

2. Letting the Right Ones in. Gendered Boundary Work in the Military Profession

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Introduction

The inclusion of women into military ranks, combat units and special operation forces has proven controversial for decades. Should women be allowed to train as conscripts, to carry weapons in wartime, or to command military units? And if so, would they automatically be considered members of the military profession? In this chapter, we explore arguments about the inclusion of women in military work, unfolding how the military profession and its boundaries are, and have been, negotiated, protected and challenged in relation to gender.

The example of women in the Swedish Air Force provided by Sundevall (2011) is illustrative. During the Second World War, women were recruited to serve in Swedish observation towers looking out for enemy planes. The decision to allow women to serve in these positions was much debated. It had proven particularly difficult to find agreement on whether the women should be armed or not, and whether or not their work should be labelled “combat”. The solution was a pragmatic compromise: the women were designated civilian employees, and while they were armed, it was made clear that this was only for the purpose of self-defence. With the potential use of violence by women on behalf of

the Swedish Air Force clearly distinguished from violence that would usually be labelled combat, women were permitted to make a needed contribution to national defence without any threat to the exclusively male nature of the military profession.

In this chapter, we unfold the ways in which gender is entangled in the negotiation of professional boundaries in the context of the military. Our discussion of the extent to which gender can be understood as a performative force derived from the entanglement of gender norms and professional norms draws on a tradition of gender studies according to which the categories of *women* and *men* are not as natural and stable as they might appear to be at first glance (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Acker, 1990; Butler, 1990). Gender as a theoretical concept allows for an analysis of how the categories of men and women, like those of *femininity* and *masculinity*, are “done” – that is, how gender comes into being through social interaction and is reproduced in societal structures (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This is a shift away from the assumption that one’s biological sex implies a specific gender expression, personality, ability or desire; that one’s sex characterises the entire person, defining who we are.

Ledberg (2019) argues that a similar shift in analytical focus has taken place in the study of professions in recent decades. In what we might call classical studies of professions and professionalisation, scholars have tried to pin down what professions are – their characteristics and origins. Such a taxonomic approach, focusing on what distinguishes proper professions from “mere” occupations (or variations like semi-professions, hybrid professions and non-professions) has become a key issue in relevant research (Klegon, 1978). Scholars studying professions have, however, become increasingly critical of this focus on classifying what a profession *is*, arguing instead for a focus on what the label “profession” *does* (Klegon, 1978; Witz, 1990; Gieryn, 1999). This includes, not least, analysis of how the category itself produces (or fails to produce) status, privilege and autonomy for its members (Ledberg, 2019). This chapter neither makes the case for the military being a profession, nor does it try to define exactly who or what may be part of it; rather, we employ a conceptualisation of profession affording an understanding of how processes of inclusion and exclusion work to uphold the boundaries of the military profession – what is inside and what is outside.

When this perspective is applied to the study of professions and professionalisation, we argue, gender needs to be taken into account in order to understand what professions do and how they develop in relation to other occupational groups – simply because gender categories and norms are deeply intertwined with the negotiation and policing of the boundaries of professions (Witz, 1990; Davies, 1995; Kerfoot, 2002; Persson, 2011). This chapter therefore draws on the

premise that a gender perspective is crucial when trying to understand current re-definitions of the military profession. When women are included into a previously all-male profession, unspoken professional norms governing inclusion, legitimacy and recognition are challenged, defended and made visible. We use this visibility analytically to unpack negotiations of the boundaries circumscribing the military profession, and further, use the concept of *boundary work* to bring together theories of gender and professions. This is done in the context of three issues regarded as essential to the military profession. Specifically, the chapter unfolds how *combat*, *bodily abilities* and *cohesion* have acquired the status of sites for the re-negotiation of gendered professional demarcations.

Throughout the chapter, we draw upon both empirical examples from studies we have conducted in the Danish and Swedish armed forces and insights from existing research on gender and professions in military organisations. Our own studies were conducted using ethnographic methods. In the Danish case, the study focused on what it means to be a good soldier in the 21st century and how newcomers to the profession work to be recognised as such (Sløk-Andersen, 2018a). This was explored empirically through 36 qualitative interviews with recruits and commanders, a week of observations at a recruitment centre, and four months of participation where Sløk-Andersen joined a platoon of conscripts through their basic training. On this foundation, the study included analyses of the effect and meaning of things such as uniforms (Sløk-Andersen, 2018b) and sexualised humour (Sløk-Andersen, 2019; Lilleaas, Ellingsen & Sløk-Andersen, 2020) in establishing what it means to be a good soldier while simultaneously making it more difficult for some recruits to become one. In the Swedish case (Persson, 2011), the study focused primarily on how gender relations and professional relations in the Swedish armed forces were transformed through the increased focus on international missions. The study comprised three separate sets of data collection: an interview study with eight women officers who entered the armed forces in the 1980s (Pettersson, Persson & Berggren, 2008), an interview study with nine employees in strategic roles at the armed forces headquarters (Persson, 2010a), and a five-week ethnographic study following the training of a military unit preparing for an international mission (Persson, 2010b, 2012, 2013).

