

# The female combat soldier

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## Abstract

As a result of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, women have increasingly served on the front line, performing combat roles once reserved exclusively for men. This article explores the ways in which Western military culture may have both impeded and facilitated female accession. In line with the feminist concept of hegemonic masculinity, the article explores how female soldiers are often subjected to an institutionalized cultural code that defines them as ‘sluts’ or ‘bitches’, denying them equality and recognition, irrespective of their behaviour. At the same time, some highly competent women have begun to be accepted and a new cultural classification has been developed for them: they are ‘honorary men’. This new status represents an important development for the armed forces and an opportunity for women. Yet, the category is so narrow that it is very difficult for women to maintain it.

## Keywords

Armed forces, culture, feminism, gender, masculinity, transformation

## Introduction

Since 2001, Western forces have been involved in military campaigns of unexpected duration and intensity in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the most remarkable aspects of these campaigns has been the increased participation of women in official ground combat roles or, in the UK and US armed forces, where women have been officially excluded, alongside combat troops on military operations.<sup>1</sup> In the latter case, although formally defined as attached to combat units rather than assigned to them, women have endured the same risks as their male counterparts and, indeed, they have engaged enemy fighters at close quarters in numerous cases. By any objective standard, these women have served

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in combat with combat units.<sup>2</sup> It is important to recognize the significance of this transformation in organizational and, indeed, historical terms.

The current inclusion of women in the combat arms represents the culmination of a continuous process that can be traced back to the Second World War. Initially, between 1945 and the 1970s, a proportionately small number of females served, restricted to clerical, administrative and nursing roles, often in separate women's corps (Harries-Jenkins, 2006; Holm, 1982; Kümmel, 2002; Stiehm, 1981, 1989; Wechsler Segal, 1995). From the 1970s to the 1990s, women were gradually integrated more fully into the armed forces as the majority of specialisms were opened to them. Nevertheless, before operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, even in a country like Canada, which had formally integrated females in 1989, not only were women *de facto* excluded from ground combat roles, but there was also a widespread consensus in the armed forces that women could not serve in combat. Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have disproved that assumption and Western armed forces have revised their perception of the capability of women and the military contribution they can make.

The accession of women to the combat arms represents a marked organizational transformation. The change is even more profound in historical terms. Although females have often played an important part in insurgent and terrorist organizations, they have rarely served in official state armies. Indeed, successful guerrilla groups have typically expelled women as they assume political power. In his work on gender and the military, Joshua Goldstein demonstrated that in the entire course of human history, formal female accession to organized state combat units has only two precedents: the West African Dahomey kingdom of the 18th and 19th centuries, with its 'Amazon corps', and the Soviet Army between 1941 and 1945, which drafted some 800,000 women as it faced defeat by the Germany army (Goldstein, 2004: 60–72).

This article analyses the emergence of a new gender category that has facilitated the accession of women to combat units in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the recent feminist security studies literature, a number of scholars have become interested in gender codes and have sought to show that these discourses have had manifest political and institutional effects, typically to the detriment of women. Thus, Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry (2007: 81) have sought to show how contemporary representations of female violence have involved three narrative types that 'permeate public discourses'. Women are conceived of as mothers, monsters or whores: 'While the mother narrative explains women's violence through characteristics essential to womanhood, the monster narrative explains their violence as a biological flaw that disrupts their femininity' (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007: 36). In a similar vein, Lauren Wilcox (2009), Swati Parashar (2009, 2010), Sandra McEvoy (2010), Heidi Hudson (2009) and Megan Mackenzie (2009a, 2009b) have all sought to show the way in which violent females have been marginalized and disadvantaged by cultural representations categorizing them as "camp followers", "abductees", "sex slaves", "domestic slaves" or "girls and women associated with the fighting forces" (Mackenzie, 2010: 160). Defining roles, statuses and hierarchies, gender concepts structure and inform female participation in the armed forces. Following this literature, this article examines how gendered cultural categories have informed female integration into the combat arms in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, the article takes a somewhat alternative perspective. The existence of discourses which disadvantage women is fully acknowledged, but there is no reason to

think that gender definitions are always oppressive, even when they are applied to women. Gender norms can also legitimate, emancipate and empower, as concepts of masculinity or alternative definitions of femininity demonstrate (Halberstam, 1998). Cultural reform is possible and new — potentially more liberating — codes periodically emerge to become consolidated as collective reference points. To this end, the article identifies the appearance of a new cultural category — the honorary man — in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially among anglophone Western forces, which has been applied to successful female soldiers by men. Specifically, this article aims to identify the operational and institutional conditions in which this new category has developed, highlighting the critical role of professionalism in this process. In this way, this article aims to expose an often ignored gender category that has structured the accession of female soldiers into Western combat units (Sylvester, 2002; Wibben, 2011).<sup>3</sup>

### **The slut–bitch binary**

There is little doubt that masculinity remains an important reference point for many, if not most, male soldiers today and that they have used dominant gender norms to obstruct female accession (Belkin, 2012; Enloe, 1983, 2000, 2007; Higate, 2012a). These norms often take extreme forms. For instance, Martin van Creveld is reviled by feminists because of his intransigent and reactionary stance on female integration into the armed forces but, empirically, he has usefully illustrated the male abhorrence of serving with women: ‘for them [men] to undergo military training and serve alongside women represents a humiliation’ (Van Creveld, 2000a: 12; see also Van Creveld, 2000b). Indeed, it is possible to identify the emergence of a now well-established, even hegemonic, gender construct in the military that has close connections with the ‘mother, monster, whore’ narrative identified by Sjoberg and Gentry (2007), namely, a ‘slut–bitch’ binary. This construct appears almost ubiquitously in discussions with female service personnel as they describe their experiences.

For instance, Kayla Williams (2006), who served as an interpreter in a US intelligence battalion, insightfully concluded on the basis of her service that ‘sex is key to any woman soldier’s experience in the American military’ (p. 18). However competent a woman might be, her relations with male soldiers are finally determined by her sexuality (Williams, 2006: 22, 72, 199, 207): women were either ‘sluts’ or ‘bitches’. This classification is corroborated very widely by both scholars (see Brownson 2014: 778; Benedict, 2010: 6) and by my informants: ‘You can be three things in the US Army: a slut, a bitch or a dyke’<sup>4</sup> (OF-4a, female, US army, personal interview, 14 November 2013); ‘I realized the army informal culture of bitch–slut categories from day one’<sup>5</sup> (officer, female, Australian army, email communication, 19 November 2013). Similarly, a British soldier described how ‘women got called a lot of degrading names by some, but not by all men, usually from peers’.

