The making of warriors: men, identity and military culture

Katerina Agostino
Department of Sociology, Macquarie University

INTRODUCTION
Masculinity as warrior is central to the understanding of military cultures. Such images of maleness are often presented by historians, academics, feminists and film writers, to name a few, as fixed, unambiguous and non-contradictory. Moreover this reading of masculinity as warrior involves a clear distinction between the protectors and protected, soldiers and civilians, warmongers and peacelovers, and masculinity and femininity.

Consequently, the military and war are said to be sites where hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and maintained. The exposure of risk or potential risk coupled with the physical discipline where male bodies are viewed within dominant cultural discourses as superior to female bodies for the business of warfare indeed sets the military apart from a great deal of civilian activity in the making and shaping of masculinity. Naval personnel are acutely aware of this and it is not altogether uncommon to hear them speak of an “us and them” when referring to their civilian counterparts. Military careers are discursively positioned as demanding more of the average person than civilian careers, yet nonetheless rewarding individuals for their input and sacrifice.

In relation to war masculinity and femininity are set apart as bi-polar opposites, and women’s presence in contemporary militaries has precipitated some of the most vociferous essentialist arguments surrounding gender. Academic writing has also taken up the debate and indeed some feminisms are not exempt from proposing biological interpretations of gender and war. Within the military itself the debate against women’s participation in combat centres on so-called feminine traits which are discursively portrayed as corrupting or weakening combat capability. Hence femininity is incongruous with warfare and combat because as a construct “femininity” cannot endure the ravages and deprivation that war creates. Moreover, according to this scenario, masculinity is supposedly unduly concerned with the protection of women should males and females share the same combat zone. In more recent times the increase of women’s participation in Western militaries problematises the hitherto exclusive link between masculinity and war (Morgan 1994).
The role of warrior and the importance of so-called male bonding in enabling the warrior to continue fighting are directly challenged by a number of factors. As mentioned earlier, there is the challenge presented through women's increased participation in Western militaries that serve as a direct incitement to standard norms surrounding warfare and warriors. Moreover, the presence of homosexual men in the military coupled with the lifting of the ban of homosexuals in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) also questions some of the core beliefs surrounding the warrior.

This raises some important questions about the construct of warrior and its link to masculinity, warfare, work and identity in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). This paper seeks to unravel a complex and often contradictory understanding of the warrior along with a concept of male bonding. I argue that what emerge as firm notions of masculinity in opposition to femininity particularly in relation to the warrior are not as fixed as at first appears, and indeed at times seem far from men's lived realities. In this way, I seek to unfold an understanding of the way in which masculine and feminine meanings are derived by the exclusion of the other (Cixous 1976; Davies 1994). Through a deconstruction of the warrior the identification of the binaries that exist within the hegemonic naval discourses become more apparent. As Miriam Cooke points out:

By placing gender at the centre of analysis of war, we begin to question the myth: the mystique of the unquestionable masculinity of soldiering, of the essential femininity of peace advocacy. We unlock a closed system in order to reveal the dynamic of gender constructions ... [which] opens up new space in which previously unheard voices are valorised. (Cooke 1993, 178)

THE WARRIOR AND MASCULINE IDENTITY

In one sense, man as warrior is central to the constructed identity of the RAN. Warriors are men who engage in warfare to defend or conquer nations and territories. Part of the job involves killing and maiming opponents in war as well as innocent civilians. Through rituals founded in tradition, warriors are awarded epithets like brave, courageous, strong and honourable. The issuing of military medals for Active Service is accompanied by a ceremony. Being issued with a war medal is one of the highest forms of recognition in the military and can often secure promotion.

Masculinity as warrior has its roots deeply embedded in the two World Wars (Adams 1995). The military and war have historically been central elements in the construction of gender and sexual identities in Australia even outside of the military:

The meaning of Warfare for the sexes has traditionally been understood through a series of conceptual oppositions—home front/battle front, passivity/activity, weakness/strength, private/public, staying/departing, defenders/defended—in which women are defined as passive flesh, naturally weak, outside history, ir-
relevant to the making of nations, yet needed, like nurses at the front, to keep the military machine functioning or the home fires burning. Ideally women waited and watched and wept while men fraternised and fought for freedom. (Damousi and Lake 1995, 3)

