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**The ‘Genderman’: (Re)Negotiating Militarised Masculinities When ‘Doing Gender’ at NATO**

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## **Abstract**

As a result of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) engagement with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda military personnel have been tasked with engaging with and implementing NATO's interpretation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, to do 'gender work' within the alliance. There are only a small - though increasing - number of men working full time on gender issues within the military structures of the Alliance. This article analyses the experiences of two military men actively and consciously 'doing' this gender work. Using Duncanson's (2015) notion of a (re)negotiation of gender relationships based upon empathy, similarity, interdependence, respect and equality, the accounts of these men are analysed, exploring ways in which a more 'gender conscious' militarised masculinity may develop. It is argued that positive, incremental shifts within militarised masculinities should not be dismissed; yet the process is contested, contradictory and incomplete. The article highlights how perceived gender transgressions are policed and controlled via trivialisation and feminisation and how conceptualisations of masculinist protection (Young 2003) and credibility, can reinforce pre-existing gender relations, rather than challenge or change them.

**Keywords:** Gender, Militarised Masculinities, Masculinist Protection, NATO, Women, Peace and Security

## Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) engagement with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (UN 2000) is a relatively recent occurrence; beginning in earnest in 2007 with a joint policy on implementing UNSCR 1325 with the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), a multilateral forum for dialogue and consultation on political and security-related issues among the twenty-eight NATO allies and partner countries (EAPC 2007). In 2009, NATO formally adopted Bi-Strategic Command Directive 40-1 (Bi-SCD 40-1) which set out NATO's desire to 'integrate UNSCR 1325 and a gender perspective into the NATO command structure' (NATO 2009). Despite being a relative latecomer to the Women, Peace and Security agenda – UNSCR 1325 was adopted in 2000 - NATO has, over recent years, engaged in a sustained and increasingly complex engagement with gender issues (See Wright 2016). National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement UNSCR 1325 have been developed – to varying degrees of consistency and success – within member states; NATO Allied Command Operations (ACO) and Allied Command Transformations (ACT) have produced doctrine, directives and reports as well as training and education material respectively (see Schjølset 2013, 575; NATO 2015). In addition, the Committee for Women in NATO Forces (CWINF), established in 1976, was renamed the NATO Committee for Gender Perspectives (NCGP), Gender Advisors and Gender Field Advisors have been recruited across the alliance and in 2012 the Secretary General appointed a Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security (NATO 2012a).

As a result of NATO's engagement with the Women, Peace and Security agenda numerous individuals have been tasked with engaging with and implementing NATO's interpretation of the agenda; to do 'gender work' within the alliance. There are only a small - though increasing - number of men working full time on gender issues within the military structures of the Alliance. This article analyses the ways in which NATO's engagement with the Women, Peace and Security agenda influences perceptions and constructions of military masculinities within NATO through focusing on the experiences of two military men actively and consciously 'doing' this gender work, tracing out how a more 'gender conscious' militarised masculinity may develop.

The various constructions of masculinities within militaries and their relation to power, violence and warfare has garnered much critical attention in feminist research (Enloe 1983, 2000, 2007; Connell in Kimmel & Messner 1989; Morgan 1994; Parpart and Zalewski 2008; Higate 2003a, 2007; Whitworth 2004; Duncanson 2009, 2013; Kirkby & Henry 2012). Raewyn Connell's (1995, 2005a) conceptualisation of a hierarchical gender order in which multiple masculinities (and an emphasised femininity) are ordered in relation to a hegemonic masculinity has been used extensively in studies and theorisations of the construction of militarised masculinity. As Parpart and Partridge (2014) note: 'Militarised masculinity has been theorised as a specific form of masculinity that is described as hegemonic because it is focused on creating a widely accepted dominance over other people, especially women, children and subordinate males, within a patriarchal gender order and is associated with activities that are seen as largely male such as combat and rape' (2014, 550 – citing Basham 2013; Belkin 2012; Higate 2007). Many have theorised that the construction of hegemonic militarised masculinity results from the painstaking efforts expended by militaries to construct uniformity through social practice (Kovitz 2003), a process that seeks to expel non-conforming men and to exorcise the 'feminine other' (Whitworth 2008, 121) from those that

remain. Beginning in basic training, this process seeks to create what Cynthia Enloe (2000) deemed a particular 'ideology of manliness' or a 'warrior ideal' that privileges amongst other things, heterosexuality, toughness, aggression, action, competitiveness, 'and an ability to dehumanise the enemy and defeat them in combat' (Duncanson 2015, 234). However, hegemonic masculinity is not simply a matter of the numerical superiority of a particular 'type' of man (Connell 2005a; Demetriou 2001); it acts as a cultural ideal rather than an accurate representation of all soldiers; yet it is dominant in that all negotiate their masculinity in relation to it (Duncanson 2015, 234). Feminist research has also identified multiple forms and practices of military masculinities (for example, Higate 2003b; Higate and Henry 2004; Duncanson 2009, 2013; Conway 2012; Parpart and Partridge 2014). As Claire Duncanson notes in the case of armies, the concept of hegemonic masculinity 'has helped us theorise the way in which there are multiple and contradictory masculinities – officers and squaddies, combat soldiers and administrative clerks, experienced war-weary generals and gung-ho new recruits' (2015, 234). In short, the constructions of military masculinities within the armed forces are nuanced, multiple and are negotiated.

