

# Non-Commissioned Officers and Attitudes towards Military Women in the Norwegian Air Force:

“It’s always nice when there are girls around”

By Trond Sveta Sand & Kari Fasting\*

Norway is looked upon as one of the world’s most egalitarian societies and is often highlighted as a model for other countries when it comes to gender equality. For many years, gender equality has been emphasized in political initiatives<sup>1</sup> and legislation,<sup>2</sup> and Norwegian Society is generally characterized by a broad female participation in public life and in important institutions like education and politics.<sup>3</sup> This is mirrored in the fact that Norway consistently has occupied a top-three position in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2013). The political focus on gender equality has also had an important influence on the Norwegian Armed Forces. When access for women to all military positions was implemented in 1985, Norway was one of the first countries to do so (Orsten, 1999). Accordingly, increasing female representation in the Armed Forces has been a political objective for almost three decades. Yet, such efforts have not been very successful so far, as only 10 percent of today’s Norwegian military personnel are women (Norwegian Armed Forces, 2015). The poor female representation in the Armed Forces seems paradoxical in view of Norway’s global standing as a frontrunner in gender equality, and in particular of the long-term emphasis on increasing its military’s female-to-male ratio.

This is also one of the main focuses of the 2007 White Paper “Increased Recruitment of Women in the Armed Forces” (Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2007) which brought renewed political attention to the gender imbalance in the Norwegian military. It was declared that previous initiatives to recruit more women needed to be followed up, and that new actions to increase female representation should be implemented. One of the aspects addressed in the White Paper was the need for research to

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Norway was leading the way when in 1978 it established the world’s first gender equality Ombud. See LDO – Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> In 1981, it became legally required that both women and men had to be represented in all public committees, boards, etc. In 2006, another milestone was broken when all stock corporations were legally required to have at least 40 percent representation of each gender on their boards. See LDO – Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> According to “The Global Gender Gap Report 2013”, while Norway ranked number one in both “economic participation and opportunity” and “educational attainment”, it ranked only third in “political empowerment”. See World Economic Forum, 2013.

secure a knowledge-based foundation for new actions. This call for research has elicited several studies (e.g. Kristiansen, *et al.*, 2008; Lauritzen, *et al.*, 2009) but the impression is that the main focus has been on women's opinions about and experiences with the military, whereas empirical studies about men and masculinities seem to be few (Sand & Fasting, 2012). Hence, in the face of men's dominant position in the culture, it seems essential to include them and the role they play in the Norwegian armed forces' unbalanced gender distribution. The main objective of the present study was thus to increase the knowledge about men and masculinities in Norway's military.

## **Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical outline for this article is a gender perspective that borrows from R.W. Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; 1995, Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). To have a gender perspective means that gender as a social construction is taken into account. Gender refers to cultural meanings and connections associated with one's biological sex and concern the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Gender also refers to what is considered as appropriate behaviour for women and men and thereby to what is masculine and what is feminine. This means that we have a tendency to draw on culturally gendered stereotypes when we evaluate people.

"Stereotyping" refers to a process where the expectation of a person is based upon specific characteristics, such as biological sex, where this becomes so strong that it dominates the perceptions of that person (Valian, 1999). An example would be a view that women are more caring than men, although research show that women and men are alike in most psychological variables (Hyde, 2005). This leads to assigning a person an identity based on prejudice. However, gender is constantly constructed and reconstructed based on individuals' interactions and social life where most combine both masculine and feminine characteristics (Connell, 2002). Hence, man and woman are not fixed categories and gender is not something we are or have, but something we produce and do (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

From this perspective, masculinity is an analytical concept that can give us a better understanding of gendered practices and systems, and in particular men's positions within these practices and systems (Lorentzen, 2006). According to Connell (1987 ; 1995) there will exist a hegemonic masculinity inside a culture or institution that structures hierarchical gendered relations, not only between men and women, but also among men and among women. Masculinities and femininities may therefor ebb and flow in most areas of living – from sexual orientation to power positions in the society.