It is worth noting that the conceptualisation of the military profession as such is still somewhat new and contested. Instigated to a great extent by Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* (2002), military work has been conceptualised within a frame of profession, and professionalism, debated and adjusted following continuing institutional and physical changes in the armed forces (Harries-Jenkins, 1990; Segal & De Angelis, 2009; Hachey, Libel & Dean, 2020; see also Brænder, this volume). A significant question underlying these academic debates is that

of who might be considered a member of the military profession. Should it be anyone employed in a military position? Officers? Combatants? Conscripted soldiers? What of veterans and mercenaries? Arriving at a definition is analytically challenging; constantly subject to renegotiation, it appears to require a different form according to perspective and geographical location. We employ an inclusive approach in this chapter rather than expending effort on defining who legitimately fits the category: despite the risk of obscuring both some of the (contested) boundaries that might exist between groups, and distinctions in terminology and organisational structures between the countries of Sweden and Denmark, we have chosen to use the concept of the *soldier* throughout the chapter to represent military professionals at large.

The Construction of Professions

Drawing on sociological conceptualisations of professions (Klegon, 1978; Abbott, 1988; Macdonald, 1995) it is difficult to point to exactly where a profession begins and ends. Rather than focusing on establishing a clear and uncontested demarcation between members and non-members of a profession, scholars suggest that professions are established through continuous processes of professionalisation that work to establish an inside and an outside (Abbott, 1988; Witz, 1990). Throughout this chapter, we conceive these processes to be *boundary work*, an elaboration of the argument made by MacLeish (2015) that, rather than an actual, tangible separation, the divide between a military and civilian sphere is the product of a “constant policing, performing, and imagining of the boundaries between in and out” (p. 17). Through boundary work, difference is constructed between those who are considered proper and legitimate members of the profession and those who are not – a fluid divide between an inside and an outside, core and periphery, that produces or hinders access to positions, resources and status in organisations (Persson, 2011; Sløk-Andersen, 2018a).

Scholars in the field of gender and profession have argued that the profession is inherently gendered (Hearn, 1982; Witz, 1990; Davies, 1996; Allen, 2000; 2001; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Dahle, 2012). As a significant consequence, occupations dominated by men are more likely to be recognised as professions. Historically, “the professional label has been reserved for occupations that historically take place outside of the home” (Butler, Chillias & Muhr, 2012, p. 262) – that is, work historically carried out by men. The inherently gendered nature of the profession was first argued by the sociologist Witz (1990, 1992). Understanding the profession to be exclusory in nature, Witz turned to the field of 19th century medicine in the United Kingdom to illustrate the vital role played by gender in

the process of exclusion and demarcation that defines it. As women most often end up on the outside, Witz argued (1990, 1992), their access to the resources and possibilities generated within the profession is equally limited. This is seen as a consequence of gender and professional norms entangling in ways that determine, for example, who is deemed fit for which type of work (Witz, 1992; Persson & Wieslander, 2021). Consequently, stereotypical expectations of women's particular strengths influence the policing of professional boundaries to make them apparently "ineligible" (Witz 1990, p. 680). The same is true, it should be said, for men in minority positions in other gendered professional contexts (Sargent, 2000; Eriksson, 2002; Hedlin, Åberg & Johansson, 2019). Thus, we align ourselves with Dahle (2012, p. 310) in arguing that "gendering professional theories will produce new and richer understandings of the professions and allow us to comment on how the premises for becoming successful within the system of professions differ according to gender."

Access to professions, then, remains limited. As Muhr and Sløk-Andersen (2017, p. 367) have noted, "due to their historical meaning, [professions] tend to have developed subtle cultural codes for the way individuals are seen as suitable (or non-suitable) for the work performed" (see also Butler, Chillas & Muhr, 2012; Sullivan, 2012; Ashcraft, 2013). Given the extent to which the question of "suitability" has informed discussion on the subject, this is crucial for understanding debates concerning women's access to military training and employment, and consequently the military profession. Do women have sufficient psychological strength? Do they have sufficient physical strength? Sufficient courage? Inverting this debate, scholars such as Svendsen (2018) have suggested that, rather than women being a threat to the military profession or to military professionalism, military organisations might actually use women to lever furthering modernisation and professionalisation. The military profession has found itself in need of transformation and new competencies not because of women's admittance but because of the ways in which wars are waged (Mellström, 2012; Svendsen, 2018).