Male soldiers have developed a binary classification system for women serving in the military, then: they are either sluts<sup>6</sup> (sexually available) or bitches (sexually unavailable), of which lesbians or ‘dykes’ (self-evidently unavailable) are a subcategory. Female soldiers routinely acknowledge the existence of this collectively recognized cultural schema, around which they are compelled to negotiate their service.<sup>7</sup> Thus, a highly competent

female British officer had formed a close professional bond with her senior non-commissioned officer, only to find that this relationship had been interpreted as a sexual one that had reportedly invoked a notable response from her commanding officer: 'My wife would not behave like that' (OF-4a, British army, personal interview, 13 May 2010). According to this male, the female officer was behaving like a slut. As this case reveals, the slut–bitch binary has become so institutionalized that women are often denied any agency in this process of classification; whatever they do, they will be defined by it (OF-4a, female, British army, personal interview, 13 May 2010; see also Basham, 2008: 156–157). The symbolic coding materially obstructs female participation in the armed forces not because women are instrumentally incapable of performing their roles, but purely and solely because they are women. In this way, it operates in a very similar fashion to Sjöberg and Gentry's monster–mother–whore schema or Mackenzie's camp follower.

Although this schema certainly persists to the present day, it is possible to historicize the slut–bitch binary. While sexism was not absent from the armed forces in the initial period of partial integration between 1945 and 1970, since women constituted such a small part of the armed forces and were sequestered in marginal support roles, they represented no challenge to concepts of masculinity or to specific males in the chain of command.<sup>8</sup> Their accelerated accession from 1970 to 1990 generated significant organizational and cultural tensions for the services and for male personnel as they had to work more closely with women. It was at precisely this point in these decades that the slut–bitch binary began to emerge. In the 1980s, the acronym WAF (Women's Air Force) was offensively altered to 'We All Fuck' (Burke, 1996: 125), while women in the US navy in the 1990s were routinely denigrated for their putative promiscuity with the acronym WUBA (Women Used By All). In both cases, women were defined as 'sluts' (Burke, 1996: 250). The slut–bitch binary seems to have emerged at an identifiable historical juncture, therefore, in response to changing institutional conditions in the armed forces. Yet, despite its origins and the manifest transformations since that time, there is clear evidence that it endures. Feminists are absolutely correct to highlight the hegemonic masculinity of the military.

## The honorary man

Women service personnel who have served in combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan have had to contend, then, with working in 'an extremely gendered organization' (Connell, 1987: 213; see also Sasson-Levy, 2011: 391–410); they are regularly dismissed as 'sluts' or 'bitches'. Runyon and Peterson (2010: 252) have gone further:

The aggressive and hypermasculine climate of the militaries is particularly hostile to feminized identities and bodies, so that women and feminized men are not and arguably cannot be treated as equals, no matter how well-intentioned individual agents and policies might be.

Male soldiers have actively sought to exclude women in order to defend the existing gender order.

Yet, the implication that the hegemonic masculinity of the armed forces and the codes associated with it persist monolithically is unlikely. Indeed, a number of scholars have

become dissatisfied with the reductive feminist analysis of the military. They have refined their interpretation of masculinity considerably. Even Cynthia Enloe has started to consider what the question of female accession means for the military; she contemplates whether, with increasing numbers of female service personnel, 'masculinization and patriarchy' might 'be stalled and even rolled back' (Enloe, 2007: 79). Indeed, she has acknowledged that in order to understand the armed forces, issues of ethnicity and class need to be considered alongside gender and the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Enloe, 2010: 130). Similarly, in their revision of the hegemonic masculinity thesis R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt (2005: 848) have also argued for an analysis of masculinity that takes into account differentiated local, regional and global levels: 'our understanding of hegemonic masculinity needs to incorporate a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, recognizing the agency of subordinate groups' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 843). Paul Higate (2012b) has also usefully drawn a distinction between the alternate masculinities of UK and US contractors working for private military and security companies. Similarly, Claire Duncanson (2013) has shown how, in the course of peacekeeping operations missions, male soldiers have developed novel gender concepts that transcend existing stereotypes. All of these scholars now reject monolithic accounts of gender.

In line with these observations, a small but potentially highly significant transformation has begun to take place over the last decade. In the course of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns, a new gender category has begun to emerge among Western, Anglophone,<sup>9</sup> forces. Rather than being defined as sluts or bitches, women have themselves noted that male soldiers have adopted an alternative attitude to them and have begun to apply a distinctive new category to them. Accordingly, it has become increasingly common for female soldiers to describe how, on recent operations, they have been accepted as 'one of the boys', 'one of the lads', 'one of the guys' or 'one of us' (OF-4a, female, US army, personal interview, 14 November 2013; officer, female, Australian army, email communication, 19 November 2013; OF-3a, female, US army, personal interview, 14 February 2014; see also Bishop, 2009: 174, 216, 250–251).

It is easy to overlook the significance of these self-descriptions. They are typically made casually by female soldiers. They begin to become significant only when it is recognized how radically they contrast with the standard binary definition of women in the military; under that schema, it would have been impossible for women to be considered as in any way equal to a male soldier. Indeed, the very fact that women can now describe their acceptance as a mundane, routine event is itself a radical departure. At this point, once the import of these phrases is recognized, these multiple self-descriptions can be collated together so that they are no longer random observations, but begin to constitute evidence for the emergence of a coherent new gender category. Specifically, they suggest that all the women using these ascriptions have begun to be treated as gender equals. Moreover, since each of the phrases invokes gender as the index of inclusion — lads/guys/boys/us — these women are claiming that they have been incorporated into the masculine group on the same basis as other males. In definitional and status terms, they have become men. Extrapolating from these implicit assumptions, it is possible to argue that these phrases point to the emergence of the concept of an 'honorary man'. Uniquely, selected women are no longer automatically defined as polluting, as a slut or bitch, but have been accorded the status of men. They have become honorary men.