In this regard, "hegemonic" signifies "social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes" (Connell, 1987, p.184). Hence, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is not only about stereotypical masculine characteristics, but is more meaningful when seen in relation to other masculinities and femininities that comply with and adapt to the subordinated relationship with the hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2012). Further-

more, a hegemonic masculinity does not have to be the most dominating practice ; it is more a question of what is looked upon as an ideal or model of behaviour in a culture or institution. Finally, hegemonic masculinity can appear at three levels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) : local (e.g. face-to-face interaction in families, organizations, local communities), regional (broad society levels such as national States), and global (trans-national levels like politics, business, or media). Between these levels, there will both be overlap and mutual influence. With this frame as a reference we will interpret and discuss the results of the present study.

## Literature Review

The literature on military masculinities and attitudes towards women is fairly abundant. The underrepresentation of women in the military is noticeable in all NATO countries (Schjølset, 2010). However, male domination cannot be regarded as an indicator of a masculine culture in itself, but ought to be explained by the military's traditional position in forming notions about masculinity in society at large (Dunivin, 1994). The ideal of a physically strong (male) soldier has persisted as motivation for military participation and the confirmation of manliness across time, cultures, and political systems (Goldstein, 2001). Research has shown that military service still plays an important role in boys' concepts of becoming a man (e.g., Klein, 1999 ; Lahelma, 2000, 2005), and seems to be of major importance for masculine identity-making among many men (Atherton, 2009 ; Hale, 2008 ; Sasson-Levy, 2008 ; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011).

To look upon the military as a homogenous hypermasculine institution is misleading, however. According to Jeff Hearn (2003) one cannot refer to one singular type of military masculinity : several can in fact be observed. Studies have indeed shown that different masculinities are expressed in military cultures (e.g., Higate, 2003 ; Sasson-Levy, 2003). However, the impression from international research is that a traditional military masculinity embodied by the physically strong male soldier still is the valued and expected ideal in most militaries.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, this classic military masculinity is emphasized as one of the most recognizable examples of a hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987 ; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). During the last decade, several studies have demonstrated how such a hegemonic masculinity is connected to a strong physical body in military cultures.<sup>5</sup>

While there is limited knowledge about men and masculinities in the Norwegian armed forces, the impression is that a traditional military masculinity is also reproduced as an ideal here. A study conducted among cadets at the military academies and Army non-commissioned officers (NCOs) concluded that "*physical strength seem to be one of the fundamental skills and central value in the Armed Forces*", where this is "*an indicator of willpower, a marker for masculinity, and a simple standard for suitability and capability*"

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<sup>4</sup> Boldry, Wood & Kashy, 2001 ; Boyce & Herd, 2003 ; Drake, 2006 ; Hinojosa, 2010 ; Hockey, 2003 ; Keats, 2010 ; Moon, 2005 ; Rosen, Knudson & Fancher, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Basham, 2008 ; Duncanson, 2009 ; Hale, 2008 ; Green, Emslie, O'Neill, Hunt, & Walker, 2010 ; Mankayi, 2006 ; Johnson, 2009 ; Lomsky-Feder & Rapoport, 2003 ; Sasson-Levy, 2008.

(Ellingsen, Karlsen, Kirkhaug, & Røvik, 2008, p.48). A study from the Norwegian Home Guard Task Force revealed that the ‘Outdoor life man’ and his [sic!] physical capacities characterized what was considered to be the best soldier (Rones, 2011). A similar perspective was uncovered in a study among Army soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, where a distinct masculine comradeship emphasized the physical characteristics of the masculine body as the main attribute of the soldier (Totland, 2009). Yet another study concluded from observing the officer candidate schools’ selection process that physical capacity appeared to be the main assessment criterion. This subjugated other qualities such as analytical and interpersonal skills (Rones & Fasting, 2011). Furthermore, during the last decade the issue of whether a “warrior culture” has emerged in the Norwegian armed forces (Edström, Lunde & Matlary, 2009) has been debated. It has been claimed that the “warrior” ideal in this culture is solely connected to masculine attributes such as physical strength and aggressiveness, which may have consequences for the recruitment of women (Andreassen & Ingalls, 2009 ; Kristiansen, 2011).