The divide between a professional inside and an unprofessional outside is important, as professionals enjoy both status, advantages and perks. As Dahle notes of being associated with a profession: "Those who succeed in promoting their self-interests obtain benefits and privileges on behalf of their group. They achieve sovereignty and jurisdiction over their knowledge, i.e., autonomy" (2012, p. 311). Such autonomy is connected to "an occupational monopoly over the provision of certain skills and competencies" (Witz, 1990, p. 675), and in effect, the ability to claim the paid work of a specific profession. Professions can therefore be said to be a matter of acquiring monopoly and authority. Consequently, they are characterised by struggles over influence and the right to define standards and

“truths” within the profession – processes we would label as boundary work. On top of these more abstract privileges, professionalism also more concretely comes with prestige, comparatively high salaries and worker autonomy (Sullivan 2012, p. 276, after Roberts, 2005), all of which makes professional status attractive for both individuals and organisations. While soldiers may not enjoy all such benefits – they are, for instance, rarely paid very well – they might enjoy more prestige than many others doing “dirty work” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

On account of these benefits, or to ensure them, access to a profession is limited, thereby monopolising rewards and claiming professional truths for insiders only (Butler, Chillas & Muhr, 2012; Stengers, 2018). It can be argued that this was the case for the military profession, from which women were legally excluded, until the very end of the 20th century (Sundevall, 2011; Sløk-Andersen, 2014). A part of the process of restricting access is the demarcation of different professions, aiding the protection and expansion of a specific profession’s “turf.” In the case of the military profession, the specific tasks carried out by many soldiers will in themselves often be similar to those of police officers, private security guards, medical personnel or engineers. To a large degree, similar tasks and skills are translated into separate professions through the action of constant boundary work, variously establishing and defending demarcations within and around the military profession and neighbouring professions, creating difference between one and the other.

The concept of boundary work was first introduced by Gieryn (1999) in the sociology of science, used to analyse scientists’ search for epistemic authority. Allen (2000, 2001) developed the theory further in her analysis of the ways in which healthcare workers accomplish formal boundaries and negotiate the concrete division of labour in a district general hospital. Allen conceives of professional jurisdiction as a practical accomplishment and describes boundary work as “micropolitical strategies through which work identities and occupational margins are negotiated” (Allen 2000, p. 348). Exactly who gets to be part of any profession is the outcome of both formal strategies such as admissions requirements, training and licences and less transparent or conscious strategies such as discrimination (Sullivan, 2012). These processes of inclusion and exclusion mean that some people struggle more than others to be viewed as eligible or legitimate members of a profession (Acker, 1990; Sullivan, 2012; Sløk-Andersen, 2018a).

Based on studies of different marginalised occupations, Butler, Chillas and Muhr (2012) add to this argument by emphasising that it is productive to pay attention to such processes of boundary work as they unfold both within and between professions. Specifically, they urge us to examine why some professions gain high levels of social recognition (airline pilots, for example) while others fail

to gain professional legitimacy (cabin personnel, for example), that is, marginalisation *between* professions. Second, they also urge us to pay attention to marginalisation from *within* professions –how processes of inclusion and exclusion work to award and withhold professional status amongst different groups. According to Butler, Chillas and Muhr (2012), however, margins can be said to be everywhere in a profession, meaning that no profession has a stable centre “safe” from negotiation or potential destabilisation. Consider the appearance of the key figure of the “warrior soldier” in the Danish military at the beginning of the 21st century (Pedersen, 2017; see also Pedersen, this volume) – a change that must have been difficult to foresee a few decades earlier “given the country’s post-war reputation as a society characterised by tolerant, humanitarian, and pacifist stances” (Daugbjerg & Sørensen, 2017, p. 1–2).

In the following sections, we will closely consider the ways in which boundary work occurs in and around the military profession. Condensing the issue of military boundary work, we will illuminate the ways in which gender has been discussed in the context of three themes central to military work: combat, bodily abilities and cohesion. These are themes that have appeared essential in both the field of gender in the military and in our respective studies of the Danish and Swedish armed forces (Persson, 2011, 2013; Sløk-Andersen, 2014, 2018a).