This article draws on data collected from two interviews conducted with serving NATO military men, Ben and Mike,<sup>1</sup> to identify how military masculinities are (re)negotiated within NATO as it engages with the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Both names have been changed and I provide only limited biographical and occupational information for both interviewees in order to provide anonymity<sup>2</sup>. Work on UNSCR 1325 and gender issues more broadly within NATO is predominantly, though not exclusively, done by women. The executive committee of the NCGP is made up of female officers, indeed it is the only committee within NATO to be chaired by a woman. Many of the gender advisors and gender focal points are women, though again, not exclusively so. In this respect Ben and Mike occupy distinct positions within NATO; they are men, working in predominantly female occupied job roles, in an organisation that is still dominated by men (NATO 2012b). This article analyses some of the personal and professional views and experiences of Ben and Mike. These men are not considered to be representatives of the wider views of men within NATO, indeed it was not the intention of the research to produce such generalisable data; these are their individual perspectives on what is complex, and at the time the interviews were conducted, relatively novel work within the alliance. However, there were striking similarities, as well as marked differences, across the interview data from Ben and Mike as well as the women interviewed (Hurley 2014). Ben and Mike's experiences and views – contextualised in some instances by accounts from the military women interviewed - offer unique insights into the gendered power dimensions of conducting this 'gender work' at NATO. In this sense, the findings from this article are viewed as a starting point for wider research on the impact of the Women, Peace and Security agenda upon understandings and constructions of military masculinities at NATO and within armed forces more generally.

Specifically, the aims of this article are two-fold: Firstly, Duncanson's (2015) argument for a less pessimistic account of contemporary military masculinities and her theorisation for change in hegemonic masculinity are utilised to argue that actively engaging with 'gender work' can offer opportunities for a (re)negotiation of military masculinities based around respect, empathy, interdependence, similarity and equality (Duncanson 2015, 233). Secondly, the article highlights how this process is complicated, contradictory and incomplete; highlighting how perceived gender transgressions are policed and controlled via trivialisation and feminisation and how conceptualisations of masculinist protection (Young 2003) and credibility, can reinforce pre-existing gender relations, rather than challenge them.

The article is set out as follows: I begin with a discussion of militarised masculinities and Connell's (1995, 2005a) concept of hegemonic masculinity. This is followed by outlining Duncanson's (2015) argument for a less pessimistic account of change in militarised masculinities and how hegemonic masculinity may be undone through two particular stages. Here Duncanson's focus on encouraging men (indeed all subjects) to (re)negotiate their identities in relation to others away from opposition and dominance towards a recognition of similarity, respect, interdependence, empathy and equality (2015, 233). Following from this discussion of the literature, the accounts of Ben and Mike are detailed. Firstly in relation to expressions of respect, empathy and interdependence and secondly, the contestations and contradictions contained within some of their accounts. Here a particular focus is placed upon a feminisation (via trivialisation) and the use of narratives of masculinist protection (Young 2003) and credibility to both 'shore-up' individual positions and produce a palatable rationale for men doing 'gender work' more generally. The article concludes by arguing that small changes within militarised masculinities, in adopting a more gender conscious approach, at NATO should not be dismissed simply as the 'flexibility of the machinery of rule' (Duncanson 2015, 232) but that they – and the contradictions and confusions they produce - may offer an indication for how more progressive and sustained change may be achieved.

### **Making and (Re)making Militarised Masculinities**

Military masculinities have been theorised extensively within feminist research (for example, Enloe 2007, 2000; Cohn 2000; Goldstein 2003; Parpart and Partridge 2014; Duncanson 2009, 2013, 2015; Kronsell 2005, 2006, 2012; Via 2010; Conway 2012; Higate 2003a, 2007; Higate and Henry 2004; Whitworth 2004, 2005). As Parpart and Partridge (2014, 555) note: 'the military has long been seen as a quintessential site for the production of masculinities and a source of many of the practices and assumptions associated with hegemonic masculinities'. Sylvester (2013) attributes this continued emphasis on the relationship between masculinity and warfare to 'part of a lingering sense that men are either hardwired for war or, as is more likely the case socialised to it' declaring that 'feminist analysts have shown considerable interest in understanding celebrations of warrior men and masculinity' (2013, 39). This work identified a particular construction of masculinity, conceptualised as a 'warrior-ideal' or 'warrior-ethic' (Cohn & Enloe 2003); one based around notions of violence, aggression, heterosexuality and individual conformity to military discipline (Whitworth 2004, 16). Indeed Whitworth (2005, 125) argued that these constructions of idealised military masculinity create conformity and uniformity within the organisation writ large and simplifying complex, fluid and uncertain understandings of 'male identity' within recruits. In doing so - she argues - the military replaces these uncertain understandings with a 'hegemonic representation of idealized norms of masculinity which privilege the tough, stoic emotionless warrior, capable and willing to employ violence' (Ibid).

Central in many accounts of military masculinity is Raewyn Connell's (1995; 2005a) concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell conceives of a hierarchical gender order in which multiple subordinated masculinities and an emphasised femininity are ordered in relation to a hegemonic masculinity. For Connell, hegemonic masculinity is a dominant 'pattern of practice' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) which serves as an ideal – much like in Whitworth's account - rather than a reflecting the practices of most men. Yet, this 'combat-orientated masculinity' is powerful and has material – often destructive effects - in that all soldiers negotiate their masculinity in relation to it (Duncanson 2015, 234-5; Parpart and Partridge 2014, 550). Connell herself recognises that the military has a central role in the production of forms of hegemonic masculinities (1995, 213). As Parpart and Partridge (2014,

554) argue, 'huge quantities of money, resources and time are spent on developing military structures that require very specific constructions of gender roles – masculinities and femininities – in order to function. These gender hierarchies legitimate the very creation of hegemonic masculinity and the consequent gendered access to or exclusion from positions of power, wealth and privilege'. Hinojosa (2010) identifies that hegemonic masculinity in the military manifests in both 'external' and 'internal' ways. External in the sense that: 'masculine power is embedded in the structure of the institution' (2010, 180). Examples of this can include the banning of women from particular combat roles and the military rank system – which 'ensures that some men maintain dominance over other men and women' (180-181). Hinojosa conceives of an 'internal hegemony' as 'the hierarchical structuring of masculinities such that some constructs [of masculinity] are dominant and privileged over other masculinities and femininities' (181). Hegemonic masculinities within a military context are therefore both structural and a configuration of everyday gendered social practice (Connell 2005a) whereby individuals construct gender identities in relation and opposition to other men and women (Hinojosa 2010, 181).