Female informants affirmed the appearance of the category of honorary man and, indeed, their use of it:

I experienced that a lot of that [being treated as an honorary man] in the military and even in the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) ... you do become one of the guys. This is especially true with soldiers on the same level as you. You become like a brother to them; they became my battle buddy. (OF-3a, female, US army, personal interview, 14 February 2014; see also Brownson, 2014: 773)

I can remember being pleased when I'd been classed as 'an honorary bloke'. The term 'bloke(s)' is used even by women to refer to those you work with. (OF-4a, female, British army, email communication, 20 March 2014)

That the honorary man category has been applied to a woman often becomes most apparent at 'breaching' moments, when female comrades are encountered away from operations, when they have reassumed their feminine role and explicitly dressed as women. At that point, the gender incorporation of the female soldier into the male combat group becomes very clear. For instance, one informant recorded how having worked for a year in uniform in Afghanistan, she subsequently attended a formal unit ball in the US. The reaction of her male colleagues was illuminating on seeing her in an evening dress: 'Holy crap, you look different' (OF-3d, female, US army, personal interview, 5 March 2014). In theatre, by ascribing her the status of an honorary man, her comrades had forgotten that she was a woman and, therefore, of potential sexual interest. There, she had become a man.

Female soldiers have often expedited this process by adopting masculine mannerisms, especially while on operations, as scholars have observed (Jeska, 2010: 86; Sasson-Levy, 2003: 447; Zajcek, 2000: 120). Thus, in Afghanistan, it is noticeable that one Canadian female soldier cut her hair short; the result was that even when she took her helmet off, local Afghans did not always recognize that she was a woman (OF-4, female, Canadian army, presentation, Oxford, UK, 18 March 2013). Although partly practical, the short hair conveniently signified that she was defining herself in a way that might be easier for her male colleagues and subordinates to accept. Instructively, female soldiers have noted the connection between appearance and male recognition: 'the more male a woman's physical appearance (short hair, no makeup, unfeminine civilian clothing), the more her femininity is masked, the more she reduces her disturbance to male social cohesion' (OF-4, female, US army, email communication, 15 November 2013). Another noted the importance of physical comportment, including such apparent trivialities as how she sat during meetings. Accordingly, on operations, deliberately imitating the dominant males, she would not hold her knees together while sitting, in approved feminine fashion, but would self-consciously place 'one ankle over the other knee' and adopt a confident slouch (OF-4, female, US army, personal interview, 14 November 2013). There are, then, a range of physical strategies that female soldiers have adopted in order to earn honorary male status. These strategies are not only interesting in themselves, but also strongly suggest that in order to be accepted by men, women cannot just be women; they cannot ultimately be accepted as 'sisters', as some scholars claim (Brownson 2014). Somewhat paradoxically, in order even to be sisters, they have to be 'men'. The military has yet to develop an unproblematic concept of femininity that recognizes women as women.

Of course, not all female soldiers have consented to the concept of the honorary man. For instance, one female informant, who had once aspired to being an ‘honorary man’, considered herself old and senior enough to survive without this ascription: ‘by this stage in my life I had grown into the age of being a mature woman and so had the attitude of “*I’m not a bloke, I am a woman, accept me for who I am or not at all*”’ (OF-4a, female, British army, email communication, 20 March 2014). Another, who had served as an intelligence officer with an infantry battalion in Iraq, explicitly sought to maintain her femininity on operations. Indeed, a female subordinate told her that she admired her for somehow being able to sustain her status as a woman while retaining credibility with her male peers and subordinates: ‘You really kept your femininity and yet you accomplished your job’ (OF-3c, female, US army, personal interview, 17 February 2014). This is an important case because it shows that some women can still be women and serve. Yet, the fact that a female subordinate identified her refusal to adopt masculine traits as extraordinary suggests that it is commonplace for women soldiers to aspire to be accepted as men and that the category of the honorary man has wide purchase. Indeed, this officer, while maintaining her femininity, accepted that the concept of the honorary man was common. In most cases, notwithstanding these important exceptions, female soldiers have to be ascribed an honorary male status in order to be incorporated into the male combat unit.

It might be suggested that while the slut–bitch cultural code corresponded to the period of partial female integration between 1970 and the 1990s, the ‘honorary man’ has emerged in response to the new operational conditions of the last 10 years as a means by which the armed forces has accepted and organized female accession to combat roles. The ‘honorary man’ is the historical product of the first two decades of the 21st century. On the basis of this evidence, an important development has manifestly taken place over the last 10 years, then; a new discourse has emerged in the armed forces, partially displacing the slut–bitch binary. Women are now no longer automatically categorized as anomalous and liminal; in some cases, they have been granted an equal and honorary status as men. Given the deep institutionalization of masculinity in the armed forces, this revision of gender norms is noteworthy. The question is, of course, to explain how such a change has been possible.

## **Operational pressures**

There are precedents for the appearance of the honorary man in Western forces that usefully illuminate how this gender transformation might have been possible. For instance, in her work on insurgent and terrorist groups in South America, Luisa Ortega has shown how conventional military masculinity has been reformed as a result of operational demands. The continued success of these organizations has relied not only upon the participation of large numbers of women who are involved in combat, but also upon the general inculcation of skills, such as emotional work or medical care, which were once defined as ‘female-coded tasks’ (Ortega, 2012: 496). As a result, masculine fighters are expected to demonstrate characteristics once deemed feminine. Operational exigencies have overcome hegemonic forms of masculinity by allowing women to perform roles once reserved for men and vice versa. Consequently, these organizations now prioritize

'comrade identity over gender consciousness' (Ortega, 2012: 503); new, more inclusive, gender concepts have replaced older constructs precisely because these groups could not function and survive without closer cooperation between men and women.

It might be thought that insurgencies are unusual because the participation of women in their activities is typically very high. Yet, in the case of Western forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, compatible organizational imperatives have also been very clear. As a result of the demands of the campaigns in these theatres, Western forces required increased numbers of women on the front line to sustain personnel numbers and to provide specialist functions for combat units. Indeed, personnel pressure was so intense that in the case of the US and UK, women were assigned to front-line units to fight alongside male soldiers, even though this was formally forbidden by defence policy. Operational exigencies compelled a *de facto* inclusion of women, whatever the existing norms or gendered interests of men. On this account, military necessity has demanded the inclusion of women and is, therefore, solely responsible for the emergence of the new 'honorary man' category. Indeed, Michelle Sandhoff and Mady Wechsler Segal (2013) have claimed that the renegotiation of military gender norms are the more or less inevitable result of institutional and operational requirements.