Combat as the core of the military profession

The presence, role, and legitimacy of women in military work continues to be debated in the Nordic countries, even after their admittance to the military profession. The Swedish parliament made the decision to give women access to military positions in 1978, outlining a gradual process that began with allowing women into ground positions in the Air Force in 1980. In 1989, the process was completed when submarine and aviation service positions were opened (Persson & Sundevall, 2019). In Denmark, low-ranked military positions were opened up to women in 1971 and officer training in 1974; the formal process of inclusion was completed when women were permitted to become fighter pilots in 1992. The question of whether women should be allowed to participate in combat was at the heart of debates and negotiations concerning inclusion (Sundevall, 2011; Sløk-Andersen, 2014; Persson & Sundevall, 2019).

Combat is often presented as the very core of the military profession, considered “the basic unit of warfare” (Millar & Tidy, 2017). And it is the part of the military profession with the strongest and most enduring connection to men and masculinity (Enloe, 2013; Basham, 2013; MacKenzie, 2015). If we widen the scope of women in the military to beyond women’s inclusion in the profes-

sion, however, the timeline becomes altogether different to that outlined above. Research in the field of gender and the military shows that, although they have not been allowed to perform tasks that have been considered professional military work, women have indeed been present in everyday military work for a very long time (Mitchell, 1966; Hacker, 1981; Sjöberg, 2008). Women have, for example, been present as accompanying wives and daughters, as cooks, prostitutes, and nurses. The example of the women serving in the Air Force during the Second World War described in the introduction to this chapter is also illustrative, including the key features of the ongoing debate concerning women's place in the military. Should women be allowed to work in the armed forces, and if so, what positions and tasks would be available to them? At the heart of this discussion lie professional demarcations closely connected to both gendered divisions of labour and professional norms governing who can be considered a full member of the military profession; this explains why women, armed, uniformed and manning air defence towers in wartime, were still not considered soldiers – and, perhaps more importantly, why the violence they would have used was pre-emptively labelled “self-defence” rather than combat.

Interest in the concept of combat has been growing in recent years in both the field of critical military studies and amongst feminist scholars (Enloe, 2013; Daggett, 2015; MacKenzie, 2015). In their article “Combat as a Moving Target,” Millar and Tidy (2017) argue that while feminist scholars have convincingly showed that combat is central to the production and reproduction of masculine norms and myths of soldier heroism, few have really unpacked the empirical category of combat itself. If studies fail to problematise common sense definitions of combat as an empirical reality, they argue, the analysis of gender, war and the military remains under-theorised. Sweden offers an interesting illustration of combat as a somewhat slippery concept, especially during the 1970s when the issue of women in the military was intensely debated (Persson & Sundevall, 2019). A state committee appointed in 1975 was assigned the task of outlining the details of women's upcoming inclusion into the military profession. With the issue of women in combat proving particularly controversial, the committee was instructed to identify the non-combat positions where women should be allowed to serve. While the instruction was well aligned with principles in other military organisations (few, if any, countries allowed women to serve in so-called combat positions at the time), it soon became apparent that there was no simple distinction to be made between combat and non-combat positions as there was no policy outlining a clear division between the two. When the committee's instructions were revised in 1978, their assignment was no longer limited to non-combat positions. The issue of women in combat lingered throughout the process of the elimination of

restrictions on their entering the military profession as the Supreme Commander at the time remained opposed to opening the final positions until the reform had been implemented (Sundevall, 2011).

In the decades following the full inclusion of women into the military profession in Sweden and Denmark in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the issue of women in combat appeared on the political agenda of many other countries; the difficulty of defining the so-called combat positions continued to cause problems. When American and British troops fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, women were formally banned from serving in combat units. When soldiers returned home, however, many women had been in combat. Some had even been awarded distinctions (King, 2015). In 2013, the US Secretary of Defense announced that all combat roles would be opened for women in 2016; in 2018 the UK followed suit, thereby formally removing the ban on women serving in combat from all NATO forces (King, 2015; UK Ministry of Defence, 2016) and bringing women closer to the core of the military profession on an international level.

Over the last 50 years, much work has been invested in defining combat and debating whether women should be allowed to participate. We find it relevant to ask not what combat is, but what combat *does* as a means for establishing and defending lines of demarcation between men and women in the military profession. Positioned as the core of the profession, combat and combat experience not only support membership of the military profession; they link to vertical career opportunities. Our studies disclosed analytical patterns in the experience of our interviewees illustrating that, while it may not be a formalised criterion, combat experience is crucial for advancement to high-ranked positions in the armed forces. Perhaps that is precisely why it has been such an important theme in the debates concerning women's inclusion into the ranks.

