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Come as You Are:
Dismantling Hegemonic Masculinity in the Canadian Armed Forces

Lieutenant-Colonel Neil J. Rodriguez

JCSP 50

Exercise Solo Flight

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COME AS YOU ARE: DISMANTLING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has a long history of marginalizing certain groups of people under the guise of operational effectiveness.¹ Although over 45,000 women had enlisted full-time into the CAF by the end of the Second World War, that figure was later capped at 1,500 by 1965 and incorporated significant employment barriers for women.² This included unequal enrolment criteria, unequal pay and benefits, restrictions on occupations and entry programs such as military college, prohibitions on enrollment of married women, and compulsory release upon childbirth. Following the release of the 1970 report by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, “organizational stalling” by the CAF in adopting equal opportunity employment practices for women became less acceptable, although it continued to persist.³ A monumental shift occurred in the late 1980s following a complaint to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, where the CAF was “ordered” to adopt the full integration of women by 1989.⁴

Comparable narratives can be explored regarding other marginalized and equity-seeking groups. For example, between the 1950s and 1990s, the CAF engaged in a systematic purge of gay and lesbian service members through highly coercive and intrusive means. This included the implementation of CAF Administrative Order 19-20 that actively enabled investigations into homosexuality and “sexual abnormality”, and the subsequent release of service members under the pretense of national security and loyalty concerns.⁵ Given these historical contexts and the perceived systematic aversion to adapt to Canadian society, it is reasonable to question the role that power structures stemming from social identities (e.g. sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, ability, etc.) continue to hold within the CAF.

As stated in the 2021 Initiating Directive for Professional Conduct and Culture, numerous change initiatives within the CAF have failed to materialize. The CAF must undertake new approaches to address systemic root causes, structures, and barriers faced

¹ Maya Eichler and Vanessa Brown, ‘Getting to the Root of the Problem: Understanding and Changing Canadian Military Culture’, *Canadian Military Journal* 23 (2023), p. 8.

² Robert Egnell and Mayesha Alam, eds., *Women and Gender Perspective in the Military: An International Comparison* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2019), p.3; Andrea Lane, *Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*, Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), p. 353.

³ Egnell and Alam, *Women and Gender Perspective in the Military*, p. 74.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Alan Okros and Denise Scott, ‘Gender Identity in the Canadian Forces: A Review of Possible Impacts on Operational Effectiveness’, *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 2 (April 2015), p.245; Ron Levy, ‘Canada’s Cold War Purge of LGBTQ from the Military’ (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2020), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/canada-s-cold-war-purge-of-lgbtq-from-the-military>.

by marginalized groups towards meaningful inclusion within the CAF.⁶ Some research indicates that, like most militaries, the CAF was built and designed for cisgender, heterosexual men and seemingly continues to value deep-rooted masculine ideals that have been historically associated with military service.⁷ A term first coined in the 1980s, hegemonic masculinity is a concept that draws attention to “the existence of social norms and cultural rituals that [have] promoted a favourable social condition of men over women.”⁸ At its core, hegemonic masculinity is defined as an aspirational and idealized form of masculinity that is socially valued and associated with power over all other identities, setting a foundation for gender order within a society.⁹ It is reasonable to question the influence this historical design has on current CAF structures, ability to recruit and retain, and the larger impact on military operations. Although levels of attrition for the CAF are comparable to figures found in both the private and public sectors, the specialized skills of service members and the inability for lateral entry into most occupations amplify the direct costs associated with turnover of CAF members.¹⁰

This paper identifies hegemonic masculinity within the CAF as a threat to operational effectiveness and recommends actions that must be undertaken to dismantle these structures.

To accomplish this, this paper will first briefly describe the origins of hegemonic masculinity and its relation to military service. Second, this paper will propose a framework for how hegemonic masculinity continues to be produced, reinforced, and perpetuated in the CAF. Third, this paper will explore the advantages of non-hegemonic masculine and feminine approaches and their relevance within the current operating environment. Finally, this paper will recommend actions for the CAF to dismantle hegemonic masculinity to enhance operational effectiveness. This paper focuses on the institutional level and, hence, it is outside the scope of this paper to differentiate between intersecting military sub-cultures such as component, element, occupation, rank and other affiliations.

PART 1 – ORIGINS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

As a foundation for this argument, it is important to recognize the exemplary contributions and sacrifices that CAF members have undertaken to ensure the protection

⁶ Department of National Defence, ‘CDS/DM Initiating Directive for Professional Conduct and Culture’, April 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/dm-cds-directives/cds-dm-initiating-directive-professional-conduct-culture.html>, p. 1.

⁷ Eichler and Brown, ‘Getting to the Root of the Problem: Understanding and Changing Canadian Military Culture’, p. 10-11.

⁸ Sarah Salvo, ‘The Effects of Hegemonic Masculinity on the Endemic of Sexual Misconduct in the United States Army’ (United States Army, 18 June 2021), p 12.

⁹ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005), p. 846.

¹⁰ Irina Goldenberg and Nancy Otis, ‘Canadian Armed Forces Reconstitution: The Critical Role of Personnel Retention” in Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice’, *Springer International Publishing*, 2023, p. 29-30; Department of National Defence, *Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy* (Ottawa, 2022), p. 15.

of Canadians and Canadian values. For members of the CAF, military service has been a life-long journey that has significantly shaped their identity. As such, being asked to dismantle foundational elements of CAF's culture will certainly be challenging for many to undertake.

Hegemonic masculinity is described by theorists as idealizing characteristics of strength, toughness, competitiveness, aggressiveness, and heterosexuality while also relegating behaviours associated with the display of emotion and vulnerability.¹¹ At its root, hegemonic masculinity amplifies structures of power and difference by valorizing a version of masculinity that is based on the ideology of a *real man*, which in the military is strongly reflected through the historical framing of a warrior.¹² Although normative, hegemonic masculinity is at best performed by a statistical minority of men.¹³ In other words, attaining hegemonic masculine status remains conceptual by design and largely an aspirational stereotype for most men from a pragmatic perspective. Interestingly, hegemonic masculinity cannot exist without its "superordination" over forms of non-hegemonic masculinity and femininity.¹⁴

During WWI and WWII, it was perceived that the physical nature of war required soldiers to demonstrate toughness that would prepare them to fulfill the duties their country required, including applying lethal force. To enable this, militaries such as the CAF adopted a culture of discipline, loyalty, obedience, and cohesion centred around the traditional male warrior spirit.¹⁵ At that time, service members demonstrated toughness through acts of dominance such as brawling, womanizing, drinking and the use of profanity and slang that defines the masculine foundation of military service.¹⁶ Expressions of anything less than this established norm of militarized masculinity lead to marginalization, whether a man or woman, and likely feminization (i.e. opposite of a *real man*).