With its increased use the concept of hegemonic masculinity drew critique: that it can imply rigidity or representation of masculinity as a simplistic negative type or a toxic assemblage of traits; that it oversimplifies complex relationships between men – within the categories of hegemonic, subordinate, marginalised – and that it significantly neglected the role of women and femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, 840; Schippers 2007). Connell & Messerschmidt, in revising the concept in 2005, addressed some of these critiques and re-emphasised the importance placed on social context (2005, 832-833) asserting that just as 'masculinity and femininity is not a fixed entity in the body or personality traits of individuals – masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and therefore can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting' (836). In critiquing Connell's formulation of hegemonic masculinity, Schippers (2007, 55) work looks to centralise and reclaim the feminine other in theorisations of the gender order. Importantly, Schippers also centralises heterosexuality as a key factor in binding masculinity and femininity into a binary of submission and domination. Feminist research – within the field of critical masculinity studies, as well as feminist International Relations and Security Studies – therefore began to pay attention to multiple forms and practices of military masculinities (Higate 2003a; Higate and Henry 2004; Duncanson 2009, 2013; Conway 2012; Parpart and Partridge 2014). There has been a significant move away from viewing the armed forces as typified by one, static type of military masculinity outlined above – some such as Paul Higate (2007) have argued that a continued focus on dominant forms of masculinity ignores others forms of masculinity experienced by soldiers (Parpart and Partridge 2014, 551). Writing in 2003, Maria Kovitz (2003, 2) argued that 'military men are treated as an internally undifferentiated group rather than as a socially constructed category incorporating disparate individuals exhibiting a spectrum of physical, psychosocial characteristics, interests and inclinations'. Plural and nuanced forms of militarised masculinities have subsequently been explored (Duncanson 2009, 2013; Niva 1998; Khalili 2011) and military masculinities have been seen to be patterned on a civilian/military divide, through the variation of occupational roles and across the various branches of the armed forces (See also Barrett 1996; Higate 2003b). Research such as that by Belkin (2012) and Cockburn (2010) offer nuanced and intersectional understandings of the constructions of militarism, military masculinities and femininities. For example, Belkin argues that rather than a simple expulsion of the feminine and/or homosexual other, military masculinity is structured by contradiction, engaging with both femininity and queerness, not just rejecting or exorcizing them (in Bulmer 2013, 135). Parpart and Partridge (2014, 551) explore the multiple masculinities

emerging from military institutions and experiences to offer ‘a more complicated and complicating discussion of specific experiences of idealised masculinities within the militaries...as well as the possibility that multiple understandings of masculinities as well as femininities and other constructions of gender may enable more equitable gender practices within the military both during conflicts and in times of ‘peace’”.

Military masculinities are therefore multiple, complex and contested, and importantly when considering the accounts of Ben and Mike below, can change. Indeed as Parpart and Partridge (2014, 561) acknowledge:

‘Contrary to the belief that militarised masculinities are fixed as well as socially resilient, they are unstable and often adapted to a variety of circumstances’ and that: ‘even though militarised masculinities may occupy ‘hegemonic space’ (Connell 2005a) within the broader field of gender relations they also have many different forms – some dominant and some subordinate – and may allow for alternative, non-hegemonic forms of masculinity within military structures (Higate and Henry 2004)’ (Parpart and Partridge 2014, 550).

This final point is important when considering the development of a type of ‘gender conscious’ masculinity in the accounts that follow; the following section discusses the concept of positive change within hegemonic masculinity and how that might be conceived of and achieved.

### **Theorising Change in Hegemonic (Militarised) Masculinity**

Claire Duncanson (2015, 232) has argued that accounts of changes in military masculinities are viewed by many feminists as merely the ‘flexibility of the machinery of rule’. That military masculinities such as Niva’s (1998) notion of a ‘tough but tender’ military masculinity evidenced in the First Gulf War, or Khalili’s (2011) conceptualisation of the ‘humanitarian soldier-scholars’ of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, are merely hybridisations and redefinitions of what is deemed ‘legitimate masculinity’ by those already in positions of power; often involving delegitimising and ‘othering’ non-western civilian men and women, rather than offering fundamental change (Duncanson 2015, 236-239; see also Razack, 2004 and Whitworth, 2004). Duncanson also draws attention to changes in gender relations within the armed forces, particularly with the inclusion of women in combat roles and referring to Bulmer’s (2013) work, the changing attitudes towards sexuality, with the repeal of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ in the United States and the ending of compulsory discharge for openly homosexual personnel in the UK military (Duncanson 2015, 238). She notes that: ‘One could conclude that heterosexuality is no longer so obviously the quintessential practice of hegemonic masculinity, and homosexuality the subordinated, as was once the case’ (239). However, this does not necessarily represent an uncomplicated acceptance of LGBT personnel or that diversification within the armed forces is straightforward. Bulmer (2013) highlights how acceptance for some LGBT personnel often comes at the expense and exclusion of ‘non-homonormative’ others; whereby ‘old hierarchies are replaced by new ones’ (Duncanson 2015, 239).

