen as inauthentic. "Such inauthentic replications of the dominant identity are often held to a comparatively lower value or at the very least viewed differently" (Pendlebury, 2020, p. 180) reinforcing the hegemonic ideal.

Trivialisation refers to how women react to incidences of sexual harassment, relabelling them merely as 'jokes'. Sasson-Levy (2001) hypothesises that women may feel that any complaint would rebound, positioning them as "constituting a gender problem" and separating them from being seen as "just one of the guys" (p.17), She offers one additional explanation, that any complaint would additionally position women as victims. "A victim is defenceless and weak with no place in an army whose duty is to defend the weak" (p. 17). The reluctance of women to be seen as victims or a 'gender problem' is reflective of research on stigmatised identities (Lutgen- Sandvik, 2008; Toyoki & Brown, 2014). Wessel et al. (2015) drawing on Goffman's concept of dramaturgical selves, define stigma as "a personal attribute or characteristics that are devalued in a particular social context based on associated negative stereotypes (p. 244). It is probable that women seek to distance themselves from an identity which potentially carries negative or stigmatised connotations.

Studies on the Norwegian military (Rones & Steder, 2017; Kaspersen, 2023) indicate the widespread prevalence of a masculine soldier ideal. Women reported being assigned tasks below their competence and being in receipt of condescending comments concerning their physical performance. Kaspersen (2023) describes how female soldiers felt unable to meet the ideal masculine norm, emphasising a constant need to prove themselves, or be better than the men in their unit to be judged as equal. Women often attempted to discursively position themselves as one of the men, keeping their distance from other women. In this quest for recognition and validation, these women often denied that any gender discrimination existed. Paradoxically, becoming 'one of the boys' minimises perceptual awareness of the prevailing culture of masculinity (Miller, 2004).

## GENDER IN MILITARY PEACEKEEPING

Peacekeeping spaces are areas of extreme complexity, culturally, historically and administratively. Peacekeeping missions are situated within the cultural and gendered context of the country in which the operation occurs. Camps are characterised by the culture of the military organisations that inhabit them. Missions are experienced in ways that are fluid and dynamic, ranging from peaceful and benign to conflictual and violent; identity constructions in response to these changing spaces are multiple and in flux. Jennings (2019) views peacekeeping as "a practice of government" where "government refers to diverse modalities of influencing behaviour… mechanisms, practices, *savoirs*, and institutional arrangements" (Jennings, 2019, p. 31, original italics). Jennings views these as crucial in promoting particular types of identities. UN policy discourse[1] stresses that the "blue-bereted peacekeeper is supposed to be benign, altruistic, neutral and capable of conflict resolution in any cultural

[1] Code of conduct for Blue Helmets https://conduct.unmissions.org/ten-rulescode-personal-conduct-blue-helmets

setting – a warrior-prince-of-peace" (Whitworth, 2004, p. 12). Idealised narratives are "directly and indirectly communicated to peacekeepers via codes of conduct, training regimes, public rhetoric and internal communications concerning what peacekeepers 'are' and what is expected of them" (Jennings, 2019, p. 36). The discourse of peacekeeping positions soldiers as the "protector, benevolent, firm and driven by altruism rather than self-interest or the pursuit of power" (Jennings, 2019, p.37), in direct contrast to hegemonic conceptions of military masculinity.

As early as 1960, Janowitz was one of the first scholars to propose that peacekeeping assignments may actually enhance military skills, arguing that "the realistic study of international relations involves an appreciation of the limits of violence", and that this understanding could only be of benefit to armed forces (Janowitz, 1960, p. 429). Moskos (1976) imagined the emergence of a new type of military peacekeeping professional characterised by a "constabulary ethic" that prescribed minimum use of force (Moskos 1976, p. 11) potentially resulting in the increased "civilianisation" of the military (Jenne, 2020, p. 105). However, Janowitz (1960) also anticipated that combat soldiers would actively resist peacekeeping discourses, casting such missions as less valuable than traditional 'warrior' engagements. Numerous studies (for example, Franke, 2003; Higate 2007; Simic, 2010; Jenne, 2020) provide little evidence for 'civilianisation' of the military referencing identity tensions manifesting through aggressive actions, sexual misconduct, othering and positioning the host population as victims or the enemy.

One significant area of discussion concerns how peacekeeping spaces may promote 'alternative masculinities' (Duncanson & Woodward, 2016). Tronto (2006, as cited in Sanghera et al, 2008, p. 6) suggests that peacekeepers may present in ways that "unsettled or at least expanded traditional understandings of what it [is] to be a soldier, through playing up the caring dimensions of peacekeeping work". Young (2003, p. 4) describes how this may manifest as a form of protective masculinity in which a "peacekeeper, whether a man or woman, is the masculine protector, while local people, both men and women, young and old, are the paradigmatic women and children ... the dominant masculinity in this way constitutes protective masculinity as its other".