Embodying the military profession

Amongst military scholars, soldiers' bodies have been argued to be paramount to military work, or even constitutive of the entire profession (Richman-Loo & Weber, 1996; Carreiras, 2006; Lande, 2007; Carreiras & Kümmel, 2008; McSorley, 2015). Ascribing such importance to the body of the soldier, its capabilities, endurance and strength becomes pivotal for professional success – or even for simple admittance, as injuries and illnesses might lead to one being deemed unfit to serve at all. Considering this through the lens of boundary work, the body becomes a site for the policing of professional boundaries, as perceptions of strength and ability become mechanisms for inclusion and exclusion. After interviewing soldiers, observing units and scrutinising admissions requirements

in our previous studies (Persson, 2011, 2013; Sløk-Andersen, 2014, 2018a), we understand bodily abilities as closely intertwined with professional standards and considered of great value and importance in military work. During a week of observations at a recruitment centre, Sløk-Andersen, for instance, noticed how membership of the Danish armed forces was described as entailing work “of a quite physical character.” The instructor who made this statement in a room filled with young Danes called for the draft examination then encouraged them to start working out a couple of months or even a year before they were to muster.

In many countries, conscription has added a gendered layer to the importance of the body, as compulsory military service for male citizens has established close ties between the military profession and the male body (Carreiras, 2006; Eriksson, 2014). Such connections between the male body and the military profession have recently been challenged with the introduction of gender-neutral conscription in both Sweden and Norway, thus tampering with the gendered foundation of the entire military profession. Equally, the United Nations’ *Resolution on Women, Peace and Security* 1325 (UN Security Council, 2000) has challenged such gendered patterns through its insistence that women must be included in both the prevention and resolution of conflicts – that is, included in military work. In light of this resolution from 2000, the assumption that only men are to be part of the military – as indicated and established by so many conscription systems – was put into question. Both the UN resolution and gender-neutral conscription systems thus destabilise assumptions that men are the obvious members of the military profession on simple anatomical grounds.

Few military organisations seem fully geared to deal with the female body, however. While uniforms have been adapted, boots have been made available in smaller sizes and sports bras have been made available in the Swedish and Danish armed forces (all examples of equipment called for by some of the first women who served), there are still clear remnants of a male-only profession (Schröder, 2017; Sløk-Andersen, 2018a). One example from a Danish context is the lack of protocols and procedures relating to how pregnant soldiers and soldiers returning to work after giving birth should deal with bodily changes in a physically demanding job (Svop, 2019). While this cannot be considered a conscious attempt to exclude women from the military profession, it is an example of the ways in which standards and procedures in the military continue to be modelled from a male standard (Richman-Loo & Weber, 1996; Cohn, 2000; MacKenzie, 2015).

The fear of damage to reproductive organs has been used as an argument against women’s (full) inclusion in those debates where female anatomy was a feature. When combat positions were opened to women in Denmark, for example, the role of fighter pilot was excepted because it was not known “how the very

fast acceleration in this type of airplane affects women's [reproductive] physicality' (Ligestillingsrådet, 1989, p. 39). While such hesitations were soon refuted, arguments about women's reproductive abilities as an obstacle to military work still arise sporadically (see, for example, Maninger, 2008). In Sweden, there were similar concerns when positions were beginning to open up for women (Persson & Sundevall, 2019). Here, concerns were about everything from women's physical strength and capacity for oxygen absorption to how menstruation, pregnancy and breastfeeding were to be handled in the military, as well as concerns about the risk of birth defects for women serving in tactical aviation or the submarine service while pregnant.

Based on these examples, it can be argued that women's bodies have been "taken hostage" in efforts to uphold boundaries around the military profession. In a review of studies examining the connection between human bodies and the gendering of professions, Sullivan (2012, p. 275) has noted that

professions – and who is considered a professional – rest in large part on the gendered perceptions of both the occupation (for example, airline pilots) and the embodied subjectivities of who is doing the work (white, male, middle class, able-bodied) (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004). ... [O]ur modern definitions of what constitutes a professional are pervasively narrow and gendered, and linked to the bodies doing the work.

This appears to hold true in a profession like the military where so much attention is given to the physical abilities of its members and those seeking to join. Draft examinations, admission tests and yearly appraisals of employees' fitness make up the more formalised indications of how membership of the military profession is dependent on a strong and able body. More implicit indications of this we find in daily routines of doing push-ups or running the 10km track, and the crucial role played by physical accomplishments in soldiers' assessment of each other's capabilities and professionalism (McSorley, 2016; Pedersen, 2017; Sløk-Andersen, 2018a).