Today, military women have a historically strong role in many countries and international studies have revealed that some military men are positive to women in military positions.<sup>6</sup> However, the impression is that there still is much ambivalence and resistance against female personnel. Typical disputes involve women’s combat roles and their service in submarines where scepticism against women in such positions is common.<sup>7</sup> Still only about a dozen countries, Norway among them, allow women in combat roles (Cawkill, Rogers, Knight, & Spear, 2009). Other much debated subjects are dual training standards and gender-differentiated admission tests for military education (Cohn, 2000). Furthermore, the fact that many military women experience harassment and gender discrimination is generally explained by a masculine military culture where women are met with little respect.<sup>8</sup> Studies also indicate that sexism is widespread and that military men compared to other groups in society at large show more conservative and stereotypical attitudes towards women.<sup>9</sup> This may be due to military men’s attitudes towards women and their perceptions of what they consider as needed in military roles, especially when it comes to leadership positions. Studies among US military cadets for example found that male cadets had less confidence in the leadership abilities of their female counterparts although there was minimal difference between the male and female cadets in military performance and leadership style (Boldry, Wood & Kasy, 2001 ; Morgan, 2006). These and other studies (e.g., Archer, 2013 ; Looney, Kurpius, & Lucart, 2004) show that many military men ascribe stereotypical feminine attributes to military women, such as emotional characteristics and being more social or communicative. This stands in contrast to what most military men perceive as required for the ideal soldier, namely traditional

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, Ivarsson, Estrada & Berggren, 2005 ; Kümmel, 2002 ; Stiehm, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Field & Nagl, 2001 ; Iskra, 2007 ; Snider, Priest & Lewis, 2001 ; Torres-Reyna & Shapiro, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2001 ; Estrada & Berggren, 2009 ; Firestone & Harris, 2009 ; Koeszegi, Zedlacher, & Hudribusch, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Drake, 2006 ; Ivarsson, Estrada & Berggren, 2005 ; Kurpius & Lucart, 2000 ; Matthews, Ender, Laurence, & Rohall, 2009 ; van Wijk, 2011.

masculine characteristics (Boyce & Heard, 2003). Correspondingly, physical ability is a quality that is particularly emphasised in the construction of masculine identities among military men and where it is implicit that most women cannot achieve the required levels (e.g. Boldry, Wood & Kashy, 2001 ; Hinojosa, 2010 ; Hockey, 2002).

The impression of a traditional masculine culture is also reflected in Norwegian military women's own experiences. A review study of Norwegian research shows that many military women perceive that there is a gap between how they experience the culture and the governmental policy on gender equality in the armed forces (Fasting & Sand, 2012). The authors concluded that Norwegian military women often have experienced that the man always is the model and that they have to adapt to a male norm system. It is important to be tough, and to be "*one of the boys*" is a strategy that is used to be accepted. These experiences represent a paradox since studies among Norwegian military men indicate that there generally exists a positive attitude towards female colleagues.<sup>10</sup> However, doubts about military women's physical capacities also are expressed. Many men tell about female classmates or colleagues who are tough and strong, both physically and mentally, but these women are typically emphasized as exceptions. A common comment is that it is essential for military personnel to be able to carry out a wounded colleague whom most women are assumed not to be able to do due to their lack of physical capacity (e.g., Ellingsen *et al.*, 2008 ; Totland, 2009).

## **Research Question and Method**

Based on the literature review, the military seems to be dominated by a traditional masculine ideal that entails a widespread doubt about women's physical skills. Hence, the following research question was formulated for the present study: what are the attitudes of a group of male Norwegian NCOs regarding women's participation and abilities in the Armed Forces ?