Yet, this organizational explanation, though plausible and necessary, is not in itself sufficient. The inclusion of women into combat units as a result of operational requirements did not, in and of itself, demand a revision of gender categories. There are examples when armies have been under similar pressure but have not revised their gender norms, even in cases when they have drafted women. For instance, Anna Krylova (2010) has shown that the inclusion of women into combat units in the Soviet army during the Second World War involved no radical change of gender identities: 'a non-oppositional though still binary concept of gender' was institutionalized (Krylova, 2010: 13). Soviet women and men could serve on the front line together but they were still regarded as fundamentally different, with different functions. Although the Israeli Defence Force has historically had a high level of female participation and women have served as combat instructors, in fact, conventional gender norms are typically enforced and, indeed, are being re-inscribed (Sasoon-Levy, 2003, 2007; Van Creveld, 2000a, 2000b). Yagil Levy (2013) has shown that as the Israeli army has become more hieratic, reactionary gender norms have been reintroduced.

It is possible that gender integration could have occurred in western forces without any significant discursive transformation, as it had in the Soviet and Israeli armies. Indeed, as discussed, women who fought in combat units in Iraq and Afghanistan were often defined by traditionally discriminatory gender categories, as the slut–bitch binary shows. Therefore, the participation of women in combat operations forced on Western militaries by the pressures of the Iraq and Afghan campaigns has been a necessary but not sufficient condition for the revision of gender codes in the military. A new organizational culture, which has facilitated not just the inclusion of women into combat units, but, crucially, their acceptance by male soldiers, is required to explain the appearance of the honorary man category; this culture — not just the operational pressures — provides the sufficient explanation.

## Professionalism

In the opening paragraphs of *The Soldier and the State* (Huntington, 1957), one of the most important works on the military profession and civil–military relations in the 20th century,

Samuel Huntington provided a definition of professionalism that remains valid to this day. Professionalism did not simply refer to the fact that military personnel (and, of course, Huntington was concerned only with the officer corps) committed themselves to a service career, rather than being conscripted or volunteering as citizens for a short period. For Huntington, professionalism consisted of expertise, responsibility and corporateness: military professionals possessed 'specialized knowledge and skill in a significant field of human endeavour' and shared 'a sense of organic unity and consciousness of themselves as a group apart from laymen' (Huntington, 1957: 8–9). Professionalism consists of institutionalized expertise and a distinctive collective identity, while professionalization refers to the intensification of military expertise and the collective consciousness that follows from it. In the 21st century, military professionalization has been one of the most important transformations for Western armed forces, improving their capabilities, altering their corporate identities and reconfiguring relations between their personnel. It has been critical to the reformation of gender relations. Clearly, in order to invoke professionalism as an explanation of recent gender revisions, some clarification is plainly necessary here since professionalism is not a new phenomenon for many Western powers.

It is true that the major European powers abandoned conscription and professionalized their forces only recently after the Cold War, including, finally, Germany in 2010. However, anglophone militaries, the focus of attention here, abandoned conscription decades ago: Canada abolished conscription in 1945; the UK in 1960; and Australia and the US in 1973. Since professionalism has long been institutionalized in these militaries, it would seem incoherent to cite it as an immediate factor in recent gender changes. Yet, even anglophone forces, which have been all-volunteer for many years, have been forced to professionalize (in Huntington's sense) as a result of the demands of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan; they have become more highly trained, expert and proficient than their 20th-century predecessors. Operational requirements have sharply intensified the professionalism of Western armed forces over the last 10 years. Thus, although the Canadian army was nominally professional throughout the post-war period, it was widely regarded as a poor and unprofessional force right up until its engagement in Southern Afghanistan in 2006 (English, 1998; Granatstein, 2004: 406). At that point, operational pressures compelled a radical improvement in combat skills. The Canadian army may exemplify contemporary professionalization most clearly but the advance has also been observable among UK and US ground forces. Although the combined arms superiority of the US forces was widely recognized in the Cold War, in the 1990s, the skill of their infantry soldiers was often questioned by their European North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, especially following their performances in the Balkans. There is no such scepticism now. They are recognized as indisputable global leaders in combat at every level.

The professionalization of Western armed forces is of immediate relevance to the emergence of 'the honorary man' and the revision of gender relations because professionalization has had a particularly marked influence on the solidarity of the small 'primary' group, precisely the location at which discrimination or accession is actualized. It is here that women are accepted or rejected. The importance of the small group becomes particularly clear when it is recognized that, formally, women should have faced no discrimination or harassment in the military since their integration in the 1970s; in every case, they were legitimately appointed to the rank they held and the role they performed. In legal terms, the military institution recognized them as equal. Yet, in reality, they faced

discrimination, of an often brutal type, enacted by small groups of men. The slut–bitch binary demonstrates that face-to-face interaction at the micro-level has been the critical site of gender exclusion and discrimination in the armed forces. The chain of command, then, often colluded in this discrimination primarily because it was afraid of disturbing the cohesion of units. However, the locus of discrimination was the primary male group.

Scholars have been well aware of the potential significance of the primary group for the integration of minority groups and women. Accordingly, since the 1990s and especially over the last decade, scholars have reacted against classical accounts of primary group cohesion forwarded by scholars like Morris Janowitz and Edward Shils (1948) or Samuel Stouffer et al. (1949), correctly recognizing that these traditional accounts legitimate a series of social exclusions. On the primary group thesis, homogeneity was essential in the primary group because soldiers could develop interpersonal bonds — critical to cohesion and combat effectiveness — only if they already shared common social backgrounds; as soldiers were alike and liked one another, they would fight for each other. Any disturbance of the bonds between male soldiers and their social homogeneity was dangerous. Elizabeth Kier (1998) and Robert MacCoun (1993, and Hix 2010; MacCoun et al., 2006) were among the first to reject the primary group thesis. They argued that social cohesion or ‘likeness’ were not so important in the primary groups of the professional force. Here, teamwork, not interpersonal bonds, becomes crucial: ‘the sense of group cohesion based on “teamwork” has little to do with whether members enjoy one another’s company, share an emotional bond or feel part of some “brotherhood of soldiers”’ (Kier, 1998: 19). Irrespective of their social backgrounds and interpersonal relations, soldiers could be trained to perform together.