Yet in more recent times, there has been a burgeoning of narratives which tell of women's experiences of war (see, for example, McHugh 1993; Woollacott 1993; Matthews 1993; Michel 1993; Taylor 1993; Holmes 1995; Ford 1995). Some of these accounts seek to redress the warrior/beautiful soul binary (Elshtain 1987). They tell of women's participation—directly and indirectly—in war not only in terms of their contribution to the defence of their nation, but to their vulnerability as women. Military and civilian women are both exposed to enemy attack, but in relation to Australian legislation, neither category of woman can fight back. In a sense, their narratives serve to counter the images of masculinity as warrior, hero, defender and protector constructed by the military, academics, historians, film makers, newspaper journalists and others. In other words, the posts which carry the warrior identity in its purest form are those from which women continue to be excluded.

David Morgan considers that:

Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with the war and the military are some of the most direct. Despite far-reaching political, social, and technological changes, the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity .... Traditionally, then, combat and military experience separate men from women while binding men to men. It is a separation which reaches deep into a man's sense of identity and self .... (1994, 165–66)

The warrior as the embodiment of masculinity is an identity spoken about amongst the men I interviewed, few of whom were able to extend the warrior identity to incorporate women. Men's reflections on the warrior image were imbued with a gendered division of labour where on the whole, women were viewed as "naturally" not fit for this role. Moreover, the role of warrior is largely linked to what RAN men perceive to be a clear delineation between protectors and protected.

Some men felt threatened by women they perceived to be actively competing with them for this warrior identity. A young Sub-Lieutenant, for instance, argues that during the Gulf War women were receiving "all" the media attention. His argument is backed up by what he regards as societal views on the issue of women at war:

Andrew: I think that society is still unsure about sending its females to war. In the Gulf War the ones with the most media coverage were the women instead of what was really happening. The women can turn the media attention on to themselves, so people don't see what is really happening. As a society I am not sure we can cope with this. Society is reluctant to send its sons off to war. I am not sure if we can do this for our daughters. It all comes back to our ability to defend Australia.
Within dominant naval discourses surrounding war, women are seen not to have participated in war as warriors prior to the Gulf conflict. Many people’s images of warfare are of the two World Wars. Part of this image is steeped in the misconception that only active military people are involved in conventional warfare. It has been well documented that most of the people killed or injured in war this century have been civilian men, women and children (Brownmiller 1976; Chapkis 1981; Stiehm 1981; As 1982; Hirsch and Spitzer 1993).

However, chinks are being made in the armour of the masculine image of the warrior. As I argued earlier, in demanding equal participation with Navy men, women are seen to be chipping away at this “innate” masculine role. In doing so, men perceive women to be undermining the very fabric of society, to be going against “natural” gender laws which endow each human with an essential sexual and gender identity. Such natural laws are clearly part of the binary gender logic of male/female, protector/protected. Wayne, a Leading Seaman, and Josh, a senior sailor, state how the protector role interferes with the warrior role:

Wayne: In a war I think that if there were females on board, you’d protect the female, that’s natural instinct of being a male to protect the female, whoever she may be. Males and females are different, and the male is the protector. No policies are going to change that fact.

Josh: Look, there is a place for women and men in the Defence Force. Personally I think that women shouldn’t be on the front line. I say this because of human nature. It’s human instinct for men to come to the defence of females and to help them. In a war situation this spells disaster. The male will leave whatever he is meant to be doing to look after the female. You can’t win a battle like that.

What comes through in Wayne’s and Josh’s statements is that masculinity as warrior clearly relies on the maintenance of a distinct division of gender and sexuality between women and men, homemaker and protector. Moreover, it is “men’s instinct” that is valorised. Images of the warrior are also seen to be threatened particularly by the possibility of sexual fraternisation between male and female members in a war setting. As Andrew, a junior officer, put it:

Andrew: I agree with having women in the Navy ... I do have my doubts with women going to sea, or going to war. So far, no one has been able to allay my doubts, and this is where we fail as an organisation. My time on the —- proved my views of women at sea. I saw the power of sexual distraction. It was just a peace time voyage. We went to —-, there was nothing stressful about the trip. But you realise if you went to war it could be really stressful. To put it crudely, the person you are having a sexual relationship with could be the one you find dead on the ground.