The historical context above represents only a subset of the deep-rooted behaviours influencing CAF culture. More importantly, the emphasis on military tradition and cohesion perpetuates an intergenerational cycle that allows for these dominant masculine structures to continue to thrive within the CAF.¹⁷ Fundamentally, military traditions such as ceremonies, drill, uniform and social protocol produce a standard of professionalism and uniformity necessary for military operations yet can also preserve undesirable patterns of behaviour and beliefs.¹⁸ As depicted in the introduction

¹¹ Irina Goldenberg and Nancy Otis, *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice, Volume 2*, Canada and International Affairs (Springer International Publishing, 2023), p. 13.

¹² Heather Huhtanen and Joan Johnson-Freese, 'The "Real Man" and National Security', *Orbis* 68, no. 2 (2024): 276–93, p. 280.

¹³ Connell and Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', p. 4.

¹⁴ James W. Messerschmidt, 'The Salience of "Hegemonic Masculinity"', *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 1 (April 2019), p. 86.

¹⁵ Robert Egnell, 'Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness', no. 1 (2016), p. 6.

¹⁶ Nancy Taber, 'After Deschamps: Men, Masculinities, and the Canadian Armed Forces', *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* 4, no. 1 (April 2018): 100–107, p. 103.

¹⁷ Egnell, 'Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness', p.4.

¹⁸ Nancy Taber, 'Understanding and Addressing Opposition to Transforming Military Cultures: Moving from Technical and Humanist to Critical Learning', *Canadian Military Journal* 23 (2023), p. 30-32.

of this paper, the CAF clearly struggles to balance upholding traditional warrior spirit ideals with changes in Canadian societal norms and expectations, including diversity, inclusion, and individualism.

Since its conception, many academics and researchers have criticized this concept of hegemonic masculinity. Some have instead attempted to identify the fixed characteristics of hegemonic masculine practices, while others have applied the term more dynamically for a given space or time.¹⁹ Unfortunately, such interpretations fail to consider the “relational nature of the concept” amidst non-hegemonic masculinities and femininities.²⁰ Consequently, no fixed set of characteristics is associated with the concept, as the emphasis is related to the enactment of power over inferior masculinities and femininities. More importantly, this implies that existing forms of hegemonic masculinity can transform and even be displaced by newer forms of hegemony. This is particularly enlightening for the CAF, where understanding the enduring problematic factors that form hegemonic masculinity and the changing characteristics of conflict can help shape a more modern and inclusive structure.

While the role of hegemonic masculinity is to rationalize gender order within society at large, the application of the concept within the military environment presents a unique dual-reinforcing function. From one perspective, it comes as no surprise that military organizations such as the CAF reinforce structures found within the general society, such as gender order and power.²¹ After all, the CAF is populated by Canadians and responsible for upholding Canadian democratic values, so logically, the gender structures of society are replicated in the CAF. However, from a second perspective, although characteristics of toughness and dominance can clearly be linked to other professions such as business or politics, the military demonstration of hegemonic masculine characteristics is explicitly linked to the use of violence and lethal force against a *lesser man* (i.e. a defeated adversary or inferior group).²² As a result, militaries can be seen to hyper-valorize and idealize hegemonic masculinity as part of the core operating mindset that continues to define military service today.

Connell proposes a Hierarchy of Masculinities model to differentiate the forms of masculine structures and practices within an organization's culture.²³ Figure 1.1 below depicts the four levels of masculinity proposed by Connell, adapted to the CAF, and sequenced in terms of organizational power.

¹⁹ Messerschmidt, ‘The Salience of “Hegemonic Masculinity”’, p. 87-88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Laura Masson and René Moelker, ‘Teaching Gender, Teaching Culture: A Comparative Study of Gendered Dilemmas in Culturally Complex Situations’, in *Warriors or Peacekeepers?*, ed. Kjetil Enstad and Paula Holmes-Eber (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), p. 164-165.

²² Lea Aluie and Kimberley Smith-Evans, ‘Military Masculinity and Culture Change in the Canadian Armed Forces: Briefing Paper’ (Centre for Social Innovation and Community Engagement in Military Affairs, April 2023), p. 11.

²³ Salvo, ‘The Effects of Hegemonic Masculinity on the Endemic of Sexual Misconduct in the United States Army’, p. 31-33.