Whilst accepting these critiques, Duncanson identifies a risk in simply viewing changes in hegemonic masculinity as simply a reconfiguration of traits ‘most strategically useful for the getting and keeping of power’ (Hooper 2001, 61). The risk, Duncanson argues, ‘is that we come to our analysis of gender relations with a framework within which progressive change



cannot be conceptualised', that 'any shift in gender relations is inevitably hegemony at work and there is little point in asking whether such shifts might be signs of progressive change, and, more importantly how they could be furthered' (2015, 240). Indeed, Duncanson argues that Connell's and Messerschmitt's (2005: 853) conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity does not share this pessimism, arguing that hegemonic masculinity can be dismantled and that gender relations can be made more equal (Ibid). The question for Duncanson is *how* this might come about.

Connell and Messerschmitt (2005) propose a two stage process: 'a "transitional stage" in which a version of masculinity is established which is open to equality with women as hegemonic among men, then, secondly eradicating relations of hierarchy, presumably through allowing the hegemonic masculinity to construct those relations of equality' (Duncanson 2015, 241). Duncanson finds this problematic, arguing that as hegemonic masculinity achieves its hegemonic status through the feminisation of other groups of men, it is hard to see how a masculinity open to equality with women could ever be hegemonic (Ibid). Instead, Duncanson proposes that 'the 'transitional stage' is more likely to be one where hegemonic masculinity shifts to adopt traits, practices and values which are conventionally associated with femininity' (Ibid). Duncanson recognises that this may seem like the hybridisations (tough-tender, soldier-scholar) identified above, however she argues against confusing the problems in these case-studies with a problem with the concept itself (Ibid). Using the example of changing masculinities in the British Army, she argues that:

'For the unravelling of hegemonic masculinity, men must be encouraged not so much to *change their ways* as to *change the way in which they negotiate their identities in relation to others*. Rather than forge their identities through relations of opposition or domination, men and subjects in general need to construct their identities through recognition of similarity, respect, interdependence, empathy and equality with others' (Duncanson 2015, 233) – emphasis in original.

Here then, I want to take Duncanson's conceptualisation of a (re)negotiation as a way in which to analyse the accounts of Ben and Mike to explore whether their views and experiences may represent a particular (re)negotiation of a more 'gender conscious' militarised masculinity. In the following sections I consider how Ben and Mike articulated issues of similarity, respect, interdependence, empathy and equality with others when discussing and making sense of their work, as well as the challenges and contradictions contained within these accounts.

## **Respect**

Incredibly enthusiastic and convinced of the value of his work, Ben described his initial interest in gender issues at NATO as somewhat accidental; being asked to prepare a presentation on NATO's implementation of UNSCR 1325 on relative short notice. Knowing little about the topic, Ben immersed himself in all the available material he could and in his words became a 'believer'. Much like Ben, Mike's described 'falling into' his role. Mike began by reviewing English language documents on gender issues that his colleague had developed as a favour. Reading the documents, Mike described 'getting into the subject' and being fascinated by what his colleague was trying to accomplish. Ben and Mike both articulated a strong sense of respect for their female colleagues (who form the majority of personnel working on gender issues), emphasising the difficult and challenging nature of their work. Mike noted that he saw his (female) colleague – whom he described as a 'very

fine officer' - taking on what he saw as 'monumental challenge' and wanted to help. In describing his interest in wider gender issues, Ben also noted that relations between men and women should be a 'matter of respect', that 'we are different, but we have the same rights, equal rights'.

Throughout his interview, Ben repeatedly drew upon the notion of 'putting on gender glasses' through which to view the world, and more specifically NATO operations. This is a common refrain in gender mainstreaming initiatives and gender training and education initiatives. The point being that by viewing the world or a specific situation through 'gender sensitive' lenses the differing security concerns of men and women are revealed, allowing for gender differences (and similarities) to be actively considered. For Ben, these gender glasses increased respect for others:

'In the armed forces as well as in civil society, it is not just a matter of having the same salaries, having the same access to work; it is having the same mentality. Once you get this mentality, especially in men, seeing life with your gender glasses, I think the lives of many people will change...you apply the gender glasses to everything and your level of respect for the other gender is much better'.

In this account, it is specifically men that Ben draws attention too – a point returned to below – yet there is an acknowledgement of the relational nature of gender here. For Ben, a gender-conscious approach to 'everything' has a positive overall effect of increasing respect for others.

### **Empathy and Similarity**

When discussing his somewhat novel position, Ben articulated a sense of empathy with his female colleagues. He was acutely aware that he was working in a field dominated by women:

'We try to find believers [in gender] and you find believers everywhere, they don't need to be women, most of them are women. I can tell you, unfortunately, because I feel really alone in this world. I feel the same as when women joined the armed forces and they were just one or two and it is really hard, I can tell you, it is really hard. You have to behave because they are watching you...they are watching you, they are paying attention to what you do because you are, let's say an alien in their world'.

In finding himself in a minority position vis-à-vis women, he expresses a form of empathy with women in the military, acknowledging the difficulties in occupying such a position. Also, in acknowledging that the women who dominate work on gender issues are aware of him and are watching how he works and operates, he highlights something of a mutual wariness based upon his strong feelings of being out of place and highly visible. He conceives of himself as an alien in their world – one where it is implied he comes under scrutiny because of his difference. In this account, Ben is both similar to and distinctly different from women working on gender issues (a point returned to below). Mike did not articulate feeling as out of place as Ben did. He did however note a feeling of apprehension when doing his first presentation, mainly about being a man talking about gender, noting that he was in the minority and worrying that his audience might think: 'how is a guy going to talk about that?'