The existence of alternative peacekeeping masculinities highlights the inherent contradiction between the warrior and the humanitarian, the former grounded in notions of violence, the latter based on altruistic behaviour (Whitworth, 2004). Whitworth (2004) specifically references tensions that arise in forces who are required to perform both roles. However, her discussion is confined to conventional 'war fighting' militaries. Other authors have focussed on neutral or nonaligned nations such as the Finns (Jukarainen, 2011; Mäki-Rahkola and Myrttinen, 2014).

Finnish peacekeepers speak proudly about themselves as a 'peacekeeping superpower' (Jukarainen, 2011, p. 93) using weapons only in the case of self-protection. Research by Mäki-Rahkola and Myrttinen (2014, p. 475) with Finnish peacekeepers indicates that the hegemonic idea of a peacekeeping professional, is one who is "neutral, calm and rational". Although identity work is not explicitly alluded to, their study revealed that soldiers crafted identities that both deconstructed and reiterated ideas of traditional military masculinities (p. 476). Identity tensions were expressed through various paradoxes such as: soldiers whose primary task is not to fight, whilst retaining an image of the tough 'agrarian warrior' linked to the Winter War (1939/40); and declaring a self-image of gender equality

whilst operating in a highly gendered institutional culture. However, Finnish peacekeepers effectively distanced themselves from more conventional military forces through stressing their "superior soft approach, eschewing 'Rambo' and 'cowboy' approaches" (Mäki-Rahkola & Myrttinen, 2014, p. 485). Mäki-Rahkola and Myrttinen (2014) regard these identities as temporary positions, adopted for the duration of the mission and crafted for specific contexts.

Other writers have explored peacekeeping constructions in countries such as Norway and the Netherlands who were previously neutral but drawn into the conflicts of Word War One and Two. Research in these countries presents a different picture. Haaland (2011) drew on memory books composed by Norwegian soldiers while on overseas peacekeeping missions for her analysis. She found "few expressions of aggressiveness or violence" (p.71), and relatively no references to the "masculinities Whitworth claims are those that go into making a soldier: those that promote violence, misogyny, homophobia and racism" (p. 73). However, she qualifies this with the fact that soldiers equally did not see themselves as 'helpers in uniform', privileging accounts of their superior professional skills. Haaland (2011) describes expressions of masculinity that were distinctly military, she highlights how Norwegian military culture is "completely dominated by men in the sense that women are invisible and having to adapt to male norms in order to be accepted. Being 'one of the boys' is unanimously presented as the highest praise that can be bestowed to a female soldier" (p. 73). Sion (2008) found that Dutch peacekeepers demonstrated ambivalence to what they perceived as the feminine aspects of peacekeeping, seeing this as a challenge to their military identity. She states "peacekeeping training was violent and exciting, the missions in Bosnia and Kosovo were peaceful and more humanitarian. The disappointed soldiers, especially infantry, perceived the mission in feminine terms" (Sion, 2008, p. 562). Any suggestion that the peacekeeping context promotes alternative masculinities is not largely borne out in the literature. It may be, as Bridges and Pascoe (2014) argue that "normative constraints are shifting but these shifts have largely taken place in ways that have sustained existing ideologies and systems of power and inequality" (p. 247).

The United Nations Security Council resolution 1325[2] on Women, Peace and Security (2000) argues that women make an important contribution to conflict resolution processes and on the ground as peacekeepers in post conflict zones. Figures given by the United Nations point to how between 1957 and 1989 only 20 uniformed women were serving as UN peacekeepers[3]. By September 2023, this figure had risen to a total of 4,972 women deployed as military personnel, representing 7.6% of the total number on UN missions. These figures indicate that military women are in a significant minority on peace missions, reflective of their wider under representation in national militaries.

Resolution 1325 called for gender mainstreaming in all aspects of peacekeeping operations, prompting Duncanson and Woodward (2016, p. 7) to ask, "could a policy of gender mainstreaming involve displacing the gender dichotomies that are instrumental in the persistence of violence such as the association of combat with masculinity and peace with femininity?" Research that focuses specifically on female identity in this context is largely underrepresented in the literature, with Newby and Sebag (2020, p. 167) highlighting that

[2] http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1325(2000)&Lang=E
[3] https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender

"there remains a desperate shortage of literature on women's experience of peacekeeping, and participation in military life."

Some writers have focused on the contribution that female soldiers make to peacekeeping (see Carey, 2001; Karamé, 2001; Bridges & Horsfall, 2009; Simic, 2010; Heinecken, 2015). These authors present the argument that women possess unique skills: facilitating better interactions with local populations; improved civil military cooperation (CIMIC); are positive role models for local women; are more likely to deescalate potentially violent situations and respond better to cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). A study by Bridges and Horsfall (2009) with the Australian Defence Forces supports this position. Participants reported that the presence of women on deployment provided for a more "normalised environment" and a "tempering of inappropriate behaviour" (Bridges & Horsfall, 2009, p. 125). They found that the inclusion of female peacekeepers added capability to the mission expanding on the skills available and resulted in greater trust between the troops and local people. Extant research is lacking or unclear how these affirming experiences impact on female soldiers identity construction in the peacekeeping space.