There is now a well-developed literature that rejects the primary group thesis outright, arguing that training and, specifically, professionalism — not social homogeneity — are the crucial determinants of cohesion at the small group level (Ben-Ari et al., 2010; Ben-Shalom et al., 2005; Coss, 2010; Strachan, 2006). Against the ‘pure cohesion’ thesis (Segal and Kestnbaum, 2002), social scientists have increasingly observed that professional soldiers unite around quite impersonal procedures and drills, which they have learnt in training, whatever their background. This has produced the possibility of a novel form of cohesion, described as ‘swift trust’ by Ben-Shalom et al. (2005). Professional soldiers do not necessarily need to share a common social background or personal relations in order to cooperate; they can perform with each other by reference to common drills and adherence to shared doctrine. In this context, personal affection or interpersonal attraction, ‘likeness’, between males in dense primary groups, once regarded as essential to cohesion, becomes less relevant or even supererogatory:

Comradeship is now primarily based on competence, not on likeness. Soldiers are valued more for their knowledge and expertise, rather than so much for their personalities. As a result, soldiers increasingly seem to be able to co-operate with each other and form cohesive social groups on a recurrent basis not because they know each other or have a long history of shared experiences but because each has been intensely individually trained in common, compatible or mutually supporting professional skills. Independently of their individual acquaintance, soldiers are increasingly united by their individual commitment to professional competence. (King, 2013: 374)

Under the intensified professionalism of the 21st century, performance, not social background, has become primary. Soldiers have developed solidarities with each other

through the competent performance of their mutually allotted tasks, out of which they build up dense networks of trust.

There is considerable evidence that Western soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan have increasingly understood their relations to each other in professional terms. For instance, in his widely read account of US paratroopers in the Korengal Valley in 2007–2008, Sebastian Junger records precisely this kind of impersonal professional cohesion among 2nd Platoon, Battle Company 173rd Airborne Brigade. In the course of a narrative ostensibly dedicated to the extolling of primary group cohesion, Sergeant O'Byrne, one of the central figures in Junger's account, makes a surprising admission. Rather than expatiating on his soldiers' love for each other, he observes: 'There are guys in the platoon who straight up *hate* each other' (Junger, 2010: 79). Yet, O'Byrne also notes a paradox: 'But they would also die for each other. So you kind of have to ask, "How much could I really hate the guy?"' (Junger, 2010: 79). The paradox seems bizarre, even impossible, according to the classical primary group thesis in which soldiers must be friends, but it can be resolved if it is recognized that among these professional soldiers, cohesion was not necessarily dependent on personal affection. It was based on competence. Specifically, in combat, Junger's paratroopers united around their training and drills, whatever their personal differences. Bound by professional bonds, they performed together; they did not need to like each other personally.

In the 21st-century all-volunteer, professional army, social cohesion based on the homogeneous male primary group, so typical of 20th-century armies, has been increasingly replaced by a more impersonal form of solidarity based on competence. Individuals are accepted on the basis of whether they can perform their assigned role efficiently, whatever their social, ethnic or racial background, forming, in many cases, very dense solidarities on a professional basis. For Western soldiers, comradeship has become a function of performance (OF-4, British army, email communication, 15 July 2013; OF-6, US army, Special Operations Forces, 20 November 2013; OF-3, Bundeswehr, personal interview, 9 December 2010; OR-9, US army, Special Operations Forces, 12 November 2013).

Professional cohesion, increasingly central to Western armed forces, seems to have exerted considerable impact on combat performance. Crucially, in terms of the current argument, it has also allowed for the integration of once-excluded population groups, such as ethnic and racial minorities or homosexuals (Kier, 1998; MacCoun, 1993, Hix 2010). By extension, professionalism may be critical in facilitating the accession of women to combat roles. In the case of women, like homosexuals and minority ethnic and racial groups before them, gender might become simply another arbitrary social category — of no more significance than skin colour — in determining military participation. On this account, in a highly professionalized military culture, as long as a woman can perform, she might be accepted by male colleagues. The professionalizing ethos of the armed forces has constituted the cultural context for the accession of women into the combat arms. It is the cultural precondition that has allowed women to be incorporated into combat units and to be judged by their combat performance, not by their sexuality.

## Professional integration

There is substantial evidence to corroborate the thesis that professionalization has been the critical factor in the emergence of the honorary man category. For instance, at an

institutional level, Western forces have explicitly understood female accession in professional terms. In 1998, assessing the very mixed success of female integration at that point, the Canadian army published a policy document that promoted female accession to the combat arms as a manifestation of professionalism: 'Men and women must learn to live with each other professionally in the field' (Army Lessons Learned Centre, 1998: 23). The document systematically deconstructed a series of incidents that had been initially defined as 'gender problems' to show that they were, in fact, leadership (i.e. professional) problems. In every case, female soldiers had performed poorly or been treated inappropriately because they lacked training or because their commanders had been unprofessional — not because they were women.

Far more importantly, there is considerable evidence from Iraq and Afghanistan that professional integration has occurred at the small unit level; male soldiers have collectively changed their view of women and their capabilities and have been willing to incorporate them into their primary groups on a specifically professional basis. For instance, one non-commissioned officer from the British Parachute Regiment maintained that as a result of recent operations and increased training, 'the British army is in a better state than it has ever been' (OR-4, male, Parachute Regiment, personal interview, Camp Bastion Helmand, Afghanistan, 27 June 2010). Specifically, he noted how this professionalism had manifestly improved the quality and maturity of junior soldiers: while the older generation were 'more concerned with image', 'the younger cadre are much more professional' (OR-4, male, Parachute Regiment, personal interview, Camp Bastion Helmand, Afghanistan, 27 June 2010). The implication was that the advance of professionalism had involved a revision of traditional concepts of military masculinity. Soldiering was no longer understood purely in gendered terms solely as an expression of manhood, still less in sexualized terms. Rather, soldiering was a professional activity that relied on the acquisition of expertise. Indeed, connecting professionalism to a revision of gender norms, he explicitly concluded: 'We had a female medic. She was awesome. She carried the same weight as the blokes. She was doing her job, performing as well or better than the men. Why should sexuality affect cohesion?' (OR-4, male, Parachute Regiment, personal interview, Camp Bastion Helmand, Afghanistan, 27 June 2010). This is not an isolated view. A Royal Marine major stated that as long as women were competent, 'the blokes didn't care' (OF-4b, male, Royal Marines, personal interview, Shrivenham, UK, 13 May 2010). A battalion commander of a US airborne battalion in the 82nd Airborne Division was utterly explicit about accepting a female officer into his unit, declaring publicly: 'I don't give a fuck if she is a girl as long as she can do the job' (OF-3d, US army, personal interview, 5 March 2014).

