

DND Policy Review Roundtable: An Educational Program for Integrating Gender Perspectives Dr. Nancy Taber, CD, Capt (Ret'd)

Introduction

I would like to thank Minister Sajjan and Minister Hajdu for the opportunity to provide my input concerning the integration of gender perspectives into defence policy. I served in the Canadian Armed Forces from 1989-2002. During that time, I attended Royal Military College, trained as an air navigator at 17 Wing Winnipeg and 406 Squadron, and deployed as a Tactical Coordinator with Sea King helicopters on HMCS Iroquois, Athabaskan, and Toronto with 423 Squadron. I worked in Operations at 12 Wing Shearwater, where I was also the Workplace Relations Training Coordinator. I am now an academic at Brock University with research expertise in the area of war, gender, and learning.

In this submission, I explore how masculinities and femininities intersect with military culture, detail how feminist pedagogy could assist with gender integration, and outline recommendations for an educational plan that would bring gender studies into every aspect of training and service. In this way, a gender lens would be embedded into all military tasks, decisions, and policies because military members would be trained to do so throughout their careers. Developing and delivering such a program of study would be a significant commitment; however, it would be a proactive way to address gender concerns in a positive, non-punitive, and effective manner. Furthermore, it would indicate to CAF members and to the public that DND and the Canadian government take gender integration seriously. If, as General Baril stated, implementing gender integration and employment equity is “one of the hardest and most challenging tasks undertaken by the CF,” then surely this challenge must be tackled head on, with time and resources allocated as necessary.

Masculinities, Femininities, and Military Culture

Over the last several decades, the CAF has worked to include women, moving from their total exclusion, through limited participation, to full participation, at least in policy. However, women are still a minority in the military, particularly in operational and combat trades, and women’s retention rates are lower. UNSCR 1325 calls for the increased participation, contribution, and decision-making of women at all levels in relation to conflict, peace, and security. It also calls on all actors to integrate a gender perspective, to ask: How can adopting a gender lens inform actions and decision-making in ways that would otherwise be missed? Cynthia Enloe terms this stance as adopting a “feminist curiosity” through “gender analysis.” She problematizes the effect of, among other concepts, militarization, feminization, and masculinization on women and men. In short, gender is about men as much as it is about women; with respect to the military, it is about how the military organization as a whole privileges hegemonic masculinity, a gender performance that Raewyn Connell explains as valuing a specific blend of toughness that inhabits a male body and devalues anything perceived as feminine. Notably, hegemonic masculinity can be as damaging to men as to women, although in differing ways.

It is important neither to position women as the problem (as in, if there were no women in the military, there would be no issue), nor as deficient (if women acted like men, they would be fine), nor as victims (if women were tougher, they could take care of themselves). Women are strong active agents from diverse sexual, racial, religious, class, and national backgrounds. They form as much as a spectrum as men do with respect to height, weight, strength, ability, intelligence, education, and leadership skills. However, while men are perceived as military members, women are typically perceived as female military members; there is a caveat to their service. Although men also struggle with the demands of military service, they are not marked by their gender in the ways that women are. Furthermore, women can be just as likely as men to engage in gendered and patriarchal thinking; it is not that women are good

and men are bad, but that women are differently affected than men by organizational policies and practices.

The Deschamps Report concluded that “there is an underlying sexualized culture in the CAF.... Cultural change is therefore key.” OP HONOUR, a result of that report, is intended to “eliminate harmful and inappropriate behaviour within the CAF.” This is a start, but the marginalization of women in the CAF goes beyond such behaviour to unconscious attitudes and assumptions about the roles of men and women in the military. The Problem Definition of OP HONOUR states that “Harmful and inappropriate sexual behaviour includes but is not limited to actions that perpetuate stereotypes and modes of thinking that devalue members on the basis of their sex, sexuality, or sexual orientation.” This statement is central to the examples that follow it, such as “unacceptable language or jokes; ...material of a sexual nature; offensive sexual remarks...” While it may be relatively simple to find and dispose of a Playboy calendar, it is much more difficult to address the thought process by which members decided it was acceptable to display in the first place. Furthermore, men and women do not fit neatly into the binary of predator/prey. A focus on women’s harassment by men, although an important point of analysis, does not capture the larger issue of, as LCdr Karen Davis explains, the “warrior culture” of the CAF that, among other things, presupposes that men protect *and* victimize women. In a culture such as this, the word woman is often used as a pejorative. Therefore, it is this causal sentiment that must be rooted out; this is a long term project that I submit can be addressed through educational programs and everyday learning opportunities.

Education and Feminist Pedagogy

A central tenet of critical adult education theory is that change will not occur through rote-based informational competency education. Arguably, this was the approach of the Standard for Harassment and Racism Prevention (SHARP) training, an earlier intervention into addressing sexism and racism in the CAF. It was a laudable start, but was inadequate for transformational change, which is needed in order for adults to revise their worldviews. Such change will only occur with providing opportunities for critical conversations, deep discussions, and a search for new understandings of the world. Feminist pedagogues and scholars have critiqued patriarchal society through their teaching and publication, resulting in slow societal change. I argue that a program of training which invites members to engage in a gender analysis of their everyday lives in and beyond the CAF can help members explore, problematize, and change military culture.

Recommendations

- Develop a program of study that would include a required course/workshop in gender studies at every training opportunity, from basic training up to and beyond Staff School, including professional development and in every year of military college.
- Place gender integration and analysis at the centre of training in a way that positions gender as important as any other topic.
- Include an intersectional focus that explores the ways in which other forms of marginalization intersect with gender.
- Create small group discussion-based learning, facilitated by an experienced educator knowledgeable about gender studies and the military.
- Scaffold the courses so that each builds on the former, beginning from an introductory discussion of gender, society, and the military into a more complex analysis.
- Discuss at every level how a gender awareness can be integrated into selected policies and practices.