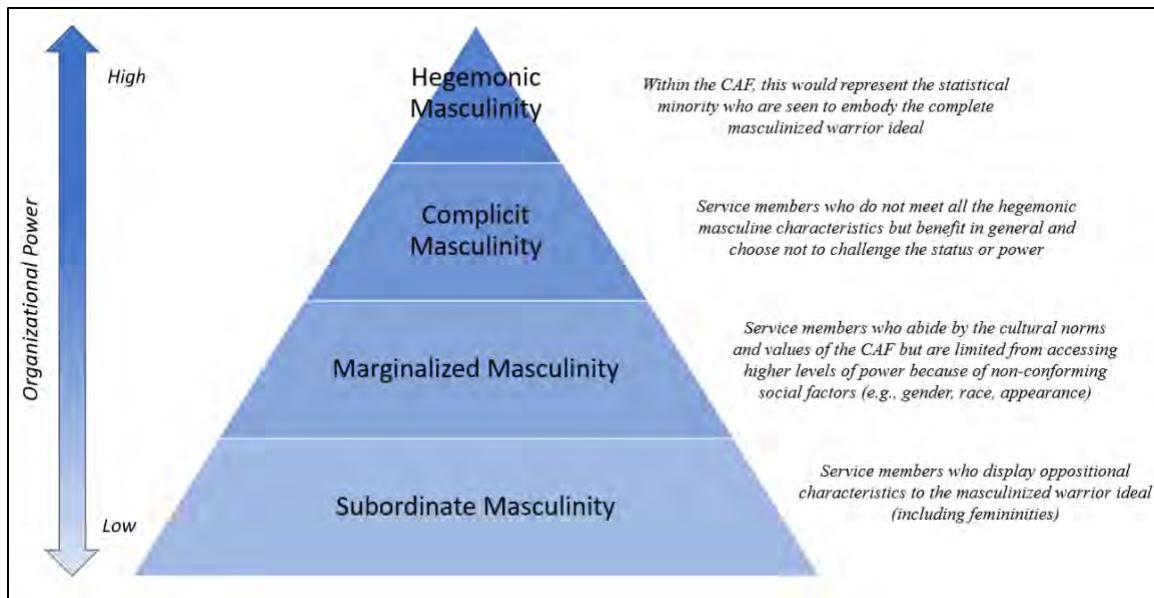


Figure 1.1 – Connell's Hierarchy of Masculinities Adapted to the CAF

Adapted from: Salvo, 'The Effects of Hegemonic Masculinity on the Endemic of Sexual Misconduct in the United States Army', p. 32.

As a model, it is possible that the definitions above do not precisely align with the realities of service members. Particularly, many service members may find that they fall within a spectrum of masculinities, perhaps possibly even displaying characteristics that can be seen to fall within all four levels at various moments of military service. Although these points are rightfully debatable, it should be noted that Connell's work intends to establish a foundation to analyze relations between various masculinities and femininities to enable "solutions to problems of gender relations", akin to this paper.²⁴

Failing to adopt new approaches to understand and address these hegemonic structures will continue to affect the CAF's ability to recruit and retain individuals not representative of the hegemonic masculine ideal, ultimately impacting operational effectiveness. The next part of this paper establishes a comprehensive framework for hegemonic masculinity and characterizes its enduring influence in the CAF.

PART 2 – FRAMING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

Within the CAF, hegemonic masculine norms are established through formal and informal social interactions and "supported by institutional power."²⁵ Specifically,

²⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', p. 838.

²⁵ Katharine A. M. Wright, Matthew Hurley, and Jesus Ignacio Gil Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military: Women Organising from Within*, 1st ed. (First edition. | Abingdon, Oxon; N.Y., NY: Routledge, [2019] |: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429952074>, p. 20.

service members are indoctrinated into a cultural system that establishes expected social norms based on enduring relational models between masculinities and femininities, and that are reinforced within a system of policing, reward/punishment, status, and power.²⁶ For example, upon entering the CAF, service members undergo rigorous physical and mental conditioning at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Through acts of repetition and uniformity, this indoctrination period requires that service members converge towards a single standard of normativity.²⁷ The indoctrination process sets the foundation for what is valued within the military environment, such as acts of “toughness, aggression, and emotional control” through rigorous physical training activities that reinforce masculine dominance.²⁸ From one perspective, it can be seen as necessary for military organizations to require uniformity to focus military action and manage risk within highly chaotic and violent security environments. However, from another perspective, this approach fails to appreciate the innovative capacity that diversity of thought and individualism offer in supporting complex operations.

Within this context, it is not difficult to understand why naively adding women and other marginalized groups to existing CAF structures can be problematic and counter-productive towards dismantling hegemonic masculine barriers.²⁹ In fact, most Western cultures perceive masculine and feminine characteristics as direct opposites (e.g. rational vs emotional, strength vs weakness, aggression vs care, competition vs cooperation, hard vs soft skills).³⁰ Organizations that produce hegemonic masculinity also tend to reinforce patterns of abuse and aggression that can manifest in violent and sexually abusive ways, similar to the systemic sexualized patterns of behaviour extensively reported within the CAF.³¹ A 2021 study on designing an inclusive model of care for CAF Health Services found that members that identified as normative within the CAF were more likely to “report diversity being frequently encouraged and respected” compared to non-normative members, signalling a deep divide within the perspectives and experiences of various CAF identities.³² Enloe proposes a simplistic but insightful

²⁶ Alan Okros, ‘Anticipating Future Culture Struggles Over Contested Military Identities’, *Canadian Military Journal* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2023), p. 44.

²⁷ Sara Greco and Stéphanie Von Hlatky, ‘Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Revising the Concept of Military Professionalism in the Canadian Armed Forces’, in *Rethinking Military Professionalism for the Changing Armed Forces* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), p. 12.

²⁸ Carol O’Brien, Jessica Keith, and Lisa Shoemaker, ‘Don’t Tell: Military Culture and Male Rape’, *Psychological Services* 12, no. 4 (2015), p. 359.

²⁹ Wright, Hurley, and Gil Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military: Women Organising from Within*, p. 30.

³⁰ Jon Swain, ‘Changing the Identities of Young Army Recruits and Ways of Looking at Hegemonic Forms of Military Masculinity’, *Culture, Society & Masculinities*, 2016, p. 4-5; PMI, ‘Pulse of the Profession 2023 Report’ (Project Management Institute, 2023), p. 3, 5.

³¹ Marie Deschamps, ‘External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces’, *Government of Canada*, 27 March 2015; Louise Arbour, ‘Report of the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces’, *Government of Canada*, 20 May 2022.

³² Julia Kowal and Trisha MacLeod, ‘In Service of All: Co-Designing an Inclusive Person-Partnered Model of Care in the Canadian Forces Health Services’, *Ontario College of Art & Design University*, 2021, p. 17.

approach to understanding the ascendancy of hegemonic masculine institutions, which is to observe the employment of women and men within the organizational structure.³³

For the CAF, this would include observing employment practices for the upper echelons of the military Command structure and employment practices for occupations that directly affect military operations. For example, the homogeneous composition of the CAF Command staff featured in the infamous 10 February 2021 publication on X (formerly Twitter) during a discussion led by the Chief of Defence Staff on diversity in the CAF offers a grim reminder of the hegemonic barriers that remain prevalent.³⁴ Whether intentionally published or not, this social media post offered some interesting dialogue that remains relevant today. One can argue that change does not occur *overnight*, and it will take time before women begin to more meaningfully populate the senior levels of Command, while an opposing argument could be that women are simply not interested in military service or attaining senior levels of Command.

