



MASCULINITIES IN MILITARY CONTEXTS

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'masculinities' ?

- Gender refers to the social construction of 'men' and 'women' or 'masculine' and 'feminine': 'to people who study it, gender indicates something about socialized behaviour patterns' (Przygoda and Chrisler 2000: 554).
- Masculinity = a "set of attitudes and practices culturally deemed appropriate to men" (Buchbinder 1994)
- 'Masculine' traits such as rationality, autonomy, objectivity, competitiveness and aggression tend to be valued more than 'feminine' traits such as emotion, empathy, subjectivity, cooperation and compromise.



Militarised masculinities

- Hegemonic militarised masculinity values: an individual's ability to **endure hardships**, their capacity for **controlled violence**, exultation of the **bonds between fellow soldiers** over all others, commitment to **completion of assigned tasks** without complaint, **rationality**, **emotional suppression**, **physical fitness**, **hard drinking**, and overt **heterosexuality** (ie Whitworth 2004, Duncanson 2013, Higate 2003, King 2016).
- Combat/warrior model has a central role in delimiting ideal masculinities in the military and beyond:

The notion of combat plays a central role in the construction of notions of manhood and justifications for the superiority of maleness in the social order. In reality, of course, to be a soldier of the state means to be subservient, obedient and almost totally dependent. But that mundane reality is hidden behind a potent myth: to be a soldier means possibly to experience 'combat', and only in combat lies the ultimate test of a man's masculinity (Enloe 1983: 12).

changing military roles



MILITARIES CONVENTIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH HEGEMONIC, MILITARIZED MASCULINITY THAT VALUES AGGRESSION AND UNIFORMITY FOR WARFIGHTING / UNIT COHESION.



NATURE OF SOLDIERING CHANGES WITH PEACEKEEPING, PEACEBUILDING AND COUNTER INSURGENCY. PLUS MORE RECENT TECHNOLOGICAL SHIFTS TOO.



SUGGESTION THAT CONTEMPORARY MISSIONS REQUIRE DIFFERENT TRAITS SUCH AS EMPATHY AND AN ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH WIDE RANGE OF PEOPLE.

What masculinities are available?



In the 1990s Cynthia Enloe suggested peacekeeping might change the nature of military masculinities (though others such as Whitworth (2004) sceptical).



Suggestions since that a form of 'peacekeeping masculinity' has indeed evolved where mutual respect and empathy can become acceptable core values (Duncanson 2013).



Additional forms of acceptable masculinities also developing within military contexts: emphasis on competence, mastery of technology, breadwinning capacity depending upon unit (Brown 2012).



Increasing recognition of dangers of hypermasculinity to operational objectives (see Higate 2015; Myrtinnen 2009) and focusing in on how professionalism can be performed by all genders too.

the nature of this research

- Based on Kiri Stevens' Masters degree research.
- Interviews with New Zealand soldiers and locals in situ in Solomon Islands.
- Context important: RAMSI a somewhat demilitarised mission thereby weakening any demands for a more 'hypermasculine militarised masculinity' to be performed.
- Also important to note that the local context was one where possession of weapons had bestowed status, especially for young men.
- Many locals wanted a less intimidating / militarized approach from RAMSI as they sought to reestablish non-militarized actors as sites of authority.

- 'Henry' stated that the NZDF's intention was not to appear aggressive:

Reinforcing the fact that we were there, we're not there with an aggressive posture, there is no enemy as such, as a normal soldier would be trained, yeah, you were there to engage and impress and . . . interact with the population in a very friendly way.

- 'Steve' noted the limitations of a more hypermasculine militarised masculinity approach:

Another guy I worked with in the field of intelligence — he was senior NCO, he was just hard out war-y, like he'd been to Afghanistan and seconded to the marines to train American marines in Afghanistan; he'd a been a sniper, a recon soldier, and an intelligence operator; and [he] . . . oozed that military confidence. But that would be more beneficial in a conventional warfare environment.

NZDF views on appropriate approaches

Local views on NZDF approaches

- Solomon Islanders' often suggested that it was those behaviours that can be linked with femininity and alternative masculine practices that were the most positively received. These practices included: valuing the need for cross-cultural relationship-building through **communication skills**, demonstrating **empathy, respect for local cultural practices**, and a **willingness to be flexible**.

'Andrew', a Solomon Islander who had interacted a great deal with the NZDF expressly asserted that:

Sometimes it's good to demonstrate masculinity but sometimes it's not so necessary. I think when . . . you respect and you go down and uphold the weak part of society, that has more impact, is more realistic and has a lasting . . . memory within a society . . . [whereas] if you're a military officer a lieutenant or a sergeant . . . [and] you go in the village and you like [indicates a tough stance] you know, no. But when you go and say hello and you shake hands and they offer you something and you receive it, that has more respect . . . lasting respect.

- Suggestions that some acceptance of more 'feminine' coded traits within NZDF.
- Growing international evidence both of risks of hypermasculinity and the value of incorporating alternative masculinities that allow for expression of feminine values.
- More research needed on different unit cultures and impacts of intersectionality (ie are some of these traits associated with / tempered by age, education or ethnicity?).

Masculinities?