The body is held to be central to the military profession in the everyday work of soldiers, in policies and procedures and in political debates about gender. It thus constitutes a central site for constructing and defending professional demarcations through boundary work. Doubts of the suitability of women as members of the military profession based on their perceived physical limitations recur as a form of boundary work. In an interview study with some of the first women to become military officers in Sweden, women repeatedly proved themselves and

defended their place in the profession on the 10km running track (Pettersson, Persson & Berggren, 2008, p. 203). An officer described an incident that took place when she was in training to become a captain. In class, one of her peers stated “Blir man slagen av en tjej fysiskt eller i teoretiska prov så är man kass som kille” – if you are beaten by a girl in a physical or theoretical test as a guy, you stink. When the class ran the 10km track a week later, and she reached the finish line 10 minutes before him, she found him and told him “Damn, you stink!” The officer tells the story as an example of how she has managed to gain acceptance as a woman officer, proving her worth on the prestigious arena of physical capacity. She also tells it as a sort of success story, since this particular colleague approached her at their graduation to say “I accept *you* as a woman officer.” But, she also notes, this was to be considered an individual exception and that his conviction that women should be considered inferior remained. That way, although he agreed to accept her as a “woman officer” based on her achievements on the 10 km track, he had not changed his mind that women in general did not belong in the profession.

Little discussion is required to find agreement that, on average, there exist physical differences between men and women; this is hardly what any scholar discussing increased gender integration in military forces would suggest. Of greater interest is the complex question of how the difference between these averages is mobilised as boundary work, and how claims about different bodies are used to establish and defend boundaries of gender and profession. As MacKenzie (2015, p. 98) has noted, “physical arguments are not as objective and straightforward as they appear.” Attending only to averages rather than individual performances is one example of how arguments about bodies become gendered; for the military scholars Carreiras and Kümmel (2008, p. 30), indeed, it demonstrates how ideas about the strong body have become the main “discursive weapons targeting gender integration in the military.” So while there may be a push for a greater inclusion of women and a redefinition of military work and culture due to technological and political developments such as UN Resolution 1325, the gendered body is invoked as an argument against change in the military profession and its intake of new insiders (MacKenzie, 2015; Persson & Sundevall, 2019; Sløk-Andersen, 2018a; Stern & Strand, in press).

Cohesion as the key to efficiency

In the field of military studies, cohesion has long been considered an essential condition for military efficiency (van Creveld, 2001; Simons, 2000; King, 2013, 2015). King (2015) describes cohesion as a concept closely linked to combat and

shows how this conceptual duo has been developed theoretically since it was first outlined in a 1948 article analysing the work of German soldiers in the Second World War (Shils & Janowitz, 1948). In Shils and Janowitz's conceptualisation, cohesion refers to bonds between soldiers created by "spatial proximity, the capacity for intimate communications, the provision of paternal protectiveness by NCOs and junior officers, and the gratification of certain personality needs, for example, manliness, by the military organisation and its activities" (Shils & Janowitz, 1948, p. 315). This theoretical concept has become widely recognised since it was coined. Despite military organisations and work having undergone much change since WWII, this issue of closeness, trust and intimacy between soldiers is equally present in contemporary accounts of military work. For many of the soldiers we have interviewed, for instance, building close bonds with other soldiers is a crucial part of their motivation for doing military work – and for doing it well (Persson, 2011; 2012; Sløk-Andersen, 2019; Guschke & Sløk-Andersen, 2021). This closeness between soldiers is reflected in expressions such as *band of brothers* and *brothers-in-arms*; expressions that, due to their historic origin, presuppose a male-only unit. It is perhaps unsurprising that cohesion has therefore been another central concern in debates around women's entry to the military profession: what happens to the unique bonds formed in the military when the band is no longer one formed only of brothers?

One concrete strategy for facilitating comradeship and cohesion across gender-mixed units that has appeared in our studies seems to be specific to the Nordic armed forces: gender-mixed accommodation. In Norway, gender-mixed rooms for conscripts have been used for more than a decade; after initial trials in 2015, they were adopted by Denmark. In Sweden, it has been the standard form of accommodation for conscripts since the early 1990s. Ellingsen, Lilleaas and Kimmel (2016) have documented how the soldiers living in the gender-mixed rooms in Norway consider it a positive experience, and a way of building team spirit and camaraderie. Several women interviewed for their study stated that the gender-mixed rooms made it easier for them to become "one of the guys" (Ellingsen, Lilleaas & Kimmel 2016, p. 5). In the Nordic context, gender-mixed quarters seem to be framed as a way of producing cohesion for young conscripts and soldiers, creating close bonds beyond the brotherhood of men.