Unfortunately, such arguments fail to appreciate the complexity of the hegemonic structures that moderate the CAF and the physiologically reversing influence those structures can have on service members and Canadian society. The 2023 public opinion survey of the CAF demonstrates a persistent and statistically significant decline in overall favourable results for “Pride in the CAF” since 2018, as well as a serious drop in the perception of the CAF as a “good career choice” for women from 70% to 58% since 2020.³⁵ As previously mentioned, naively integrating marginalized groups without first addressing the enduring hegemonic masculine structures can be harmful to the operational effectiveness of the CAF, affecting the ability to recruit and retain members. Furthermore, indirect costs associated with attrition, such as “lower morale, lost productivity, lost corporate memory, and added workload on those remaining compound retention concerns,” impact the operational effectiveness of the CAF.³⁶

Many western nations appear to be experiencing a similar gap between the perceived military culture and what is expected from their respective societies, which is likely contributing to challenges in recruitment and retention of service members³⁷. A recent report by the UK Defence Committee reveals that the UK military not only continues to struggle to recruit women into the Regular Force, but systematically fails to support women in achieving their full potential.³⁸ Based on statistical trends, the UK Ministry of Defence considers that it could take decades to “over 300 years” to establish a meaningful presence of women within the senior officer ranks. Similarly, the United

³³ Wright, Hurley, and Gil Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military: Women Organising from Within*, p. 28-29.

³⁴ Michael Fraiman, ‘The Canadian Military: Not a Picture of Diversity’, *Maclean’s*, 11 February 2021, <https://macleans.ca/news/canada/the-canadian-military-not-a-picture-of-diversity/>.

³⁵ Department of National Defence, *Views of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) 2022-2023 Tracking Study: Final Report* (Ottawa, Ontario: Department of National Defence, 2023), p. 12, 50.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Lee Berthiaume, ‘Defence Chief Calls on Canadians to Rally behind Military during Personnel Crisis’, *CBC*, 15 October 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/wayne-eyre-canada-military-personnel-shortage-1.6617951>.

³⁸ UK House of Commons, ‘Women in the Armed Forces: From Recruitment to Civilian Life’, 2021, p.3.

States Air Force Academy claims that, based on recruitment data, it will take a “further 100 years for women to represent half of an entry class.”³⁹

Consequently, the enduring hegemonic masculine framing that underpins the CAF fosters a pattern of behaviour and culture that continues to devalue the contributions of non-hegemonic service members and is harmful to the operational effectiveness of the CAF. Figure 2.1 below depicts the reinforcing functions within the CAF that contribute to the enduring perpetuation of hegemonic masculine structures.

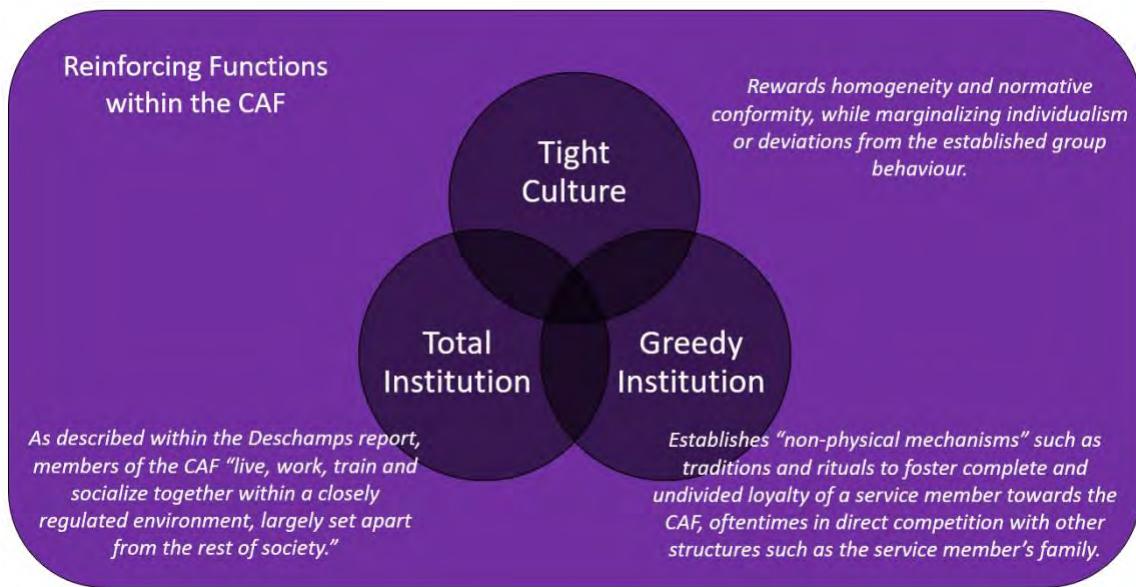


Figure 2.1 – Reinforcing Functions and Culture in the CAF

Sources: Marie Deschamps, ‘External Review into Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces’, *Government of Canada*, 27 March 2015, p. 13; Mady Segal, ‘The Military and the Family as Greedy Institutions’, *University of Maryland*, Fall 1986, p. 11-12; Alan Okros, ‘Anticipating Future Culture Struggles Over Contested Military Identities’, *Canadian Military Journal* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2023), p. 262-264.

Naturally, conforming to these structures enables service members to access heightened levels of cultural capital and relative power within the CAF. On the contrary, attempting to disrupt these structures threatens the organization’s power dynamics and hegemonic construct, thus reducing a service member’s ability to acquire cultural capital and power. For example, the implementation of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) within the CAF continues to be seen as a policy requirement rather than a critical

³⁹ Jarrod Pendleton, “‘This Is a Man’s Job’: Challenging the Masculine ‘Warrior Culture’ at the U.S. Air Force Academy”, *Armed Forces & Society* 46, no. 1 (January 2020), p. 164.

approach to empower decision-makers, particularly when “GBA+ intersects in a way they don’t like with operations,” leading to the marginalization of advocates for change.⁴⁰

Based on the findings from parts 1 and 2 of this paper, Figure 2.2 below was developed to illustrate the relational pattern of how hegemonic masculinity is produced, reinforced, and perpetuated within the CAF.