In discussing the need for introducing gender issues into basic training across all NATO militaries, Ben highlighted the importance of moving beyond simply teaching an understanding of basic gender concepts to soldiers, towards fostering empathy for those within conflict zones:

‘You have to introduce this issue, but in a serious way. You have to explain to them basic gender concepts, very basic gender concepts, but you have to go deeper. It is not just: ‘what is gender mainstreaming?’, ‘what are gender perspectives?’ It is more. It applies to people suffering the effects of wars and operations. You have to listen to them, understand how they feel, how the operations affect them and in which ways; ask how you can help them’.

In reflecting on his work, Ben therefore articulated empathy with both his female colleagues and the need for gender perspectives within NATO to be based on empathy with civilians in conflict zones, of the need for listening and understanding<sup>3</sup>. For Ben, it was not just enough to ‘pass a course’; soldiers need to see life through ‘gender glasses’ to ‘see life in a different way’. So within both Ben and Mike’s accounts a feeling of discomfort is expressed in suddenly being both ‘visible’ and aware of gender in ways that they weren’t before. This discomfort can be productive if, like in Ben’s experience, it promotes empathy and understanding of others in similar positions.

### **Interdependence**

There was also evidence of the importance of interdependence within Mike and Ben’s accounts, though in slightly different ways. For Mike, the concept of team work was extremely important. He viewed developing an effective ‘gender team’ – containing himself and his female colleague – as one of the most important aspects of his job. The effectiveness of the team was based, for Mike on the skills and perspectives each could bring:

‘I’ve got a longer history in the military, I’ve been in the army almost as long as she has been alive, and I’ve got operations and training background so, there was a lot I could offer. Not just because I am a man, certainly a women who had been in the military as long as I have been and had the same roles as I have, would have been able to offer that’.

What is interesting in this account is it is the skills that Mike has developed within his previous military experience, rather than his position/difference as a man, that he deems important; though this point is complicated by other accounts detailed below.

In discussing training and development courses he attended, Ben recalled: ‘We have fifty percent women, fifty percent men; fifty percent military, fifty percent civilian; so the mixture is between men and women, military and civilians working together. It is chaos at the beginning but you learn a lot, both sides learn a lot. Working together with women you learn a lot’. Both men expressed a desire for an integrated, and interdependent, approach to promoting gender and the Women, Peace and Security agenda within NATO. Furthering his discussion of feeling ‘alone’ and an ‘alien’ outlined above, Ben went on to rationalise his inclusion, saying the success of gender work was dependent on the inclusion of both men and women: ‘women alone, they will never succeed, they need more men to get involved and spread the message’. He concluded that: ‘we need them, and they need us’.

Yet, what is also in evidence is the constant refrain throughout the interviews to the differences between men and women – them and us. In this sense then, Mike’s focus on acquired skills regardless of gender is something of an outlier. All those interviewed expressed notions of distinctly ‘male’ and ‘female’ ways of ‘viewing’ and ‘doing’ security (Hurley 2014, 128; 2016). Indeed, Mike himself made constant referral to his ‘male perspective’ on things – one that was different, though not necessarily more important, than the ‘female perspective’.

However, there is a fine line between an interdependence built around empathy, respect and an understanding of difference, and a lapse into reductive understandings of complementarity. Repeatedly, civilian and military women are presented within NATO doctrine and promotional material regarding UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda, as having characteristics, skills and competencies that are complementary, holistic and distinct to that of men, ‘softer traits’ that include being more attuned to ‘listening’ and ‘intelligence gathering’, for example:

The experiences and skills of both men and women are essential to the success of NATO operations. Today’s conflicts often require a comprehensive approach in terms of more tactful public relations, better and more extensive situational awareness, information operations, information gathering and intelligence production. Women in NATO-led forces can be an asset and an enabler, especially in activities of engagement with the local population. (NATO 2012a, 11)

Where this becomes problematic is if it is assumed that men cannot or will not embody or practice these ‘feminine competencies’, that they are solely the preserve of women. This reinforces an overly simplistic binary and hierarchy between different desirable skills of war-fighting men and peaceable women. It places limits on both the perceptions of what women (and men) within NATO militaries - and those civilians who find themselves within a NATO theatre of operation - are ‘allowed’ to do. As Dianne Otto (2006, 139) states: ‘If women are admitted on the understanding that their special contribution arises from their womanly instincts, it follows that their political agency will be limited to what is made possible by that representation and restricted to “feminised tasks”’.

Ben and Mike’s micro-level experiences are formed, conditioned and practiced within this wider institutional context. This leads to a contestation between the complexity of gender relations at the individual level - in this case those based around an understanding of mutual interdependence, empathy and a respect of differences - and a reductive and essentialised understanding and representation of these relationships at the institutional level. Here then, analysing Ben and Mike’s experiences in context, demonstrates the importance of accounting for the pressures acting upon (re)negotiations of a more gender conscious masculinity specifically and NATO’s interpretation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda more broadly. It is to these pressures - and the challenges and contradictions they produce - I now turn.

### **Challenges and Contradictions**

The accounts above show how there is, at some level, a (re)negotiation of a more gender conscious militarised masculinity; in part based upon notions of respect, interdependence and empathy with both female colleagues and civilians. Yet Ben and Mike also articulated what they perceived as challenges to gender work in NATO more broadly. In doing so, both

produced rationales for their work that – like the notion of complementarity - throw up some interesting contradictions and complicate this understanding of a more gender conscious masculinity emerging within NATO.