Clearly, some caution needs to be exercised here, for it is easy to exaggerate the opportunities that professionalization has created for women. Max Weber (1978), Randall Collins (1979) and Rosabeth Kanter (1977) have all shown how monopolization, discrimination and exclusion are, in fact, often central to professionalization. Even if professionalism theoretically facilitates new opportunities for minority groups, Carol Cohn (2000: 133) appositely observed a gap between the perception and reality of ethnic integration that might parallel contemporary gender integration:

white male officers often pointed to 'successful integration of racial minorities' to support their claim that if you just meet the same standards, you will be treated equally. When I repeated this assertion to black officers it met with reactions ranging from skeptical amusement to incredulity.

Male soldiers, who comprise the majority of the armed forces and at least 99% of the combat forces even in Canada, retain their dominant position as primary definers of performance and acceptance. They may presume that they are according women equal status when, in fact, they are not.

It is precisely to avoid the kind of presumption that Cohn noted of white officers that the testimony of female soldiers who have served in combat is so important; they constitute the most secure evidence of the professionalization thesis. Female informants who have served in combat have recorded notable cultural reformations. As the first major Western army to liberalize its accession policies, the Canadian army offers an advanced insight into this gender renegotiation. The Canadian army contains a number of successful female soldiers who have served in combat in Afghanistan, both as officers and non-commissioned officers. One of the most obvious examples here is Major Eleanor Taylor, who served as a company commander with 1 Royal Canadian Regiment in major combat operations in Kandahar in 2010. It is widely believed in the Canadian army that she may be the first female to command an infantry battalion and, instructively, male soldiers have openly expressed a willingness and desire to serve under her in this capacity (OF-3, male, Canadian army, personal communication, New Brunswick, Canada, 12 October 2011). Major Taylor explicitly identified professionalism as critical to her career: she was accepted because she was competent (OF-4, female, Canadian army, personal communication, Oxford, UK, 18 March 2013). Other Canadian female soldiers and officers have confirmed the experiences of Taylor:

It's not about gender when it's about war, it's about training. (OF-3c, female, Canadian infantry, personal interview, Gagetown, Canada, 19 October 2011)

If you want to do the job, there can be no gender. If I can do the job, I am respected as long as I can pull my weight. (OR-2, Canadian army, personal interview, Gagetown, Canada, 17 October 2011)

In the combat arms trades, you are equally accountable, it is task-oriented and task-based; it is about meeting the standard. (OF-3a, Canadian army, personal interview, Gagetown, Canada, 17 October 2011)

Female Canadian soldiers have identified professionalism as critical to their integration.

These Canadian examples are illuminating. However, in order to prove the role of professionalization in changing gender norms, it is perhaps useful to examine the most extreme cases, focusing not only on the infantry in general, but on elite infantry regiments in the UK and US, which have been widely seen as a haven of extreme forms of masculinity and to be most resistant to women (Basham, 2009a, Basham 2009b; Belkin, 2012; Hale, 2012; Jennings and Weale, 1996; Winslow, 1997). In addition, it might be expected that these elite soldiers, often given the most difficult and dangerous missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, would, following Kanter's (1977) thesis, unite in tight homosocial groups in order to maximize interpersonal trust. These forces would seem to offer an ideal test case of the extent to which women have been integrated on a professional basis.

Decisively, even among these elite UK and US units, there is evidence, provided by women, that male soldiers have begun to accept females, interpreting them as professional colleagues. For instance, one female informant was assigned to the US 82nd

Airborne Division to participate in their tour in 2011–2012 in Kandahar. She recorded that she was nervous joining this famous division. However, as noted earlier, her commander supported her (OF-3d, US army, personal interview, 5 March 2014). As a result of this approbation and her proven competence in theatre, this female officer had no difficulty in being accepted as a professional by her fellow soldiers in the 82nd Airborne even though she was the first intelligence officer to be in an infantry battalion in this division. She noted that while it was physically more challenging to be in an elite division, the very fact that standards were higher and played a decisive role in the organization meant that, having passed the entry requirements, including the jump-master course first time, her acceptance as a peer was expedited:

Definitely professionalism was critical but there were other factors. I'm physically fit. I could beat most of the guys in running and running is a huge thing in this division. Once you showed you could do PT [physical training] and keep up, you were accepted. (OF-3d, female, US army, personal interview, 5 March 2014)

It might be noted, in fact, that, as Carol Cohn (2000) has shown, physical fitness is one of the key signifiers of professionalism for male soldiers. Other female soldiers who served with the infantry confirmed the importance of their professionalism to their integration:

My male colleagues respected me. I was in good shape: I could keep up with them physically. That was important. I was competent and the best at my job. ... I felt I was integrated with my colleagues but I was hyper-aware of staying professional. (OF-3c, female, US army, personal interview, 17 February 2014)

Female British soldiers attached to the Royal Marines and Parachute Regiment recorded similar experiences. Chantelle Taylor, a medic attached to 16 Air Assault Brigade in Helmand in 2008, confirmed the statement from the male Parachute Regiment non-commissioned officer cited earlier (OR-4, male, Parachute Regiment, personal interview, Camp Bastion Helmand, Afghanistan, 27 June 2010). In a striking episode, she helped to fire a mortar during a firefight: 'There was a time that this would have been unheard of — a female helping out. Blokes down here weren't bothered anymore. It didn't matter what cap badge you were so long as you could do the job' (Taylor, 2011: 223).