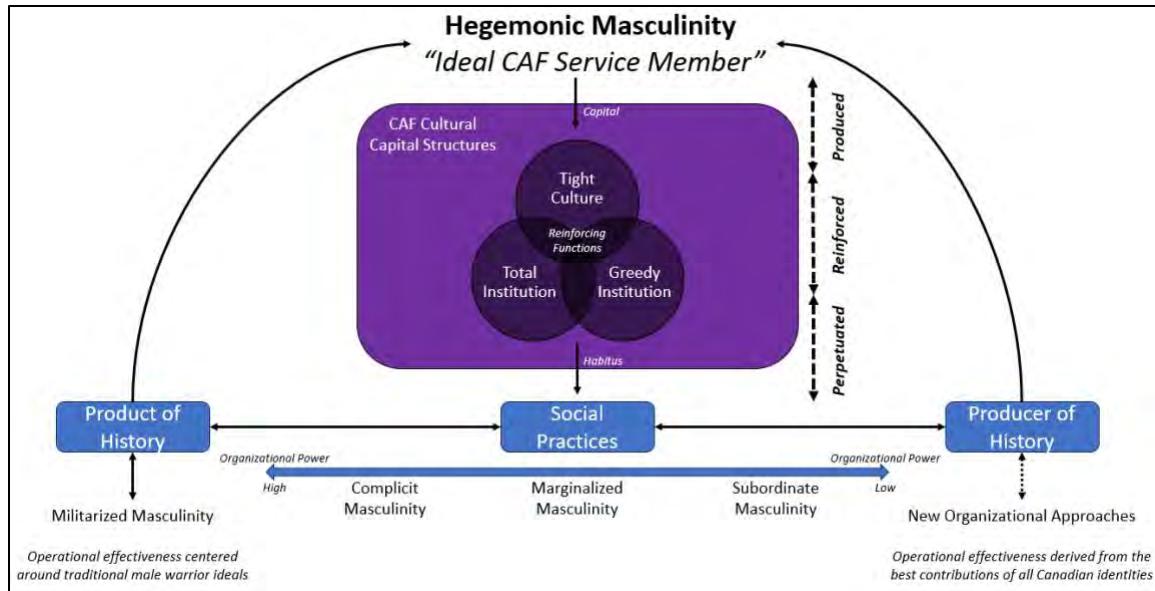


Figure 2.2 – CAF Hegemonic Masculinity and Cultural Capital

Adapted from: Marcus Klasson and Sofia Ulver, ‘Masculinising Domesticity: An Investigation of Men’s Domestic Foodwork’, *Journal of Marketing Management* 31, no. 15–16 (13 October 2015), p. 1660; Sarah Salvo, ‘The Effects of Hegemonic Masculinity on the Endemic of Sexual Misconduct in the United States Army’ (United States Army, 18 June 2021), p. 32.

From top to bottom, the figure defines how hegemonic masculinity within the CAF underpins existing cultural capital structures, setting the conditions to generate the necessary “perceptions, aspirations and practices” desired by the CAF (*habitus*).⁴¹ From left to right, the figure outlines the precedence of organizational power inspired by Connell’s Hierarchy of Masculinity model. Notably, the box on the bottom-right titled *Producer of History* serves two purposes.

First, as previously mentioned, hegemonic masculinity within the CAF is not fixed, and the enactment of dominance over non-hegemonic masculinities and

⁴⁰ Rachael Johnstone and Bessma Momani, ‘Gender Mainstreaming in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence: Lessons on the Implementation of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)’, *Armed Forces & Society* 48, no. 2 (April 2022), p. 262–264.

⁴¹ Jason D. Edgerton and Lance W. Roberts, ‘Cultural Capital or Habitus? Bourdieu and beyond in the Explanation of Enduring Educational Inequality’, *Theory and Research in Education* 12, no. 2 (July 2014), p. 198.

femininities can evolve. From the GBA+ example above, although CAF leaders have begun to designate Gender Advisors as part of their key staff to better understand institutional barriers, these advisors remain relegated below the traditional operational staff, allowing militarized masculinity to prevail.⁴² Second, the dotted bi-directional arrow on the bottom-right of the figure represents the potential that non-hegemonic and feminist characteristics have in ultimately establishing a new inclusive approach based on the best contributions of all Canadian identities.

Failing to displace these hegemonic masculine structures will continue to erode the public opinion of the CAF, its ability to recruit and retain members, and its overall operational effectiveness. The following part of this paper explores how non-hegemonic masculine, and feminine characteristics can enable operational effectiveness by shaping a more modern and inclusive culture within the CAF while addressing the changing characteristics of conflict.

PART 3 – CONCEPTUALIZING AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH

As previously mentioned, militarized masculinity occupies its hegemonic position through its superordination and domination over non-hegemonic masculinities and femininities. Therefore, dismantling hegemonic masculinity in the CAF is less about introspection and more about understanding the interrelations between militarized masculinity and other identities.⁴³ The third part of this paper deconstructs masculinities and femininities to conceptualize an inclusive approach that will enhance the operational effectiveness of the CAF.

For the US military, the deployment to Iraq in the early 2000s represents an era where more women were involved in war-making activities than ever before.⁴⁴ At the institutional level, female participation in war has been qualified by their ability to uphold traditional masculine military requirements to “endure the stresses of combat [since] men’s characteristics... are superior to women’s for the purpose of fighting wars.”⁴⁵ In other words, rather than supporting the evolution of masculine characteristics and norms, women have been expected to indoctrinate into militarized masculine ideals. Therefore, while men are assumed to be inherently masculine, women must persistently prove their masculine capacity.⁴⁶

The CAF and Canadian media demonstrated a similar struggle during the military mission in Afghanistan. Throughout the war, there appeared to be contradictory statements of female soldiers as equal to male soldiers (“a soldier is a soldier”) mixed

⁴² Johnstone and Momani, ‘Gender Mainstreaming in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence: Lessons on the Implementation of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)’, p. 262-264.

⁴³ Aluie and Smith-Evans, ‘Military Masculinity and Culture Change in the Canadian Armed Forces: Briefing Paper’, p. 32-33.

⁴⁴ Erika Svedberg, ‘Militarization, Women, and Men: Gendered Militarizations’, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 9.