### **Masculinist Protection**

In making sense of and communicating the importance of his work to others, Ben, in particular, framed his job role in narratives of masculinist protection (Young 2003). He began the interview by describing the need to constantly correct ‘misunderstandings’ of what his work entailed:

‘I speak with my friends, and I say I work in gender and they start shouting about the gays and the lesbians and you have to say: “I don’t have anything to do with gays and lesbians, it is gender”. The thing is, what I do mainly is work to protect men and women, boys and girls who suffer the effects of operations, missions and worse; and in that moment people change their perspective and say: “oh my god”; and I say: “you can literally help them”’.

The conflation issues of gender and homosexuality has been identified as a concern of men involved or interested in gender equality initiatives. In their study of gender mainstreaming within EU member states Ruxton and Van der Gaag (2013, 169) identify that there was ‘absolute terror in individual men coming across as gay, as female and so on’. Here then, there is a fear of feminisation and subordination through association with homosexuality. Ben began the interview by talking about his family, particularly about his wife and children, something Mike also did, thereby affirming their heterosexuality and mitigating any misperceptions of their own sexuality. In his response, Ben positions himself as a protector of vulnerable women, children and of men, a theme which was recurrent throughout Ben’s interview:

‘I tend to think that we work for men and women, boys and girls. You focus on the weakest part, the people that are suffering the most. So maybe men don’t suffer, but then I think that is happening more and more. In that way our objective is much more interesting and your work is much more rewarding let’s say’

Departing from feminist work that views masculinity as self-consciously dominative, Iris Marion Young explores the security state, post-9/11, through a logic of masculinist protection which draws on a more benign, chivalrous form of masculinity (2003, 3-4)<sup>4</sup>. This ‘gallant’ masculinity offers – predominately women and children - protection from an ‘other’ masculinity embodied by ‘bad’ men, who exploit, harm and abuse the vulnerable for the pleasures of domination; this protection forms part of an exchange. The protected woman defers to the protectors judgement, looks up to him with gratitude for his manliness and admiration for his willingness to face the dangers of the world (5). This gratitude in turn reinforces his perception of his own masculinity and worth and ‘in return for male protection, the woman concedes critical distance from decision-making autonomy’ (4).

Here then, Ben builds upon the empathy he expressed in the accounts above. Listening to affected civilians (men, women, boys and girls), understanding how they feel, how the operations affect them in different ways and asking how you can help, for Ben, forms part of this new gender conscious militarised masculinity, it is also one framed by a desire to protect. In similar ways to Young’s (2003) conceptualisation, Ben’s account of masculinist protection

is expressed in benign terms. Interestingly, in Ben's accounts there is no explicit reference to 'other masculinity' or 'bad men'; the protection work on gender issues can offer in Ben's articulation is from the effects of NATO operations and missions on those that are vulnerable. There is no self-consciously dominative sense to the protection Ben is offering in his account, although a hierarchy between vulnerable, non-western civilians and a powerful western military organisation acting a protector is established nonetheless. Yet, according to Young: 'the role of the masculine protector puts those protected, paradigmatically women and children, in a subordinate position of *dependence*' (2003, 2 - emphasis added). In this conceptualisation, civilian women, men and children in areas of conflict – whilst better protected - are still dependent on a (gender conscious) NATO.

### **The Genderman: Trivialisation and Feminisation**

In discussing the challenges that he faced in his job role, Ben described how working on gender issues had been met with some resistance from some male colleagues:

'...but other people are not convinced, even my colleagues make a lot of jokes about me: "you are 'genderman', have you shaved your legs"? These are jokes, but sometimes, inside their brains, there is some kind of truth. They don't believe in this. Now seeing a man [doing this work], I think they will open their eyes a little bit more'

In this account Ben's colleagues seek to feminise him individually and by extension identify his work as feminine. They use humour to both link gender work at NATO with (a culturally specific) feminine practice – the shaving of legs – reinforcing an implicit and persistent conflation of gender with 'women's issues', whilst simultaneously feminising Ben's masculinity. Women shave their legs, men do not; therefore gender is a woman's concern, not a man's. In this example, through working on gender issues, by addressing and highlighting the merits of the Women, Peace and Security agenda to other men within the organisation, the construction of masculinity Ben is seen to embody is questioned. He is seen in the eyes of some of his colleagues to be deviating from an appropriately masculine job role within NATO's gender order.

In one sense then, this trivialisation/feminisation via humour that Ben experiences is an example of what Duncanson finds problematic with Connell's (re)formulation of a positive hegemonic masculinity beginning with a version of masculinity that is open to equality with women as hegemonic among men (followed by an eradication of relations of hierarchy) (2015, 241). As Duncanson notes, one of the ways in which hegemonic masculinity achieves its hegemonic status is through the feminisation of other groups of men and that feminisation is such an effective strategy in terms of positioning and policing subordinate groups of men (Ibid). Jeff Hearn has argued that 'trivialisation through humour' is one of myriad social and psychological resources that military organisations provide for the reproduction and changing of individual psychologies (in Higate 2003a, xiii). This threat of feminisation begins at basic training where it is used to 'downgrade and police groups of men...with the archetypal use of "woman", "girl", "queer", "faggot" to put down those who are failing to complete the various physical challenges associated with manliness' (Duncanson 2015, 235 citing Segal 1997; McManners 1993; Woodward 1998; Higate 2003a; Hockey 2003). For those who made the comments, Ben has deviated from their view of appropriately masculine work. Lazar (2005, 2007) suggests that these sort of 'gender crossings' – the transgression of expected gender norms, in this case a military man working on gender issues - emphasises the underlying

dualism of the gender structure. Deviations from these gender-appropriate norms are often policed through criticism and containment (Lazar 2005, 8-9).