The study was conducted at a Norwegian Air Force base through interviews with seven male NCOs from three units. These units represented different tasks at the base : technical support of one of the operational squadrons (2 interviewees) ; base safety and security (3 interviewees) ; administrative support functions (2 interviewees). None of the units had work-related interaction on a daily basis. The reason for carrying out the study in these Air Force units was twofold. Firstly, the Air Force was chosen due to the fact that none of the few Norwegian studies presented above had investigated this service. Secondly, we wanted to avoid groups such as combat units where physical capacity is a crucial element. Instead, we preferred to interview men in units where the tasks to be performed call for other qualities, in order to see what kind of reflections they had with respect to females' participation and abilities.

The interviewees' ages varied from 20 to mid-thirties and were reflected in their seniority in service (8 months-11 years). Accordingly, military educational background

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<sup>10</sup> Batt-Rawden & Skålholt, 2010 ; Gustavsen, 2013 ; Hellum, 2010 ; Ellingsen *et al.*, 2008 ; Hovde, 2010.



was also diverse : Air Force Officers' Candidate School (n=2); Armed Forces Technical Officers' Candidate School (n=2); Army Officers' Candidate School (n=1) ; Home Guard Officers' Candidate School (n=2). Respect for anonymity and confidentiality in the collection of data preclude further descriptions of the three units in this article. For the same reason, all quotes presented are coupled with pseudonyms instead of the interviewees' real names and military rank.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide covering issues such as : reasons for applying for military education ; work experience in the armed forces; positive/negative aspects with employment in the military; needed skills, attitudes and abilities ; experience of and opinions about leaders and leadership ; physical fitness and physical requirements.

Furthermore, the interviewees were queried about their experience with female colleagues and asked questions measuring their attitudes towards women in the armed forces in general. The interviews lasted from one to one and a half hours and were recorded with a digital Dictaphone. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and thereafter coded into thematic segments by the use of MAXQDA, a text analysis software programme. The coded text segments were analyzed in terms of "meaning condensation", i.e. synopsis of the meanings expressed by the interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The analysis of the coded text segments revealed three major themes which are presented below : positive attitudes towards women in the military ; stereotypical perceptions of women ; and doubts about women's physical capabilities.

## **Results**

### **Positive Attitudes towards Women in the Military**

"A good military leader is someone who makes an effort, someone who works for his men [sic!]" (Nils). This quote was characteristic during the interviews in which a gendered language where "men" or "male" were used although the situation or context they described ought to include women as well. The interviewees also considered military service as a typical "guy thing", since "*it always has been like that*" whereas women in the military was considered as something "new". Hence, traditions and old practices were given as explanations for why there have been so few women in the Norwegian armed forces. However, there was consensus that this is about to change and that the number of servicewomen would increase in the future.

These thoughts were followed by positive general attitudes towards more women in the Armed Forces. Statements such as "*I think it would be positive*" (Jesper), "*I think it is important*" (Kristoffer), and "*I have to say I see the benefit*" (Thomas) were typical. Furthermore, the interviewees did not believe that more women would lead to any particular difference or have any negative influence on solving of the military tasks or other vital organizational accomplishments. Søren, who had been in the Armed Forces the longest, said that during his career he had worked in both gender-mixed units and in units

with only men. There had not been much difference between these units, so he thought that more women would not lead to any change in the daily work and how tasks would be solved. A similar reflection on the part of Kristoffer was that “*we go through the same training, you know, and it is not like boys are more suited than girls to do my job. We have the same qualifications*”. Søren said that he had had negative attitudes towards women in the beginning of his military career, but this had changed after having had positive experiences with female colleagues:

I wanted to know that those I would go to battle with, my partner, has to be able to carry me out if I get wounded. And maybe you are more capable to do that if you are a man ... But after a while I experienced that actually there are women who are as strong as us [men], and who can do that. As well as there are men who are not able to do what you expect.