⁴⁵ Laura Sjoberg, ‘Agency, Militarized Femininity and Enemy Others: Observations From The War In Iraq’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9, no. 1 (March 2007), p. 88.

⁴⁶ *Abid*, p. 93.

with messaging that female soldiers perform a distinct role compared to male soldiers.⁴⁷ Evidently, this constant and implicit comparison to the ideal masculine soldier gives little room for females and other forms of agency to exist as “soldiers in their own right”, upholding beliefs that soldiering is inherently male or masculine.⁴⁸ More importantly, the logic in distinguishing soldier performance as male and female fails to consider the plurality of masculinities and femininities and the complexity of intersectionality.⁴⁹ Interestingly enough, although female service members composed only 2.3% of CAF Regular Force members within the Combat Arms trades in 2012, they represented approximately 8% of all soldiers deployed to combat units in Afghanistan.

Similarly, with the ongoing war in Ukraine, women are being recognized and promoted into Officer and combat positions, and occasionally leading Ukrainian combat units into frontline deployments.⁵⁰ Although a limited sample size, the featured article on CNN does not attempt to compare male and female soldiering but instead offers a complementary perspective. Seemingly, fostering a complementary approach to developing cultural capital and establishing a sense of value and belonging, as opposed to conformity and competition, is crucial to displacing hegemonic masculinity within the CAF institution.

Below the institutional level, the gender identities of individual service members can be dynamic and tend to evolve based on societal and cultural influences. A study conducted among former service members in South Korea found evidence of the “possibility of change in hegemonic militarized masculinities at the individual level.”⁵¹ The study suggests that upon entry into military service, service members are indoctrinated into a hegemonic masculine system that sets the standard for soldiering, a construct similarly found in the CAF. Now that survey participants have completed their military service, they describe the “ideal characteristics of being a good soldier... [as] caring, understanding, respectful, not domineering and willing to listen to and help others.”⁵² Although the survey is limited to former military members, the findings support certain perspectives that gender should not be viewed as a static social construct but a dynamic “process” continually evolving through everyday interactions and relations among men and women.⁵³ Arguably, military service has always required service

⁴⁷ Maya Eichler, ‘Women and Combat in Canada: Continuing Tensions between “Difference” and “Equality”’, *Critical Studies on Security* 1, no. 2 (August 2013), p. 257-258.

⁴⁸ Pooja Gopal, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity and Militarised Femininity: Military, Women and Combat’, *Vantage* 4, no. 1 (30 April 2023), p. 39; Aluie and Smith-Evans, ‘Military Masculinity and Culture Change in the Canadian Armed Forces: Briefing Paper’, p. 60.

⁴⁹ Concept to describe how systems of inequality such as gender, race, sexual orientation, ability and class can intersect to create complex social relations (Steliana Nedera, ‘What Is Intersectionality? And Why Is It Important for Gender Equality?’, *United Nations*, 27 May 2023, <https://www.undp.org/bosnia-herzegovina/blog/what-intersectionality-and-why-it-important-gender-equality#:~:text=Intersectionality%20is%20a%20term%20used,all%20at%20the%20same%20time>).

⁵⁰ Svitlana Vlasova, ‘Heading Platoons, Repairing Machines and Doing Twice as Much’, *CNN*, 9 March 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/09/europe/ukraine-women-roles-war-intl-cmd/index.html>.

⁵¹ Seungeun Chung, ‘Challenges to Hegemonic Constructions of Militarized Masculinities in the Neoliberal Era: The Case of South Korea’, *The Journal of Men’s Studies*, 13 December 2023, p. 15.

⁵² *Ibid*, 13-14.

⁵³ Jessica Williams, Sophie Yates, and James Connor, ‘Creating a New Pathway for Change in the Military Using Gender as Process’, *Gender, Work & Organization* 31, no. 1 (January 2024), p. 214.

members to exhibit a sense of care through comradery; however, these characteristics remain subordinate to traditional warrior ideals necessary for combat operations. From a dichotomist perspective, the dominating and competitive nature of hegemonic masculinity likely inhibits individuals who identify with it from adopting a complementary approach towards masculinities and femininities.

It is reasonable to question whether the existing leadership practices within the CAF support the perpetuation of hegemonic masculine structures. Based on existing leadership doctrine, the CAF identifies Transformational Leadership as the “superior” and “practical” model for all service members.⁵⁴ When paired with positive role modelling, Transformational Leadership can be a powerful model for Commanders to inspire change within an organization and could be useful within the context of this paper. However, when paired with acts of real or perceived negative role modelling, Transformational Leadership can foster cynicism, distrust, and a hyper-resistance to change.⁵⁵ Given the current climate in the CAF related to retention, benefits, cultural evolution, and sexual misconduct, it is unlikely that the principles of Transformational Leadership alone would be sufficient in displacing hegemonic masculinity.

Inclusive Leadership offers a more holistic approach that extends “beyond assimilation strategies or organizational demography to empowerment and participation of all, by removing obstacles that cause exclusion and marginalization.”⁵⁶ Specifically, Simmons and Yawson argue that key drivers such as globalization, the rapid pace of technology and changing demographics across societies are increasing the speed at which leaders are required to “navigate [through] disruptive complexities.”⁵⁷ This remains equally true for the CAF, and to preserve operational effectiveness, leaders need to possess competencies that enable the optimization of diverse talent and expertise, foster cohesion and collaboration, and support high-performing environments. Evidently, the collaborative and comprehensive nature of Inclusive Leadership poses some risks in terms of decision-making pace since it generally requires more time to execute than more direct forms of leadership. In other words, Inclusive Leadership tends to be less direct than Transformational Leadership and more consensus-based, which can lead to increased decision-making time in favour of collaboration. However, by establishing a culture of inclusion and trust, a deeper culture capital is expected to develop that is optimized for military operations based on the best contributions of a more diverse pool of service members. In short, Inclusive Leadership is less focused on the actions undertaken by the leader and more focused on institutional leaders setting the conditions to deliver operational effects through the best contributions of service members.

⁵⁴ Department of Defence, ‘Leadership in the CAF: Conceptual Foundations’ (Government of Canada, 2005), p. 69-74.