The experience of another British female medic, who spent four months in front-line patrol bases with the Royal Marines, usefully corroborated the point. Throughout the period, she carried her own equipment, including body armour, weapon, medical kit and water. She recorded that she was completely accepted by the young marines. Once she had been attached and demonstrated her ability to cope with the environment physically and to perform her role professionally, her status as a woman became irrelevant, especially when under fire and treating wounded marines:

In the patrol bases, the relations were so close. We were a nine-man team, there wasn't 20 minutes when you weren't thinking about the team. In Tombstone [a major base in Helmand away from the front line], there was no guy in my room but in the patrol base [PB], we did everything together. When I first arrived, they felt protective of me and they worried that I was

ok but it was more that than girls and boys getting romantic. They were like family, like brothers. In Bastion, the officers were different but in the PBs, it was all together. It was very professional. The lads were aware of that. I was under as much pressure as them; I was literally one of the lads. (OR-2, female, Royal Navy, personal interview, 14 December 2011)

This statement usefully affirms the thesis about professionalization and female accession. By working, sleeping and eating so closely together, the bonds between this female medic and the marines changed. Close codependence changed her status from a potential object of sexual interest to an equal professional partner. In this way, she usefully summarizes in detail the precise means by which professionalization has facilitated gender integration and the incorporation of women as honorary men into combat units.

### **Man trouble: the challenges of retaining honorary status**

All the female soldiers cited earlier claim that they have been accepted on the basis of their competence. Professional cohesion had provided a space in which they could be accepted as equals. Yet, it would be wrong to ignore the gendered dimension to their integration: professionalized military culture remains masculinized. In order to understand this culture and the process of female access properly, it is crucial to be precise about the renegotiation of gender relations and what is involved in becoming an honorary man. Although the category 'honorary man' has allowed women to integrate into combat units, as if they were men, this does not mean that definitions of femininity have become irrelevant in the professional military. On the contrary, the honorary man category presumes a deeply conventional construct of femininity. As Judith Halberstam's (1998: 268) work would suggest, women who display masculine traits challenge established conventions so deeply that for many, they are still 'abhorrent and pathological'. More specifically, professionalism may have enabled women to perform roles that were once denied to them, but precisely because so few females have fought as combat soldiers, their effect on institutionalized gendered categories has been necessarily small. Specifically, for male soldiers, even within a highly professionalized force, femininity is still equated almost exclusively with heterosexuality and sex itself: women are essentially seen as being for sex. Defined only in sexual terms, male soldiers do not know how to interact with females in any other way than by solicitation; moreover, they expect females to comport themselves in sexualized ways towards them. On this sexualized definition of femininity, women can only be sluts and bitches. The honorary man presumes conventional gender categories rather than effacing them.

Accordingly, in order to be able to work professionally with a woman as an equal, male soldiers have to efface the femininity of female colleagues because that definition prescribes only one sexual mode of social interaction. The concept of the honorary man has become requisite because soldiers have no other gender categories to hand by which to define women and their interaction with them. This process of feminine effacement is particularly obvious in the statement of the British medic cited earlier (OR-2, female, Royal Navy, personal interview, 14 December 2011). As she attained professionalized status, she lost her femininity and became an *honorary man* for the marines with whom she served; precisely because there was no possibility of 'getting romantic', she could be

treated as a fellow marine (OR-2, female, Royal Navy, personal interview, 14 December 2011). In effect, the marines found it impossible to equate her femininity (i.e. their perception of female sexuality) with her role and, consequently, in order to be able to work with her at all and accord her membership of their group, they simply erased her gender from their relations. She became 'one of the lads' because she was no longer an object of sexual interest.

It was important for women to foster and protect their masculine status once they had been awarded it. Indeed, the dependence of honorary male status on the denial of femininity explains the particular care with which female soldiers have to negotiate their sexuality and their relations with men. If femininity is exclusively associated with sex for most male soldiers, women have to repress their sexuality if they are to be accepted by men. Accordingly, Kayla Williams (2006) sustained her honorary male status by refusing all sexual contact with her male colleagues; by desexualizing herself she could become an equal (OF-3d, female, US army, personal interview, 5 March 2014). Successful Canadian officers recorded a similar process. They maintained that in order to sustain their professional identities, they had to abjure any intimation of sexuality: 'no matter how competent you are, if you sleep around, you will ruin your reputation, not only your own, but of all women' (OF-3a, female, Canadian army, personal interview, Gagetown, Canada, 17 October 2011; OF-4, female, Canadian army, personal communication, Oxford, UK, 18 March 2013). An Australian female officer affirmed the point almost exactly:

You won't have a good reputation in the army, no matter how competent you are, if you sleep around. My female colleagues who slept around [earlier in their careers] still have this reputation years later. ... I have friends who are equally as competent as I but have slept around — that changes everything. For example, I heard male officers (senior to me) speaking about the new appointment of a female officer. She was highly competent but all the men spoke about was her previous sexual encounters which did not even come close to their previous indiscretions. These encounters may not have even been true. (Officer, female, Australian army, email communication, 19 November 2013)

If a woman wants to be treated as a 'man', she has to avoid all sexual contact with male soldiers. Indeed, sexual abstinence has to be extended even to the point of rejecting friendships with male soldiers lest they be misinterpreted by the colleague or by others — a problem experienced by some informants (officer, female, Australian army, email communication, 19 November 2013; OF-4a, female, British army, personal interview, Shrivenham, UK, 13 May 2010). Of course, male soldiers who fraternized with women and who were, therefore, minimally equally responsible for any breakdown of discipline that ensued normally avoided any sanction from their peers: 'if a man sleeps around, there are no problems' (OF-3b, female, US army, personal interview, 14 February 2014); 'Somehow everyone got it that getting laid was okay for the guys' (Williams, 2006: 21). Only women could undermine cohesion through fraternization. Any sexual activity automatically re-invokes the slut-bitch binary because it once again affirms that a female soldier is to be defined in purely sexual terms as a woman. Honorary manhood relies on the elimination of feminine identity.

There are further problems with the category: it could be extended only to a small number of women and in no way challenged gender stereotypes more widely. Thus, in the Canadian army, male soldiers would repeatedly affirm their opposition to women serving in combat units in general but would simultaneously be willing to work with individually specified females. They would repeatedly state: 'I don't agree that women should be in combat units but I would happily serve with Trish [name of a female Canadian soldier]' (OF-4, Canadian army, personal communication, Oxford, UK, 18 March 2013). Individual females could be ascribed masculinity but women as a class could not be accepted in combat units because they were still defined by their sexuality. The slut–bitch binary was predicated precisely on the fact that women are defined, for men, by their sexuality alone. On this schema, it is culturally impossible for females to be comrades as women. Conveniently, acceptance of particular females has been important to the preservation of masculine ideals because if females generally could be accepted into combat units, then the very concept of gender would have to be fundamentally renegotiated. By according a male status only to selected individual women, male soldiers have been able to preserve the gender order with a minor, if significant, revision. Gender categories have remained broadly in place but individual exceptions are now possible.