And yet, within this account Ben sees himself as challenging these views and in that sense does not see himself as ‘contained’, neither I would suggest, did he view himself as particularly feminised; he views his position as an opportunity. Despite these challenges, he aims to *use* his uniqueness (as a man doing gender work at NATO) to challenge these views. Whilst he did not experience overt personal hostility in the same way as Ben, Mike also described the resistance he encountered. Recalling briefings to senior commanders, he noted a minority: ‘just don’t see the practical use. They just can’t get beyond the idea that women, approaching them, understanding them and that addressing their security needs matters at all’. But, like Ben, noted how he sought to challenge these views, particularly as a man speaking to other men: ‘I know some men here will tell me, and they wouldn’t tell her (his female colleague), that they don’t quite buy the concept. So, I can have conversations with them as far as that goes and both they and I gain a better insight into the concept’. So, both Ben and Mike are using their distinct positions, (re)negotiating their identities in the context within which they find themselves, to change the minds and perspectives of these resistant colleagues. Yet, what is highlighted here is the importance of men speaking to, listening to and being influenced by other men (rather than their female colleagues). This is a point that was reiterated throughout the interviews, most specifically in discussions regarding credibility.

### **Male Credibility, ‘Operations’ and Problems with ‘Equality’**

The desire for more men to become involved in gender work was a recurring theme in the interviews I conducted. The benefits of involving men on gender equality issues have been acknowledged in a broad range of policy areas (Hearn 2001; Connell 2003; 2005b; Kaufmann 2003). Yet, the inclusion of men, whilst seen as a ‘good thing to do’, was justified primarily as a way to counter the resistance that the women experienced when speaking about gender issues to male colleagues. The presence of men talking about and doing gender work offered what was described as *credibility*. Grace, one of the research participants noted: ‘what I’m looking for is a male champion to talk about this, because I’m not going to get anywhere’. For Anna having a man on the team offered the dual benefits of providing a ‘male perspective’ and also lending credibility to the process:

‘Yeah, and concerning the male perspective I think it is very, very important to really establish a gender advisor office with a woman as well as a man. Because having a man in the team really adds to credibility and most of the people in the military are men and having a man working on that what is often perceived as simply women’s issues gives a great deal of credibility’.

In these accounts, the ‘transgression’ of men doing gender work, rather than being actively policed or controlled by feminisation, is being actively encouraged. The rationale expressed for this credibility was that men could link gender work to ‘operations’ in a way that was accessible and interesting to other men within NATO. There was a desire, expressed by those interviewed, to distance their work from concepts of gender equality and women’s rights explicitly – what one female participant, Nora, described as ‘female stuff’, as this was seen as inherently uninteresting to both men and women within NATO - and to align it with pre-existing alliance goals, where a gender perspective could increase operational effectiveness (Hurley 2014; forthcoming). Those interviewed described what they saw as a constant

‘misunderstanding’ or conflation of ‘gender’ with ‘women’ or simply ‘equal rights’. For example, for Nora it wasn’t simply that the *concept* of gender was conflated with women, it was that women ‘doing gender’ within NATO were associated with and signified particular ‘things’ – particularly women’s rights and equal opportunities. One of Nora’s roles was to promote awareness about gender and UNSCR 1325 within the organisation. Here she describes having to develop a strategy to counter the conflation:

‘Here [at NATO] we are also about gender awareness, why is it important for operations and not only female stuff, because female stuff they are not interested in. They [the military commanders] are interested in operational issues, so you make the link ... I think it is important that we deliver something that is of interest to them...how to implement it [gender] in the operational planning process that is something that is sexy for them, the operational thing’

Therefore, in one sense, Mike, and Ben are not being asked to talk explicitly about the ‘female stuff’ of women’s rights and equality. In one respect, they can be used to represent ‘male stuff’ and can symbolically link gender work to the more unproblematic area of ‘operations’. Mike exemplified this distinction when asked what the challenges in his job role were, he replied:

‘I think that the biggest challenge was just initially developing the message. I think it’s good here that we are really the only people that are in charge of this concept, because it can be overtaken by somebody who is interested in equal opportunity and women’s rights and these types of things, as a venue for pushing that agenda, and that is the biggest danger’.

It is worth stressing that Mike is not suggesting that gender equality is unimportant, but he went to great lengths to stress what his work ‘did not do’ and that the gender work him and his colleague were developing should be seen as an ‘operational tool’. Again, like in Ben’s conceptualisation of the protection a more gender-conscious NATO can offer, this does not necessarily make women ‘unsafe’ and is not the ‘dominative masculinity’ identified by Young (2003); but by searching for male champions, by valorising male credibility, the position of women doing gender work at NATO is somewhat undermined. To return to Young’s logic, an exchange takes place; in return for the support and credibility of the ‘male perspective’ and the male body through which to communicate gender work, women concede a key role and begin to distance themselves in certain ways (2003, 4); narratives of ‘operations’ and ‘operational effectiveness’ come to define the work rather than the more ‘problematic’ notions of rights and equality.

In some ways then, in doing gender work, in developing a more gender conscious masculinity, Ben and Mike embody a form of disruption and in their accounts above, they become note a discomfort in becoming visible and being out of place. For Mike, aligning his understanding of gender work specifically with operations rather than equal rights, he mitigates this discomfort. Michelle Lazar identifies ‘as individuals, people may deviate from the archetypes of masculinity and femininity pertinent to a community (the organisation that they work in for example) this nonetheless occurs against the ideological structure of gender that privileges men as a social group’ (2005, 7). As men they can draw down on what Connell identified as the ‘patriarchal dividend’ that gives them access to symbolic social and political capital (Connell 1995, 79-80; Lazar 2005, 7) present in the hegemonic space they



find themselves within, to disseminate information in a way that is deemed credible and legitimate to their intended audience in a way that is more problematic for women.