This concern with possible heterosexual fraternisation during war can be read to mean that women and men are viewed as incapable of being colleagues. Andrew’s account implies that losing a lover is worse than losing a friend. This argument goes against certain biographical and autobiographical
accounts of men’s relationship with one another on the front line (e.g. see Facey 1981; Dunlop 1987). It is clear from this literature that men go to great lengths to rescue, and protect their mates. The idea of men as only having a protective instinct towards women therefore, is not matched with people’s lived realities. What is being ratified by this dominant discourse of the male as protector of women is the misconception that a man’s love of a male mate cannot and will not cause the same sense of stress and tension during war as a man’s romantic love for a woman, yet Bill Langham says in an account of his WWI service: “When you go to war you find real mates. They will die for you” (Thomson 1995, 141). Warfare has certainly changed since World War I. A sobering reality in today’s modern warfare is that there can be little protection for women or men when under direct attack. No man can protect a comrade, woman or man, from a missile, chemical, or nuclear assault.

This perception of fraternisation and the potential it has to create problems during conflict, is strongly associated with heterosexism, and the masculine possession of the female body: a possession which men must protect. Moreover, the problem is seen to be the conflict that arises between the warrior and protector roles when men feel they must protect their female comrades, which takes away from the business of warfare. This argument is powerfully located in the discourses which ratify the public/private dualism. Lucas’s critique of the Australian film “Gallipoli” illustrates this point by looking at the absence of feminine images located in the film:

> it is in the most stereotypical and minimal roles: the mother who must be left if adventure and manhood are to be found; the pretty young girl who might, muse-like, inspire a lad to go to war; the nurse who will selflessly care for the men ripped apart by each other’s attacks; the prostitutes who lure men on ... to sexual encounter. (Lucas 1995, 156)

Thus images of the warrior are about a marked separation of the public and the private. Sex is something that happens in private, at home, in a hotel room, where no one else is in view. War happens in the public sphere, under the watchful gaze of all.

Moreover, the dominant heterosexist discourses on sexuality on board ships remove the possibility of homosexual and lesbian desire. That same sex relationships do exist between members on ships is rarely openly acknowledged by RAN personnel even though it has been well documented that the military provides a ready environment for homoerotic desire (Wotherspoon 1995). Wayne, a junior sailor, expresses the widely held heterosexist position:

> men would “naturally” be sexually distracted by women ... men being what they are and women being what they are ... especially if they had formed a love relationship with their female comrades.

Whilst it is true that women and men do form bonds of love and sexuality, so do people of the same sex. However, it is only this supposed innate sexual attraction between men and women that is widely expressed as having catastrophic consequences for defence capabilities. Current naval discourses on
women's participation in direct combat theorise about the strain that sexual fraternisation presents to defence capabilities as though homosexual and lesbian sexual fraternisation does not exist in the military. Gary Wotherspoon's work on male sexuality during World War I shows quite clearly that the war created a homoerotic setting:

Indeed for many of the homosexually inclined, the war represented increased opportunities for involvement with other men at a multitude of levels. This was true even at the front where isolation placed many restrictions on the sex lives of heterosexual men. Yet many homosexual men have reported that they have had lively and varied sexual experiences during war even at the front. (Wotherspoon 1995, 215)

Among the small number of homosexual men interviewed for this study, many confirmed homoerotic experiences on board ships. For some homosexual men, sea life was not restricted by sexual boredom as it was for their heterosexual counterparts. Ben, a junior sailor, for instance states:

Ben: I have had sex with men on ships, it happens all the time. Usually for me it has been some casual sex, but once I think I really fell in love .... You soon get to know who the gay ones are, it's a bit like a sixth sense, you just pick it up. Eventually you get to know them because you see them at the same gay bars and things. In the old days when being gay was illegal, you had to be pretty careful. These days you still have to be careful. Few of us admit we are gay, but at least you can't get kicked out for being gay if people find out.

As recently as 1992, legislation banned homosexuals from the Services. Prior to this a number of homosexual men and women were witch-hunted. When “discovered” they were discharged as unfit for service. Such legislation was directly linked to discourses of the warrior and made liberalisation for gay members difficult. Whilst the ban has been lifted, homosexual men are still under siege with compulsory AIDS testing and the current push to disallow service people who are HIV positive to take up Active Service. In this way, the image of hegemonic masculinity as warrior continues to be a potent influence on policy and legislation.