⁵⁵ Z Rahman and H Kholidi Hadi, ‘Does Organizational Culture Matter in Organizational Change? Transformational Leadership and Cynicism About Organizational Change’, *KnE Social Sciences* 3, no. 11 (24 March 2019), p. 354-356; Allan English, ‘Corruption in the Canadian Military? Destroying Trust in the Chain of Command’, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 23, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 32–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2016.1250654>, p. 34, 43-44.

⁵⁶ Sara V. Simmons and Robert M. Yawson, ‘Developing Leaders for Disruptive Change: An Inclusive Leadership Approach’, *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 24, no. 4 (November 2022), p. 245.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 243.

Given the violent nature of certain military operations, it is reasonable to question whether Inclusive Leaders, through its less direct approach, can portray the competencies to establish an inclusionary culture while also delivering lethal and timely effects. As former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern stated, “it takes courage and strength to be empathetic,” reinforcing the previous argument that masculinities and femininities are not mutually exclusive and should be applied complementarily.⁵⁸ In other words, including traditionally feminist characteristics into the foundation of soldiering does not come at the cost of masculine characteristics; it is not a zero-sum game. The complementary relationship between acts of caring and strength can serve as a basis for contemporary leadership. It can enhance the operational effectiveness of the CAF in dealing with complex, human-centric problems. As such, leadership approaches play a crucial role in shaping a more modern and inclusive structure in the CAF while addressing the changing characteristics of conflict.

Interestingly, a new structure within the CAF based on inclusivity would result in an institution that “equally values masculine and feminine traits so much so that they cease to be masculine and feminine.”⁵⁹ Ceasing the assigning of gender to traits has the potential of dismantling the gender hierarchy between men and women. Ultimately, this conceptualization presents a tremendous opportunity for the CAF to transform institutional perceptions on the gendered nature of military service, granting the CAF access to a larger demographic of Canadian identities and increasing the CAF’s ability to recruit, retain and remain operationally effective.

PART 4 – DISMANTLING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

The final part of this paper recommends actions to dismantle hegemonic masculinity and its enduring impact on the operational effectiveness of the CAF. Currently, there are several ongoing efforts within DND to evolve the culture within the CAF.⁶⁰ Based on the framework presented in Figure 2.2, part four of this paper recommends three focus areas to address how hegemonic masculinity is produced, reinforced, and perpetuated.

First, in dismantling how hegemonic masculinity is produced, the CAF needs to acknowledge and address the perceptions of discrimination against service members perceived to embody militarized masculine characteristics. According to the 2022 report from the Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination, white men account for more than 70% of the population of the CAF, while the same figure in the Canadian labour market is at 39% and quickly declining.⁶¹ This means that a significant portion of

⁵⁸ BBC News, Jacinda Ardern: ‘It takes strength to be an empathetic leader’, 16 November 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruDJp64prhc>.

⁵⁹ Wright, Hurley, and Gil Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military: Women Organising from Within*, p. 25.

⁶⁰ Department of National Defence, ‘Defence Team Culture Evolution’, 12 June 2023,

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/transition-materials/transition-assoc-dm/culture-change.html>.

⁶¹ Department of National Defence, ‘Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination’, January 2022, p. 15.

the CAF may feel overtly targeted, in many ways relatable but distinct to the spectrum of marginalization experienced by many other groups and identities. Working within this paradigm is critical, and the CAF needs to adopt a “problem-posing” approach that actively engages all identities toward dismantling hegemonic masculinity and reimagining a more inclusive structure.⁶² In fact, the role of service members who possess higher amounts of cultural capital, as depicted in part two of this paper, is fundamental to a change process that aims to foster an environment where all service members can “bring their whole self to work”, feel valued, contribute meaningfully, and thrive.⁶³

Second, in dismantling how hegemonic masculinity is reinforced, based on the principles found in physics, “collective action usually depends on [garnering] a critical mass.”⁶⁴ Although contested, some researchers suggest minority groups comprising between 15-40% representation within an organization “begin to influence the culture of the group”, where 30% represents the point of critical mass to implement institutional-level changes.⁶⁵ Evidently, most marginalized groups, such as women in the CAF, do not currently meet the point of critical mass, and many others, such as indigenous peoples, will never reach those figures due to their relatively low populations. As such, the following sub-paragraphs define and describe how critical acts, critical voice, and critical agency can serve as complementary approaches to creating a similar effect as critical mass.

Through the power of allyship, critical acts emphasize a complementary approach between majority and minority groups toward identifying harmful activities and reimagining more inclusive structures. Beyond focusing on diversity targets and other integrationist approaches that do not necessarily require a reconceptualization of existing structures, critical acts favour an agenda-setting approach to provide marginalized groups with the opportunity to reshape organizational structures.⁶⁶ In Afghanistan, employment of women and men on Provincial Reconstruction Teams enabled greater community outreach, leading to enhanced intelligence collection of insurgency activities, increased situational awareness for Commanders and a more meaningful contribution to human

⁶² Aluie and Smith-Evans, ‘Military Masculinity and Culture Change in the Canadian Armed Forces: Briefing Paper’, p. 62.

⁶³ Al Okros, ‘Diversity and The Defence Team in Managing Security and Defence in the 2020s and Beyond’, *Breakout Educational Network*, 2023, p. 130.

⁶⁴ Pamela Oliver, Gerald Marwell, and Ruy Teixeira, ‘A Theory of the Critical Mass. I. Interdependence, Group Heterogeneity, and the Production of Collective Action’, *University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Notre Dame* 91, no. 3 (November 1985), p. 522.

⁶⁵ Drude Dahlerup, ‘The Story of the Theory of Critical Mass’, *Politics & Gender* 2, no. 04 (December 2006), p. 494; Egnell and Alam, *Women and Gender Perspective in the Military*, p. 262.