### **Stereotypical Perceptions of Women**

Although the interviewees thought more women would not have any influence on traditional military tasks, they at the same time expressed that it would initiate changes in other areas. This was mainly based on the firm belief that men and women are essentially different, e.g., that women have other attitudes and think unlike men. “*You know, girls versus boys ... attitudes and such are essentially different*” (Jesper). Also Thomas thought that women may have “*... a different set of attitudes ? And a different way of approaching tasks?*”, whereas Per claimed that “*... they [women] think unlike men*”, and thus contributed positively to the environment among conscripts. His experience was that where there were only male conscripts, they acted immature and did more boyish pranks, whereas the presence of female conscripts also made for better order and more devoted conscripts. It was also taken for granted that more women would have an effect on the collegial atmosphere. Kristian stated that “*They [women] are more open, so maybe it would be a more open atmosphere ?*”, whereas Kristoffer thought that the armed forces today have “*... a rougher milieu than many other workplaces, so I think it would change and maybe soften a bit with more women*”. Furthermore, it was claimed that more women would lead to more parties and social happenings. Kristian believed that it would be “*more lively and fun*”, whereas Søren stated that “*It is always nice when there are girls around*”.

The perception of women and men as essentially different was also reflected in the interviewees’ opinions on the underrepresentation of women. Although they thought that there will be more women in the future, they also emphasized that men always will make up the vast majority of the personnel. “*I think we’re basically different, we perceive things differently, so I think it’s quite natural [that there should be few women in the armed forces]*” (Søren). This was supported by Thomas who thought that essential differences between women and men have consequences for women’s choice of education, job and career:

I’m thinking, what is it [in the Armed Forces] that appeals to women ? What do they find interesting ? Most of them, I think, when they consider education, they think about health and social work, psychology, teaching, those types of jobs.

Most of our interviewees emphasized that although women have other priorities and interests than men, they could find these opportunities in the armed forces as well, but they thought that this was emphasized neither in recruitment campaigns nor in other initiatives from the military. Some also thought that this was reflected in women's perceptions of the armed forces. Kristian believed that "*most girls probably think that it is very tough physically*", whereas Kristoffer said that "*... to be outside in the woods, carry heavy gear, weapons and stuff like that, maybe that's not attractive to them ?*" All believed that women perceive the services to be physically demanding, and that this could explain why there are so few females. Søren explained it like this:

I think that most girls don't know how it is in the Armed Forces, and I think most guys don't know how it is to be a nurse. ... I'm sure that there are a lot of boys who are suited to be nurses, and girls that could be in the Armed Forces, but they aren't aware of the opportunities and dare not take that step.

### **Doubts about Women's Physical Capabilities**

Initially, our interviewees thought that women could accomplish all functions in the armed forces. However, most did emphasize that serving in Special Forces<sup>11</sup> would be almost impossible for women due to the tough requirements, e.g., "*to carry backpacks of 40-50 kilos*". Some believed that there could be women that were able to go into the Special Forces, but they emphasized that they would be exceptional individuals. Only one of the interviewees opined to the contrary that this also would be the case for most men : "*... but you know, there aren't many men who are qualified for this type of duty either. It is extreme, it is an extreme environment to be in, and relatively extreme tasks*" (Kristoffer). Although the tough physical requirements were given as the main explanation for the absence of women in the Special Forces, one did also mention women's lack of interest in such positions. He believed that it was different for men since they often have a childhood dream about serving in Special Forces. Women on the other hand "*...they don't have a fantasy about being a chasseur*" (Kristian). This perspective was shared by Jesper who was critical of women's attitudes. He raised the question whether women had the right mentality to be in the Special Forces given the masculine requirements :

I think it has something to do with being masculine, that being in the Special Forces at the bottom line is connected to being rough and mentally it can be extreme. Yes, the extreme masculine skills and characteristics. Of course, I think there are girls who can fit in, but I think they are hard to find.

Jesper's opinion was typical for the interviewees. Although they expressed positive attitudes towards women in the Armed Forces this was typically followed by a reservation with reference to women's (lacking) physical ability. Jesper thought that more women would be great "*... as long as they reach the physical minimum requirements and do not become a burden out in the field*".

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<sup>11</sup> Special Forces can be defined as follows: "[S]pecially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces using operational tactics, techniques, and modes of employment not standard to conventional forces" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2011, p.10).