Images and discourses of masculinity as warrior require as much as possible a negation of the feminine and homosexuality. While a number of men view most women as potentially good sailors and officers, it is often felt that the role of warrior is inappropriate for them. In the military, gender plays an important part in determining “who does what” and “who is what” (Morgan 1994, 166). Much of the argument against women as warriors centres on the “biological” discourses which view women as naturally nurturant given their capacity as childbearers. It is often argued that to challenge this “natural” role would not only be catastrophic for the military, but for society as a whole (Walbank 1992). Thus according to the dominant discourses, if women become warriors there will be adverse consequences for Defence. Some go further and see the repercussions for the whole of society. Mike, a senior officer, makes this clear:
Mike: Fighting is a man’s job. That is a terrible sexist thing, but I cannot be anything but honest with you after dealing with people in the military environment for well over twenty years. You have to be strong to get up the top. Women might be intellectual, that’s fair enough, but how do women act in a crisis? And this has always been the case in the Navy that in a crisis women are more susceptible to crack than the men. I say that because I see it reflected in people.

Mike positions women as the weaker sex who “crack” more easily than men, a view which takes little account of descriptions in the narratives of WWI, WWII, and, more recently, Vietnam veterans of the shell shock, or what today is called Critical Incidence Stress, frequently experienced by returned soldiers. He then goes on to say:

Women are great people, better than men, but come a crisis who would you depend on? I hope you don’t pick up your chair and throw it at me, but I’m only reflecting what I see.

Can you see that whereas a woman can reach the top of Qantas no problem, in a military environment you have got another factor in there. That is really when you see the distinction of human society. When it comes to having to fight for something who does it? The sharp end is what counts and at the end of the day can women contribute to this sharp end? I can’t see it. Society doesn’t want it. Who will look after the children, if men and women both end up fighting and defending the nation. At the end of the day someone has to stay home and look after the children and that someone may as well be women. If men and women all go out to war there will be no one maintaining things the way they should be back home. The whole of society as we know it will disintegrate.

From his perspective “society” relies on women to maintain equilibrium by assuming the role of child nurturers and carers “back home.”

As indicated above, discourses surrounding masculinity as warrior dominate perceptions of gender and war, and are located not only among the rank-and-file, but in policies and legislation. These factors articulate a language of war, sexuality and gender which set women and men in binary opposition.

MEN AND WORK

One of the necessary characteristics of masculinity as warrior is that of men’s flight from the feminine. Most of this is done in response to a culture where men support and encourage one another’s masculinity to maintain a hegemonically masculine culture. In relation to this Kimmel writes:

Whatever, the variations by race, class, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, being a man means “not being like women.” This notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not, rather than who one is. (Kimmel 1994, 126)

For most men, fleeing the feminine and maintaining an anti-feminine stance is easier than appearing to be pro-women. What is significant here is that not all men as individuals are anti-women, nor are all men against having women
work in traditionally male-dominated areas. However, those men who support women colleagues often do not openly express such sentiments, usually because they are sensitive to the unofficial reprisals which may come from other male members. Women themselves can also be seen to flee dominant notions of femininity, by adopting and valorising masculine mannerisms, behaviour and dress in their attempt to “make it” in a hegemonically masculine environment (Agostino 1997).

Fine (1987) argues that through male bonding men define their social world, and are able to champion an anti-feminine position:

... women who wish to be part of a male-dominated group typically must accept patterns of male bonding and must be able to decode male behaviour patterns. They must be willing to engage in coarse joking, teasing and accept the male based informal structure of the occupation—in other words they must become one of the boys. (Fine 1987, 131)

Taking flight from the feminine was emphasised in a number of the interviews in which male-only work spheres were seen as better than mixed gender work spheres. Having women colleagues is linked to restrictions in the workplace, as well as an interference with male friendships. These “restrictions” are seen to curb “natural” male bonding behaviours important for warriors. Stephen, an Executive Officer of a small landing craft, highlighted this:

Stephen: Well, I am the XO [Executive officer] of the -- [ship] I enjoy it, it's very busy. Mind you I don't get paid enough. Our living conditions are pretty tight. I find that being back on an all male boat there are not as many restrictions on me. It's enjoyable, it's back to being the guys again. After a hard time at sea and when we pull in somewhere, we all go out and have a drink together. A ship just doesn't have the same feel to it when there are females on board. Guys bond better, especially in tough situations like life at sea .... You need that sort of bonding if you are going to get through.