Despite the presence of women in most military platoons, the idea of the male-only group of soldiers as the necessary condition for cohesion to "work" in a military unit is not completely outdated. While conducting our ethnographic studies, we encountered stories of women who have been removed from ships or camps because relocating one woman was considered an "easier solution" to conflicts or cases of sexual harassment than the relocation of the men apparently

causing the problem in the first place. While these have not been first-hand accounts, they still indicate how women might be framed as those who “disturb” cohesion amongst men; if they are removed, efficiency is once again restored. While becoming more rare, according to MacKenzie (2015, p. 134) this has been “one of the most common arguments used to justify the combat exclusion in the US and elsewhere.” For MacKenzie, such opposition to the integration of women is based on a “cohesion hypothesis” that “presumes a positive relationship between group cohesion and soldier performance, and a negative relationship between the inclusion of women and the rates of bonding and trust necessary for such cohesion.” It has been suggested, however, that it is not the women themselves obstructing cohesion but the acceptance they are met with (MacKenzie 2015, p. 134–154). We might say, in other words, that cohesion is not compromised by women’s abilities but by expectations of both those abilities and of their gender. This was reflected in a summary report drafted after extensive trials with women in combat positions in the Danish armed forces through the 1980s. While evaluations of the trials were positive, it was remarked in the conclusion that even if the women “attempt to adjust to the prevailing norms,” integration could not finally be achieved in the combat units “because attitudes do not seem to offer the full acceptance of their presence” (Schlüter, 1986, p. 8–9) – a conspicuous attempt to police the boundaries of the military profession.

In general, the debate about the value of heterogeneous (that is, not all-male) units has been particularly heated when focusing on combat units. Studies have asked whether male soldiers would be concerned with protecting the women in the unit rather than remaining focused on their task in combat, or if they would start conflicts with other men (Simons, 2000, 2014; Maninger, 2008). Feminist scholars, on the other hand, have problematised the idealised depictions of the band of brothers, shedding light on the darker sides of comradeship when it becomes skewed towards hyper-masculine ethics and hence a serious threat to military professionalism (Winslow, 1997; MacKenzie, 2015).

Taking a quite different approach to the opposition of sameness and heterogeneity in regard to military efficiency, Rones and Steder (2017, 2018) have evaluated and analysed a recent trial with a women-only unit in the Norwegian armed forces. Their work documented how performance and behaviour were contingent on the gender context the women were in. While being the minority in a gender-mixed unit made women reproduce existing gender stereotypes and turn on each other as a means of distancing themselves from associations to a gender with low status, women showed themselves “able to cooperate harmoniously in an all-female situation” (Rones & Steder, 2018, p. 46). This interesting finding illustrates both how women are themselves involved in processes of ex-

clusion and the policing of boundaries, and how mere perceptions about gender may interfere with cohesion and integration.

Examining cohesion further, we are able to unfold the boundary work the concept furthers and authorises. While cohesion continues to be presented as a very positive force for the performance and efficiency of military units, it also has other, policing, effects. When assumed to presuppose similarity, cohesion can become the foundation for boundary work in the form of exclusion and discrimination. The question of what has occurred in the name of cohesion as women entered the military is complex. While ensuring inclusion and integration for some women, cohesion has recurrently and in various ways been used, also, as an argument for keeping women out of specific units – or out of military positions all together. Working to reinforce the gendered boundaries of the military profession, the issue of cohesion is tied closely to the two previous issues we have covered (see also Basham 2013), indicating that the sites where boundary work takes place are deeply entangled.

Discussion: Policing the Boundaries of an Exceptional Profession

Questions such as whether women's bodies can endure the stress caused by flying a fighter jet, or if the efficiency of male soldiers may be negatively affected by the presence of women, can on the surface appear to be legitimate concerns about women's inclusion in military work and combat. But, aired over decades, these concerns characterise women as a problem – an objective, straightforward problem calling for consideration and caution. By examining the discourse on three matters essential to the military profession, repeatedly raised when debating women's inclusion – combat, bodily abilities, and cohesion – we have tried to critically unfold how they can be understood in terms of boundary work. Rather than merely value-neutral arguments, we propose, these are instances of boundary work that aim to reinforce the military profession as male. This proposition is supported by the continual appearance of new arguments depicting women as the problem in still new ways and in different spheres of the profession. Initially concerning the profession's periphery, debates revolved around whether women could enter low-ranked positions or even hold a position classified as "military" (Sundevall, 2011). As women gained access to military jobs and started to prove their worth, and participation in combat and more prestigious fields of expertise were considered, positions closer to the profession's centre were then debated (Persson & Sundevall, 2019; Sløk-Andersen, 2014). Today, the "gendered frontier" seems to be the special operation forces, where arguments about women simply being insufficiently strong to do the job are slowly being challenged (Rones & Steder, 2017, 2018).