Another recurring theme was the physical admission requirements to the officers' candidate schools. All except one supported the practice where gender-differentiated physical admission requirements are used. The view of Kristian was representative :

I've just accepted that's the way it is. But women and men are not equal either, you know. We are all meant to do the same job, but as long as the physical admission requirements for both men and women are sufficient for doing that job, then you are qualified.

However, the acceptance for gender-differentiated admission requirements was followed by scepticism against women's performances on these tests. It was claimed that many women had a problem with passing the physical admission tests. All of the interviewees told about women who had been admitted although they believed they had failed on the physical admission tests. Thomas said: *"When I was at the officers' candidate school, there were women who were admitted on a quota basis, for sure. They got extended time-limits and dispensation on things they could not manage"*. Jesper claimed that it had been obvious for all that some of his female classmates had graduated even if they had failed physical tests during the year : *"... several girls never completed the 3000 meter running test. They got away with it, they cheated through all that"*. Søren told about one of his female classmates who had been strong theoretically and technically, but she had been *"... a huge burden on manoeuvres. Every time we were going from A to B we had to share her pack and equipment between us"*.

The stories about females' lack of physical capacity were typically connected to arguments about how military personnel should be, i.e. the ideal was to be physically fit. However, when talking about themselves and their male colleagues, they gave a more diverse description, both of how much time they spent on exercise, and how physically fit they were. Furthermore, most doubted that to be physically fit was essential for doing their job. Kristoffer said for example: *"I think you can do my job without being physically fit. There are other skills that are much more important for this job"*, whereas Thomas claimed that *"It isn't a prerequisite, this isn't physically tough"*. Nevertheless, all still emphasized that to be physically fit was a core value for military personnel. This was due to their reasoning that military personnel should be ready to go into an operational role in a war or crisis situation : *"Regardless if you are a private, NCO or general, we are all soldiers, you know. Therefore, I mean that being physically fit should be required"* (Kristoffer). Some also indicated that being physically fit was important to gain respect : *"I believe they [conscripts] have more respect for you if you are physically fit. It gives the wrong impression if you're the most exhausted on a manoeuvre"* (Jesper). Similar was the reflection of Nils who claimed that *"I cannot ask my soldiers to do something tough and demanding if I'm not able to do it myself, that's impossible"*. He acknowledged that this influenced his motivation for exercising: *"It's about being the best [...] at least among the NCOs, we always have to be better than the conscripts, that is just the way it is"*. He concluded that *"not everyone is suited to be in the armed forces ... you have to be physically fit"*.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Initially, the positive attitudes towards more female colleagues suggest that the interviewees represented a view that welcomes more women in the Norwegian Armed Forces. This is also in keeping with other Norwegian studies<sup>12</sup> where military men have expressed positive attitudes towards women. Hence, these findings indicate that the portrayal of a masculine military culture that is hostile to women's participation should be rejected. That said, it is relevant to ask whether the positive opinions expressed by the interviewees only are a manifestation of what they believe they are expected to say. Following release of the White Paper titled "Increased Recruitment of Women in the Armed Forces" (Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 2007), there has been a distinct focus on the importance of better female representation in the military and it may be that the interviewees only give voice to political correctness.

Also, the opinion that more female colleagues would not have any negative influence on the accomplishment of military tasks could be interpreted positively. However, the latter is a hasty conclusion given that the positive attitudes in the present study seemed to be connected to stereotypical beliefs of women such as: being more social, better organized and more proper than men. If so, it follows that women who do not live up to such stereotypes will experience reactions to the effect that they do gender differently from what their male counterparts expect (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Whenever expectations are merely based on gender, most individuals will find themselves constrained given that the differences among women and among men are just as big as between women and men (Connell, 2002). Accordingly, when our interviewees apply such gendered assumptions to military women, they are perpetuating gender stereotyping. Furthermore, if military women's main contribution is associated with improvements in the order among conscripts and more inspiring social happenings among military personnel, it follows that the core tasks of the armed forces – to handle war, crisis, and conflict resolution – are still considered to be the domain of men. This may explain why our interviewees believed that more women in the armed forces would not have any influence on the accomplishment of military tasks. Instead, women are confined to an archetypal framework in which female behaviour is defined by men. This represents a reproduction of a traditional gender hierarchy where women have a trivial and subordinated position. This will influence the recognition and acceptance of women in many military positions.