Stephen is convinced from his own experience that male bonding works better without women on board ships. It may be that men “flee women” in order to bond, or perhaps they bond in order to exclude women. Certainly having women in a previously all male mess or wardroom sharply changes the conduct of men towards each other.

The importance that Navy men place on bonding with other men, particularly in relation to war, is imbued with anti-feminine discourses—not surprisingly since “maleness” and “femaleness” are defined in opposition to each other. The male bonding which I refer to is not the same as that which is spoken of in some of the men’s studies literature which considers men bonding together, or being intimate with one another, as an important step towards ending patriarchy. In contrast to this, the male bonding to which I refer and which is commonly spoken of in the Navy, relates to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity and to patriarchy itself. Such male bonding is concerned with keeping the male hegemony and maintaining the male/public and the female/private dichotomies which becomes increasingly diffi-
cult in total institutions such as ADFA and on board ships. Nonetheless such male bonding is concerned with marking out a clearly delineated male sphere in the workplace and using discourses of "nature" and "tradition" to maintain hegemony. These discourses place women in conventional feminised roles which are ratified by a number of beliefs. For example, women are viewed by some RAN men as being a liability during conflict because they have the potential to fall pregnant and their psychological characteristics render them incapable of enduring the ravages of war. Crying, for example, is proof to many men that women cannot perform the job or task at hand as well as men. Josh, a senior sailor, demonstrates this clearly he said: "If there is a problem with a female the water works come out, and you go through a box full of tissues." Then he explained:

Josh: I still like the Navy but it makes it difficult to work when you have lots of new regulations which you didn't have before. Senior sailors that I have spoken to say that a lot of females are a problem.

Josh is typical of other Navy men who have no tolerance of what they see as the weaker feminine characteristics. These characteristics are inappropriate to Navy life. Such beliefs or points of view are given further credence by theoreticians such as Tiger (1970) and Richard (1980) who argue that in situations which threaten social order men will reject women as colleagues and will form close bonds with each other for mutual defence and group cohesion. Tiger suggests that male bonding is as important for warfare as the program of male-female bonding is for reproduction. The importance given to this bonding is expressed by Mike, a senior officer:

Mike: What Navy is doing right now is creating an illusion. The right intention to change is there, but the environment cannot be changed as quickly as what they are saying. At this stage females shouldn't be on ships. On the Bridge is where all the gender harassment is happening, with all the "bum scratching" and "crotch pulling" it's all part of the male complex. You know male bonding, strutting around showing off their wares—I AM A MALE [he says this beating his breast].

Mike’s reference to the Bridge is significant because this is where ships are navigated and driven, where the power is concentrated and where hegemonic masculinity is strengthened, maintained and enforced. He goes on to say:

Mike: We men have always seen this sort of male bonding as important to the defence of the nation. If you can't bond with your mate you can’t win a war basically. You cannot change that overnight, especially on the Bridge. Look, in the really masculine spheres of the ship, like the Bridge, I don’t think it will ever change to accommodate females. I just can’t imagine a female captain of a DDG [Guided Missile Destroyer] or a FFG [Guided Missile Frigate]. Maybe that’s my own masculinity getting in the way, but I cannot see it ever happening. Women just can’t bond with men the way that men can with men.

For Mike, there is no substitute for male bonding in the making of warriors.

For some males the definition of bonding is associated with men becom-
ing mates and a willingness to lay down one's life for a mate. Whilst men spoke of the importance of bonding with other men, such bonding rarely seemed to incorporate the intimacy which is conventionally seen to be a "normal" part of female friendships. Male bonding, it seems, never gets too personal. John, a senior officer, clearly made this point:

K.A.: You talk about men bonding especially at sea, but what do men actually do to bond together?

John: Well you talk about the job and how things are going. I used to talk about women, who you think is a good sort but you wouldn't get deeply entrenched with personal things.

It is interesting to note that John's view of male bonding incorporates "talk" between and among men. But, male bonding involves a great deal of activity which goes beyond conversation. It is also about the "mateship" that comes from engaging in activities which might even be quite meaningless to most men. It is about being able to complain to one another about the "system," the "boss" or the task at hand. However, Townsend (1994) suggests that while "mateship" is seen as an important part of Australian men's lives, in actuality it plays a very minor role in their day-to-day experiences. Mateship, she suggests, is more significant during adolescence and early childhood but fades as men replace male friendships with marital and family bonds which are absent at sea. Buchbinder (1994) attributes much of this discontinuity with male-male relationships to the ways in which men become rivals, and are often suspicious of one another. Generally, men turn to women for intimacy (Donaldson 1991) and although John can discuss most things with his partner he does not see himself as someone who has to get "too personal" with people:

K.A.: The people you tell the deeply personal stuff to are they women or men?