The military profession has encapsulated what Mellström (2013, p. 5) has referred to as “forms of male exclusivity where images of heroism and bravery are at the core.” This profession has been, and to some degree remains, tied to traditional notions of masculinity that have motivated soldiers to risk their lives and added to the prestige and status of military work. But the social status and recognition of a profession is never a given – and perhaps even less so for a profession frequently subject to the moral judgement and political agendas that comes with military work (Sørensen & Weisdorf, 2019). A need for policing the boundaries of the military profession also arises due to bureaucratic and political institutions challenging the autonomy and monopoly essential to any profession. This is not unique to the military profession but, rather, a general challenge as “new occupational categories ... make claim to professional or quasi-professional status are emerging from, or in alliance with, large bureaucratic organizations” (Suddaby, Bevirt & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2019). Such a questioning of autonomy, according to which professional outsiders can make claims about, and even shape, the inner workings of the military profession, may be seen when public administrators or politicians make significant decisions concerning the direction of the armed forces without the support of military professionals. This was the case in the Danish armed forces in the 1970s and 1980s as new legislation on gender equality in the labour market enabled women’s access to all positions within any profession, while the military organisation fought to uphold the ban on women’s participation in combat (Sløk-Andersen, 2014). This type of challenge to the boundaries of the military profession precipitates boundary work and makes visible an underlying idea of *military exceptionalism*: the perception of the military profession as exceptional due to the backdrop of life-or-death that comes with combat and warfare – which is in itself defined in contrast to the ordinary (Felski, 2000).

The tension between considering the military an organisation like any other and as an exception in which ordinary rules do not apply, and in which those outside the profession (politicians, for example) have no place interfering, was recently reflected in an interview with the Danish Minister of Defence who stated that the perception of the armed forces as “something very exceptional ... must come to an end” (Svendsen, 2020). This included the belief that “there are things that the minister and the politicians have no knowledge of and therefore should stay out of” (Svendsen, 2020). What the minister points to is here is that “the military tends to be regarded as an organisation out of the ordinary” (Persson, 2011, p. 72), not least within the profession itself. The assumption that not even the minister should interfere in how the military profession operates returns to the need for a profession to be autonomous and possessed of a monopoly on its own truths, in

relation to other occupations and to the state alike. When these are challenged, by a minister introducing a new diversity policy, for example, or a political coalition deciding to restructure the entire armed forces, members of the profession are likely to experience it as trespassing and to respond through acts of boundary work. This is not unique to the military profession; consider how doctors or schoolteachers have reacted to political intervention and reforms. But in drawing on the particular traits and risks tied to warfare, military professionals try to claim autonomy through a narrative about the exceptional character of military work within which those who have had their “boots on the ground” in a warzone (Tidy, 2016, p. 5) have a monopoly on truths about the profession. Through this lens of military exceptionalism, the preservation of boundaries acquires the status of legitimate defence against the trespassing of non-professionals – and consequently, women are framed as a problem.

It is important also to recognise how developments have seen female soldiers reconceived as a solution rather than a problem. As Witz (1992) noted, processes of exclusion are accompanied by processes of inclusion. UN Resolution 1325, positioning women as integral to successful peacekeeping, is an example of a process of inclusion contributing to a reshaping of the boundaries of the military profession (Persson, 2013; Persson & Sundevall, 2019). Through this resolution, and accompanying gender mainstreaming policies, a different, affirmative, discourse about women’s competencies and contributions has been established at an international level. This is also evident in many of the interviews we have carried out, with some interviewees even reflecting Svendsen’s (2018) claim that women’s inclusion can be used to lever modernisation and professionalisation and Mellström’s (2012) claim that changes in how wars are waged have gendered effects simply because they challenge what it means to be a soldier. As military work changes, so do gender dynamics within and around the military profession. And conversely, as gender policies, organisational, national and international, change the working conditions of both men and women, what it means to be “a real soldier” is redefined (Persson, 2013).

As shown throughout this chapter, professions and their boundaries are constantly challenged, defended and renegotiated. Above, we have used the case of women’s inclusion in the Danish and Swedish armed forces to reveal how the lens of gender can make visible unspoken ideas about the profession and professionalism that govern inclusion and recognition in the military profession. Referring to these processes as boundary work, we have shown how seemingly objective arguments against women’s participation in military work can also be considered attempts to police the boundaries around the military profession.

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