### **Conclusion: A More Gender Conscious Militarised Masculinity?**

Increasingly, 'global' gender policies such as UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda are being actively integrated into international security organisations, such as NATO and national militaries. The work of integrating and promoting these, of 'doing gender', falls inevitably to particular individuals within these organisations. This article has shown how, though actively engaging in gender work, military masculinities – at the individual level – are being (re)negotiated in particular ways; that identities can be constructed not through relations of opposition and dominance but through mutual respect, empathy and interdependence. Yet, these are small changes, expressed in a complicated and contradictory way by two individuals in a large multinational security alliance. They do not represent a wider transformative shift in gender relations at NATO; this, more gender conscious masculinity, is embryonic, not hegemonic. Yet neither should these shifts be dismissed as insignificant. As Parpart and Partridge note, 'many people practice masculinities within the military in a way that does not match the ideal of a dominant, militarised, hyper-masculinity that occupies hegemonic space. These non-hegemonic masculinities do not need to be seen as subordinate or unsuccessful' (2014, 568).

Duncanson suggests two ways in which to challenge the way hegemonic masculinity is constructed: firstly, by exposing and making explicit the contradictions inherent in hegemonic masculinities that have adopted 'softer traits' in order to retain power (2015, 243). Whilst, I have suggested that a more gender conscious masculinity is not hegemonic at NATO, with the active and enthusiastic ways in which the alliance is adopting the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and emphasising the adoption of a more 'holistic' approach to operations, including a gender perspective, there is evidence of NATO embracing these 'softer traits'. The accounts above expose some of the contradictions that emerge from doing gender work at NATO, including the difficulty in speaking about and articulating 'women's rights' and 'equality' specifically. The ways in which gender work is linked to operations, as a device to increase operational effectiveness and force multiplication is problematic. Likewise, the use of narratives of masculinist protection, as a way of rationalising and making sense of gender work, can be equally as problematic if they create dependence and subordination that stymies empowerment and reinforces a hierarchical relationship between protector and those protected (Young 2003; Messerschmitt 2015, 172). What is needed then is a constant vigilance in the ways these contradictions and contestations manifest, 'for feminists to push at those contradictions, make them explicit, in the hope of forcing consideration of the underlying problems' (Duncanson 2015, 243).

The second stage for Duncanson, is to encourage relational thinking, for men to change their *relationships*, not simply their ways; shifting from constructing their identities in terms of radical othering to forging identities through relations of equality, respect and empathy (2015, 243). The accounts of Ben and Mike offered some evidence of these (re)negotiations. As individuals begin to engage with gender work more fully at NATO, tracing and encouraging these (re)negotiations can be productive in fostering more progressive change: building on 'reflexive moments' and empathy prompted by (however fleeting a) discomfort of becoming highly visible and out of place; communicating and reinforcing notions of respect and interdependence, whilst being wary of lapsing into reductive understandings of complementarity and essentialised difference. As Parpart and Partridge (2014, 563) note: 'the

move towards healthier or more equitable gender relations may not come from a 'better' masculinity but from lessons learned from practices of masculinity when it is neither dominant nor hegemonic, within both the military and society as a whole'.

As I noted in the introduction, this article is viewed as a starting point for wider research on the impact of asking military men to 'do gender work' in response to the Women, Peace and Security agenda at NATO. In that sense the accounts of Ben and Mike offer some lessons learned and avenues for further exploration. What is evident is that whilst changes within militarised masculinities are not always superficial, they are always subject to contestation.

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<sup>1</sup> Six interviews (four women, two men) were conducted as part of my doctoral research into NATO's engagement with UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda (Hurley 2014). Participants were recruited using a mixed method of limited snowballing and by direct contact with participants through publically available email addresses. Each semi-structured interview lasted between sixty to ninety minutes and was audio recorded. Three interviews were conducted at NATO HQ which is based in Brussels, Belgium and one at a mutually convenient location with the United Kingdom. Two interviews were conducted via Skype due to the impracticability of visiting the country and region in which two participants were on active deployment.

<sup>2</sup> I understand this has an impact on the analysis generated – particularly in regards to contextually specific and nuanced constructions of hegemonic masculinities – however, offering anonymity allowed participants to speak freely about their experiences. Whilst military elites can be seen as less 'vulnerable' than other marginalised or disadvantaged groups, protecting participants anonymity is still an important consideration when researching elite groups. However, even with these omissions, due to the small number of men working in this area, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Each participant was therefore made aware of this condition and asked to sign a consent form, as well as being informed verbally at the beginning of each interview.

<sup>3</sup> The problematic way in which this listening and understanding is used by NATO to further operational effectiveness and force multiplication falls outside of the scope of this paper. See Hurley (forthcoming) for a discussion of these issues.

<sup>4</sup> Young (2003) identifies how the logic of masculinist protection was used to legitimise and authorise the United States' actions in Afghanistan and Iraq whilst also authorising increased surveillance domestically. Narratives of masculinist protection can be seen to be embedded within the engagement with UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda (Hurley 2014). At the more abstract level, NATO can be seen as a collectivisation of the security state, protecting its citizens from an 'other' and external threat, beyond the (real and imagined) borders of the alliance. The citizen, in this

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reading, as 'protected', defers decision making autonomy to the nation state as protector and by extension the NATO alliance. This gendered logic helps NATO to define and locate itself and to align its engagement with UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda with wider organisational 'values' (Hurley 2014).