John: Well I have never had any problems. So I have never had to get intensely personal with anybody. I guess the closest female companion I have ever had is Cathy [partner] and I have told her just about everything. But there are a lot of things I don't tell my mates because I think that there are some things that are best kept to yourself. I mean we all harbour some secrets and life would be boring if we didn't.

Surprisingly, John sees himself as "never having problems," in spite of a gruelling divorce settlement he spoke about earlier in the interview.

In an attempt to explain men's inability to relate intimately with other men, Sherrod (1987) asserts that a combination of psychoanalytic, biological, socialisation and economic factors are the key. Economic forces, during the industrial revolution made men more individualistic in their pursuits. It brought about male comparison and supervision of one another. The male ideal of being part of a unit shifted toward ideals of autonomy, separation, distance and objectivity. These new values were incorporated in child rearing and socialisation practices. Discourses of biological predisposition be-
gan to emerge to explain masculine behaviours, particularly in relation to male aggression. The environment that this created for boys was to accelerate their detachment from their mothers and identification with their fathers, despite the marginal role most men played in the lives of their sons:

But fathers' relative absence from child rearing, combined with their non-nurturing behaviour, served to deprive boys of a male model of closeness and intimacy. (Sherrod 1987, 234)

The absence of an ideal role model has left many men insensitive to such sensibilities and indeed the failure of many Navy men to identify with the feminine may be attributed to male-dominated discourses. Therefore, what are conventionally seen as feminine characteristics interfere with the male work practices in the Navy.

An important attribute of male bonding is loyalty to one's mates. It is believed that without loyalty a team of warriors cannot form strong bonds of trust and comradeship. These values are strongly related to survival, and to victory over a common enemy. Within naval rhetoric loyalty to ones superiors is seen to be vital if commands are to be carried through and a war won. Loyalty plays an important role in maintaining hegemonic masculinity and in this way impacts greatly on whether or not women will disclose incidences of sexual harassment. The loyalty discourse is, moreover, located in various formal practices. Formally it is taught through educative programs. Every officer on entry must attend a Character Guidance Course. These courses are taught by Navy Chaplains and much time is given to instilling in cadets, junior officers and sailors a deep sense of allegiance to the Navy, as well as to fellow comrades.

In looking at RAN men at work it becomes apparent that taking flight from the feminine is an important aspect of their identity, while male bonding functions in many instances to exclude women in both the work and play arenas. Indeed women are seen to be a threat to this process. However, it is evident that such "male bonding" is limited and does not allow men close emotional relationships with one another. For this men rely on women partners, friends and relatives.

**PRO-WOMEN MEN**

Not all men are against women joining the Navy or indeed their participation in direct combat duties. Although few in number among those interviewed for this study, their voices are important if the biggest picture possible is to be achieved. Three men—two heterosexual and one homosexual—identified themselves as being pro-women in that they supported women working alongside men in all posts including direct-combat duties. One of these men directly identified himself as a feminist, whilst the other two sympathised with the feminist agenda. These men expressed an understanding of women's experiences of gender and sex-based harassment and this section seeks to ex-
explore such views through their eyes.

Expressing a pro-woman stance was something that these men found difficult in a culture where taking flight from the feminine through a range of practices and behaviours is commonplace. Martin, a senior officer, for instance, found that more often than not he would not "stick up" for women because the anti-women sentiment on board the ships he had served on was so great. He expressed his dilemma in a journal he wrote for this research while at sea in 1994:

On Monday ——, I had cause to enter the mess that the Army members on board are living in. The reason for my visit was to distribute a page two news article from The Australian. There in the mess was a big poster of a woman in the nude, displaying her breasts and pubic area. I found it offensive that these posters are still allowed—perhaps sea policy says they are not allowed. I asked a PO [Petty Officer] and she said all genital areas are meant to have a band-aid or tape over them. A male officer said he believes they are allowed so long as they/it, is not in a public place.