⁶⁶ Johnstone and Momani, ‘Gender Mainstreaming in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence: Lessons on the Implementation of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)’, p. 250; Gopal, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity and Militarised Femininity: Military, Women and Combat’, p. 7; Williams, Yates, and Connor, ‘Creating a New Pathway for Change in the Military Using Gender as Process’, p. 212, 217-218; Wright, Hurley, and Gil Ruiz, *NATO, Gender and the Military: Women Organising from Within*, p. 15.

security.⁶⁷ While recognizing the comparative advantages women offer to military operations, it is crucial that female military service not be exclusively characterized or reduced to an integrationist approach as this would largely only serve to preserve deep-rooted structures of masculinity. In other words, simply adding women to existing masculine structures within the CAF fails to harness the true potential of gender-empowered operational effectiveness. Adapting a popular Verna Myers metaphor, an integrationist approach would be inviting someone to a party, an inclusive approach would be asking that person to dance, and an agenda-setting approach fosters a sense of belonging that empowers that person to decide the room layout, music, lighting, and décor.⁶⁸

Critical voice empowers marginalized and under-represented groups by providing a platform to speak. This includes fostering an environment of belonging and trust, providing mentorship, listening to ideas and concerns, and ensuring the “freedom to question and reassess” institutional structures and practices.⁶⁹ Many organizations have also experienced the positive effects of reverse mentoring, which could be a powerful tool for those with high levels of cultural capital and power within the CAF to better appreciate the realities of marginalized service members.⁷⁰

Lastly, Critical Agency focuses on representing marginalized groups across all operations, planning, and Command levels. Within the CAF, this could include elevating the role of the Defence Advisory Groups and Gender Advisors, and positioning change agents within key stakeholder positions such as within senior leadership and at lower ranks. These measures aim to directly influence the reimagining of an inclusive environment in everyday interactions and activities.⁷¹ Furthermore, Gelinas examines the extreme difficulty for the CAF to overcome hegemonic masculinity from within the organization, given the deep and powerful structures that “unconsciously” protect the institution and “trap” its members.⁷² Although challenging for total institutions such as the CAF, active participation from external experts and change agents is fundamental to breaking down these unconscious barriers.

Finally, in dismantling how hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated, this paper advocates that the CAF adopt a more dynamic understanding of the concept of gender. As discussed in part three of this paper, service members experience and assume a range of masculinities and femininities that evolve complementarily through social interaction

⁶⁷ Written Tobie Whitman and Jacqueline O’Neill, ‘Attention to Gender Increases Security in Operations: Examples from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)’, *The Institute for Inclusive Security*, April 2012, p. 1-2, 13.

⁶⁸ Verna Myers, ‘What If I Say the Wrong Thing?: 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People’, *American Bar Association*, 2013.

⁶⁹ Kristian Alm and David S. A. Guttormsen, ‘Enabling the Voices of Marginalized Groups of People in Theoretical Business Ethics Research’, *Journal of Business Ethics* 182, no. 2 (January 2023), p. 309-310.

⁷⁰ Department of National Defence, ‘Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination’, p. 33.

⁷¹ Egnell and Alam, *Women and Gender Perspective in the Military*, p. 257.

⁷² Karyne Gelinas, ‘Sexual Misconduct, Abuse of Power, Adultery and Secrecy’, *The Conversation*, 13 April 2021, <https://theconversation.com/sexual-misconduct-abuse-of-power-adultery-and-secrecy-what-i-witnessed-in-canadas-military-158345>.

over time. In this regard, gender within the CAF should no longer be construed as a static or categorial concept, as it only serves to preserve binary constructs of identity. Instead, when viewed as an ever-evolving process, gender can be a powerful tool to foster inclusivity by acknowledging the complexity of individual identities and expressions.⁷³ Evidently, this would result in a serious shift to the reinforcing functions identified in Figure 2.1 of this paper, moving away from conformist paradigms in the CAF towards concepts of individualism and uniqueness. Coupled with Inclusive Leadership, this approach to gender has the potential to foster a more inclusive form of cultural capital in the CAF, resulting in a more collective and operationally effective workforce.

CONCLUSION

To establish a modern force and inclusive culture, the CAF must undertake new approaches to address the systemic root causes, structures, and barriers marginalized groups face. This paper identified hegemonic masculinity within the CAF as a threat to operational effectiveness and recommended actions to dismantle these structures.

The first part of this paper described the historical norms that have formed military service such as toughness and dominance, and explored the changing characteristics of military operations. Notably, although the CAF can be seen to assume hegemonic masculine structures found in Canadian society, the military's unique demonstration of dominance and lethal force against a *lesser man* serves to reinforce the concept further. These structures continue to have an enduring impact on public opinion, the ability to recruit and retain, and the overall operational effectiveness of the CAF.

The second part of this paper proposed hegemonic masculinity within the CAF as a fundamental component to the continued perpetuation of traditional militarized masculine structures and behaviours. As represented in Figure 2.2, part two proposed a framework for the relational pattern of how hegemonic masculinity is produced, reinforced, and perpetuated within the CAF. Specifically, the figure outlines the potential of non-hegemonic and feminist characteristics in establishing a new inclusive approach based on the best contributions of all Canadian identities.⁷⁴

The third part of this paper demonstrated the transformational potential of gender perspectives by deconstructing masculinity and femininity to conceptualize a new inclusive approach for the CAF. Insights from the female agency in theatres of operations and shifting masculinities throughout military service highlighted the complementary relationship between acts of caring and strength, serving as a basis for contemporary soldiering.

The final part of this paper recommended three actions to dismantle how hegemonic masculinity is produced, reinforced, and perpetuated. First, to dismantle how hegemonic masculinity is produced, the CAF needs to better engage service members

⁷³ Williams, Yates, and Connor, 'Creating a New Pathway for Change in the Military Using Gender as Process', p. 214.

⁷⁴ Lane, *Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*, p. 360.

who possess higher amounts of cultural capital as they are fundamental to the change process. Second, to dismantle how hegemonic masculinity is reinforced, this paper recommended critical acts, critical voice, and critical agency as fundamental approaches to creating the effect of critical mass toward change. This includes adopting an agenda-setting approach where marginalized groups feel empowered to make decisions, establishing efforts to provide marginalized groups with a platform to question institutional structures, and ensuring internal and external representation at all levels of operations, planning and Command.

Lastly, to dismantle how hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated, this paper recommended adopting gender as a process within the CAF to foster inclusivity through acknowledgement of the complexity of individual identities and expressions. Inclusive Leadership as a core competency has the potential to establish an organization that values the operational effectiveness of each service member as a soldier in their own right. In the words of Kurt Cobain, *come as you are*.

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