The interviewees' focus on females' physical capacity is not surprising given the traditional ideal of the physically strong (male) soldier body. The Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Operational Doctrine also emphasizes *the physical* as one out of the three core dimensions in the military profession and states that "*being in good physical shape is an essential part of our identity*" (Norwegian Defence Staff, 2007, p.158). However, like most Western militaries after the Cold War, the Norwegian Armed Forces have moved from a traditional invasion-based defence force to what today is labelled a flexible expeditionary

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<sup>12</sup> Batt-Rawden & Skålholt, 2010 ; Hellum, 2010 ; Hovde, 2010 ; Gustavsen, 2013.

force (Fürst & Kümmel, 2011). This shift is related to the obvious changes in the tasks the armed forces face, and thereby how they are organized. The flexible expeditionary force depends on the ability to act flexibly and individually, which is reflected in a great variety in the soldiers' bodily actions and skills (Sookermany, 2011). Hence, the requirements of the modern soldier may therefore differ substantially from the traditional ideal of a physically strong (male) soldier body. Our results indicate, however, that there exists a universal ideal about being physically fit among our interviewees. The questions are whether this only reflects a culture that emphasizes traditional masculine values, or if it expresses a hegemonic masculinity at the local level (i.e. the Norwegian Armed Forces) where those not living up to this ideal are subordinated (Connell, 1987, 1995 ; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005 ; Messerschmidt, 2012). If those who are not physically fit are looked down upon and to be physically fit is perceived of as mandatory in order to be acknowledged positively, it can be argued that this indicates the existence of a hegemonic masculinity.

Accordingly, several of the NCOs claimed that being physically fit was essential so that they could accomplish physical challenges better than the conscripts. This can be viewed as a marker in a classic masculine hierarchy where power and recognition are achieved through physical capacity (Connell, 1995). Given that such a hegemonic masculine ideal is closely related to the biological category "man", this may explain why female physical capacity was a frequent theme when our interviewees were asked about servicewomen. A core element of a hegemonic masculinity is that women, by definition, are unable to fulfil the ideal (Connell, 1987, 1995). In other words, as long as the ideal is strongly connected to the biological category "man", a consequence is that women will axiomatically be expected to have trouble with the value criterion physical fitness. However, women and femininities are not the only ones concerned: men and masculinities, if they fail to reach that ideal standard, will be placed in a subordinate position. Hence, hegemonic masculinity entails subordination of all femininities, but also of masculinities that do not regard physical fitness as a core value. This is of major importance for the recognition and acceptance of both women and men in military positions.

These findings should be seen in relation to the results of a review of Norwegian studies on the armed forces with a gender perspective (Fasting & Sand, 2012). The review revealed a gap between official policy and the actual experiences of Norwegian military women. Many feel that they have to work harder than their male colleagues to get accepted and that there is a strong masculine norm system in place. The review also showed that this masculine norm system exposes many military women to a lack of respect, bullying, harassment and sexism ; it further showed that they do not get the same opportunities as their male colleagues. Our findings related to stereotypical perceptions of women and doubts about their physical capacities follow the same pathway and indicate that women may experience many different barriers in the military culture. This has huge consequences for the armed forces' ability to both recruit and retain female personnel. It also reveals the

need for a continuation of the work that has followed publication of the “Increased Recruitment of Women in the Armed Forces” White Paper (Ministry of Defence, 2007).

However, it is not enough to only focus on actions at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels as the attitudes revealed in the present and previous studies are related to the gender order in society at large, and are likely to be the result of the global dominance of males over females (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hence, initiatives to increase the number of women in the military should therefore also not only occur inside the military culture, but also address the socio-cultural level to change dominant gender ideologies and stereotypes.

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