If I say something to the mess members directly, I run the risk of alienating them from my command. If I say something to their Divisional Officer, I have to trust his confidence not to mention me. How would a woman feel if she was to go in there [the mess] for morning shakes?

Christopher, also a senior officer, expressed a sense of powerlessness to do anything about the lack of support for women he witnessed around him. Whilst he could see the way in which the dominant masculine culture in the Navy limits women’s participation, and their sense of well-being in their places of work, he found it difficult to challenge:

Christopher: I went to a course yesterday. Anyway, I realise just how deep misogyny runs and how hard it is to get rid of it.

In this course they show a number of videos which I find are demeaning to women. In one video, for example, women are portrayed as anything but equals. On the one hand they had a female officer walking past a male officer at a bar and he reaches and pulls her dress off making her look like a victim. Then you have the other female dressed in uniform but wearing very heavy make up and looking seductive as she pouts. Naturally everyone laughed at these images.

Unfortunately these were the only images of women; there were no others to counter these. I find it difficult to say anything because I would be seen as a wowser, the one who can’t take a joke. I am sure women must find it the same, so you just laugh. To me it really shows that misogyny is alive and well in the military.

Martin, the aforementioned senior officer, also spoke of attempting to address serious issues of gender discrimination in his work environment but, on the whole, his challenges were unsuccessful:

K.A.: Did they [women] ever come to you and discuss their feelings about ship life?

Martin: Yes, two women did. One woman complained about the pornographic
pictures, but got a very curt response from the Command. The whole way of thinking at that time was that if they wanted to be on the ship they had to live with the set up at the time. Another woman spoke to me regarding the pornographic pictures which were inserted in the daily newspapers. She complained about it and was told if she didn’t like it she shouldn’t be on board the ship. The next day a porn picture of a man was inserted by some of the men on board claiming that they were attempting to be non-sexist.

Mind you even some of the men were affronted by all this porno stuff. Many just wouldn’t speak up for fear of being labelled, a wuss, wimp, girl, sheila, or worse still, a poof. Thinking about it now I guess I should have said more than I did.

Andrew, a homosexual junior officer, found himself pressured to be “normal” and join in the joking and banter from time to time:

Andrew: Well, I guess sometimes I participate in it all myself. Recently we were in Hawaii and we had women invited on board for a party. After quite a few drinks later one of the girls was on the table dancing and the guys were whistling at her trying to get her to take her clothes off. I suppose I stood around and whistled as well. Even though I am pro-women, I often feel a pressure to be like the others, perhaps that has to do with me being gay. I try to appear “normal” and in this case “normal” was making sexist jokes and remarks about this woman ... I don’t like myself for it, but I am guilty of it.

These men were experiencing the same sort of powerlessness that Navy women often feel. By not going along with the dominant male discourses surrounding masculinity, these men, despite their rank, feared finding themselves also at the margins. In the following account, Martin discusses the relationship between his rank and his own powerlessness. He discloses that misogyny can came from high ranking levels and, in the case of life at sea, from the Command:

Martin: It was common on board one ship in particular to have nude parties. Alcohol in male-dominated environments is like a Molotov cocktail. There seemed to be little restraint shown. Even the CO was sleeping with women on board his ship. Military power for some of these men becomes an aphrodisiac.

I found the nude parties disgusted me. I was not alone here. There were a number of men who felt the same. Yet what could you do, some of the worst offenders were the most senior officers. I think the nude parties were a way of intimidating women, keeping the ship a place for men. It was a way of saying to the women you don’t belong here and we don’t want you.

The overall naval culture is such that men who are pro-women find it difficult to express these sentiments. Since the dominant male culture can no longer preclude having women on board ships, men find ways of positioning them as sexual objects. Christopher saw this masculine strategy when serving on board a ship where women were being posted for the first time:

Christopher: At dinner when we had found out that we were to have women come on board for the next deployment, we all began to talk about it and the attitude from the XO down was negative. I would sometimes defend the prin-
ciple of having women, but would meet with some opposition. My view was that it could only help to balance this environment. Lots of the men said that if women were to come and serve on board they would leave. Of course, none of them did and some of those who vehemently opposed them became the welcoming committee, carrying their bags on board, I suppose hoping for something in return. It was kind of like if we have to have women then let's make sure we can get something from them.

Christopher implies in the interview that men's attitudes changed when sexual fraternisation or at least flirting with women members was a possibility. His statement is indicative of the ways in which men continue to position women within a sexual context as a way of "managing" their presence in their workplaces.