Taking a contrary position, Loftsdóttir and Bjórnsdóttir (2015, p. 217) argue that the underlying assumption of gender mainstreaming, 'add women and stir' does nothing to disrupt the status quo. Taking an integrationist rather than a transformational approach, mainstreaming has been translated into policies that simply apply a gender perspective to existing structures and practices. This results in little change, women are simply added into the mix with no planned attempts at cultural transformation (Williams et al., 2024). UN peacekeepers are drawn from many different countries with a myriad of "cultural, military and political backgrounds" (Baldwin & Taylor, 2022, p. 8). An International Peace Institute roundtable in (2020) identified how female peacekeepers with children felt judged when they deploy, being hailed by others as 'bad mothers'. Uniformed women have expressed how they experienced gendered judgements where they are perceived as a woman first and a soldier second even though this ran counter to their self-view. (Baldwin & Taylor, 2022).

Extant research highlights how female peacekeepers report feeling isolated and under higher levels of scrutiny than their male colleagues, expressing how that their behaviour is judged as representative of all women (Karim & Beardsley, 2020). Vermeji (2020, p. 9) discusses how female soldiers are subject to paradoxical judgements, praised "as promising officers… but criticised for leaving their families". In the multicultural environment, "female peacekeepers frequently encounter men who do not accept women's leadership due to deep-rooted customs, beliefs, or mindsets" (Vermeji, 2020, exec. summary).

Female Dutch soldiers and officers based in Kosovo and Bosnia, reported how they were perceived as less capable, physically weak and less effective in terms of interactions with locals (Sion, 2009). They also felt excluded on gender grounds, housed separately and required to self-restrict their behaviour. Sion (2009) quotes one officer as stating: "you cannot joke or flirt with anyone because you are the only woman and people will talk about you…. I'm used to it, I can take it… It's a man's society and always will be, it will never change" (Sion, 2009, p. 489). Dutch female peacekeepers utilised distancing as a tactic to distinguish their identities from those of other female soldiers who they regarded as stereotypically women. Sion argues that this strategy which emphasises individuality over collectiveness demonstrates a fear of being judged on gender grounds. The rationale being that if one female soldier makes a

mistake, they are held accountable as a group. Sion holds that this is not a unique experience but also shared by the Norwegian UNIFIL force (Karamé, 2001).

Valenius (2007) in her article on Nordic peacekeepers cites how women perceived they were viewed as 'forbidden fruit' having to restrict their activities and therefore housed separately. She states that on one hand, strict codes of conduct and gender segregation is protective of women, but on the other, it problematises them. She also identified how when the proportion of women is low in a staff or battalion deployment, female soldiers may be even more accepting of hypermasculine behaviours than their male colleagues, displaying evidence of complicity - "boys will be boys" (p. 519). She concludes that the UN's 'add women and stir' approach, serves to essentialise women's experience and does not address the gendered power structures to which "women are added" (Valenius, 2007, p. 510).

Newby and Sebag (2021) agree, arguing that gender mainstreaming strategies has only resulted in more women in staff roles and specialist areas. This is reinforced in recent UN data[4] (2023), the percentage number of military women on staff deployments is given as 18.4% contrasting with the percentage of women on troop deployments at 6.8%. Newby and Sebag (2021, p. 149) term this practice as "sidestreaming", where women are sidelined into administrative or 'gender sensitive' roles. This raises an important issue, if women have the potential to disrupt traditional notions of hegemonic military masculinity, the limited available research indicates that this is largely unsuccessful. Women are "hailed as equal when they perform as soldiers, but in other scenarios their differences are instrumentalised and retained for use in specialist spaces" (Eichler, 2013, pp. 257-259). Heinecken, (2015) p. 247 argues that "one cannot assume that the simple act of being a women will transcend the economic, cultural, linguistic and possibly religious, racial or other ethnic differences that influence attitudes."

## CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on how the strong gendered and gendering nature of the military impacts on the construction of professional identities. Duncanson and Woodward (2016) writing in response to the increasing numbers of women participating in Western militaries, stress how some writers such as Stiehm (1989, p. 5) see huge advantages to this – "women can change the military, making it more democratic, less hierarchical, more compassionate and more suited to the modern world". Writers, such as van Douwen et al. (2022) argue that the strength and influence of a masculine military identity is beginning to decline. This could be ascribed to changing societal values, and pressures from both within and outside the organisation to strive for greater equality. However, this does not apply across all cultures, and where it does: "resistance to change is still enacted through a variety of subtle, discursive, and sometimes contradictory processes that are difficult to identify and disrupt" (Williams et al., 2024, p. 216).

Organisational structures and cultures that marginalise feminine discourses and alternative masculinities has been offered as one explanation for the failure of militaries to attract and retain a workforce that reflects the wider societal demographic (Pendlebury, 2020). These discursive processes require that women continuously work on their professional identity, incorporating an image of the ideal masculine soldier with a concomitant

[4] https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender

impact on their professional commitment and career development. Attention needs to be paid to the ways in which military women and men construct, experience and perform identity both at the individual level and in social interactions across the organisation. Research that focuses on how identity is enacted in the peacekeeping space, exploring the potential for alternative constructions is needed. Forthcoming publications by this author will explore the experience of women in the Irish Defence Forces on peacekeeping deployments.

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