The concept involved further problems because the strategies that women have to adopt to sustain this status involve significant costs for them by putting them in a contradictory position. Discussing the issue of the honorary man was difficult for informants because they were, in effect, being asked to consider reflexively whether they had played into gender stereotypes that might be damaging to women in general. Indeed, some informants were explicitly aware that their status as honorary males meant that they complied with definitions of women as sluts and bitches: 'I sometimes accept comments about other women, which may enable assault. Do I accept these behaviours in order to become one of them? Or do I say it is not acceptable and risk being seen as a bitch' (OF-4a, female, US army, personal interview, 14 November 2013). One officer noted that when she was instructing female recruits, she adopted the official position on gender equality that she personally affirmed, but upon which she had consistently been forced to renege in practice on operations; therefore, she had in some way 'failed women as a leader and a role model' by acting in a way in which she did not ideally want men to see their 'female comrade-in-arms' (OF-4a, female, US army, personal interview, 14 November 2013). She had effectively been able to sustain herself as an honorary man only by allowing male soldiers to disparage other less competent women in sexist ways. Indeed, others recorded that they sometimes actively colluded in these processes: 'I catch myself using it [the slut–bitch binary]'. Honorary man status is problematic because it often reaffirms rather than invalidates the slut–bitch binary. The fact that some individual women can be 'men' is taken to prove that most are rightly dismissed as 'sluts' and 'bitches'.

In her analysis of the construction of militarized femininity, Laura Sjoberg (2007: 98–99) concludes: 'The institutional exclusion of women from the US military may be waning but the discursive structures of gender subordination that plague the military and extend to its targets are not disappearing but evolving in the face of that change'. The emergence of the 'honorary male' category seems to provide evidence for Sjoberg's claim. There is little doubt that the appearance of the discourse of the 'honorary man' represents a minor cultural revision rather than a gender revolution. It augments rather

than transforms existing gender discourses. Yet, the concept of the ‘honorary man’, although very narrow, does represent a material transformation: it is a new category between the slut–bitch binary and denotes an actual change in the roles that some female soldiers can perform, and the status that they are accorded for it. Small though it may be, it constitutes a ‘regendering’ of the military (Cockburn and Hubic, 2002).

## Conclusion

This article has sought to explain the transformation of gender concepts in Western armed forces over the last decade and, specifically, the appearance of a new category: the honorary man. As feminists have argued, masculinity remains hegemonic in the armed forces. Women are routinely discriminated against, abused and assaulted, demonstrating that masculinity remains critical to the military as an institution and to soldiers individually. Specifically, female soldiers are subject to a binary slut–bitch classificatory system over which they have little or no control. However, this article has identified the appearance of a new gender category over the last 10 years: the honorary man. While the operational demands of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan are by no means irrelevant, this article has claimed that the professionalizing culture of Western armed forces (substantially intensified as a result of those missions) constitutes the primary factor in explaining the appearance of the honorary man category and the acceptance of women in combat. The honorary man represents an advance in gender discourse but it is also deeply problematic.

As a conclusion, it is worth considering the institutional significance of the appearance of the honorary man category and whether it is likely to lead to more radical gender reform in the future. There has been some uncertainty among feminists about the import of these changes. Cynthia Enloe has tended to reject minor changes to gender relations in the armed forces as irrelevant. By contrast, Annica Kronsell (2005: 286) claims: ‘my contention is that the inclusion of even a small percentage of women makes all the difference in the world because it makes gender and masculine norms visible’. She observes how the entry of women into the Swedish army forced the removal of pornographic images and the reduction of obscene language. Similarly, the integration of small numbers of women into Western combat units over the last decade represents a small numeric change that has generated a new gender category, the honorary man, partly displacing the slut–bitch binary. This seems to be a significant development. However, precisely because the number of women serving in the infantry and combat arms will remain very small, the emergence of the honorary man denotes a gender revision rather than any larger-scale gender reformation of the armed forces.

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## Notes

1. A total of 283,000 women have served in the US armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan; 964 have been wounded and 154 have been killed in action (Magginis, 2013: 78).
2. Indeed, recognizing the reality, in January 2013, Leon Panetta, the Secretary of Defence, rescinded all gender restrictions in the US armed forces; from 2016, women will be free to

- serve in any military specialism, including ground combat roles. The UK currently maintains its ban on women in the combat arms but this policy is due for reconsideration in 2016.
3. In order to understand the way in which gender categories have informed female accession to combat roles, it is necessary to go well beyond the official policy concerning female integration into the armed forces and into the distinctive 'lifeworld' of the armed forces. Consequently, this article draws on an international archive of evidence from the UK, Canada, the US, France, Germany and Australia, including documentary material (official doctrine and a selection of contemporary memoirs), fieldwork observation of training in these countries and, finally, interviews with selected male and female members of the armed forces (38 males and 17 females) supported by informal discussions with a wider group of (53) informants (recorded in field notes). The fieldwork involved observing 40 days of infantry training and exercises in Canada, France, Germany, the UK and the US between May 2009 and December 2011.
  4. All Canadian, US and Australian (14) interviewees and one of the UK interviewees explicitly confirmed the category; in the account of one of the other UK interviewees, the slut-bitch concept was implicit in her discussions of the discrimination that she had faced. Only in one case did the binary not arise, though this British female also recorded cases in Helmand where males had openly discriminated against her merely because she was a woman.
  5. In her work on the Swedish armed forces, Kronsell (2010: 51) records the use of the category 'bimbo', which is equivalent to the term 'slut' (see also Herbert, 2000: 67).
  6. In the UK, the word 'slag' is sometimes used.
  7. In addition to interviewees, female soldiers with whom the issue has been discussed informally routinely accept the existence of this cultural code.
  8. De Groot (2006: 102) records cases of discrimination in the Second World War.
  9. The Canadian forces are included as anglophone forces even though, strictly speaking, they are bilingual; the francophone contingent represents a minority and English is the military's first language, especially when dealing with allies.

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