Anti-women sentiment also manifested itself with deeply felt resentment in relation to women and their use of ship's space. Space on board a ship can become highly contentious. The quality and quantity of space that each individual has is related to rank. For instance, the Commanding Officer of a vessel always has a cabin of his own with his own private facilities near the Bridge. Heads of Department on larger vessels also have their own cabins but are likely to use shared bathroom facilities. The higher the rank the more privacy one has. This is one of the privileges of rank.

With the anti-women-on-ships attitude widely adopted throughout the Navy, it is not surprising that men on ships argue women are given better facilities and accommodation. Moreover, they maintain these privileges conceded to women on board counter the naval and military tradition of the privilege of rank. As some men see it, this is one of the few remaining job rewards:

Peter: It seemed they [women] were always having to justify being at sea with us. There was a lot of resentment from the men even over very small things like the fact that the women were given the use of the heads at the senior officers' section. Many of the men complained about this saying that the women were getting favourable treatment, and men as a result were losing privilege of rank. Heaven help the women if they accidentally left a pair of undies in the bathroom. The men would have had a field day.

Ship's space is yet another factor in the anti-women camp which stacks up against the presence of women on ships.

Men who consider themselves to be pro-women find it difficult to challenge the anti-women sentiments located in naval culture. Much of the problem lies in the ways in which Navy men feel themselves watched or under the surveillance of other men (Foucault 1980). To be outwardly supportive of women can entail public humiliation and, as one commentator points out, may result in men being "deprived of their gender status as men" (Buchbinder 1994, 36).
CONCLUSION

The domination of masculine culture is not simply reproduced by men. It would be inaccurate to conceive men as solely maintaining the male/female dualism in the workplace. As Game and Pringle (1983) assert, women, along with men, reproduce the sexual division of labour in the way they go about their day-to-day lives both in the private and public spheres. Yet throughout this paper we have seen how Navy men define and view masculinity in relation to their role as warriors and how all men are under pressure to conform to dominant notions of masculinity in order to maintain their “gendered identity” in the eyes of their peers. Even men who espouse pro-women sentiments find it difficult to support women since they are aware of other men’s surveillance of them. To stand out as “different,” would mean being noticed.

It has also been shown that masculinist discourses within the RAN take on strongly anti-feminine positionings which contribute toward the maintenance of the historically male-centred work sphere. Burton (1991, 7) views these as “strategies of resistance [or] masculinity-protection strategies.” In other words, this is a process by which men can attempt to protect their job identity because work ceases to be attractive to them if women have a significant presence. Burton considers that this is a direct outcome of the fact that men’s job satisfaction is very closely tied to “masculine ego satisfaction” (Burton 1991, 7). This may indeed underlie the deep prejudices against women that are expressed in naval circles.

NOTES

The data gathered for this project was obtained from a number of sources. A total of sixty RAN members (twenty-six women and thirty-four men) were interviewed from both sea and shore establishments. Thirty members were interviewed twice, and the remaining thirty were interviewed three times. This resulted in a total of 150 interviews which were conducted over a period of thirty months. In addition to face-to-face interviews, data was obtained from the 122 submissions to the Senate Inquiry which explored allegations of sexual harassment in the Royal Australian Navy. Moreover, four additional people (three women and one man) kept sea-going diaries which extended over six to twelve months. These personnel were part of the mainstream culture participating in the Navy on a full-time basis. Hence data was not obtained from reservists, or civilians in the Navy, such as social workers, psychiatrists, doctors and administrative staff.

Participant observation also became a primary source for data gathering. Whilst not able to observe RAN members directly in their work setting, I was able to attend as the wife of an RAN officer both official and unofficial social functions on board ships and ashore (ten official functions, and fifteen unofficial functions). The official functions included “Ladies Dining in Nights,” “Passing out Parades,” “Ceremonial Sunsets” and various cocktail parties. The unofficial social functions included dinner parties and barbecues where most present were RAN members and their families; “happy hours” at wardrooms and messes; Christmas parties; and
“drinks” on board various ships. After all of these social gatherings I took careful notes. I also gathered data from two main texts circulated widely in the Navy, Navy News the naval newspaper and Sea Talk a periodical put out by the Personnel Division.

The concept of “hegemony” refers to the cultural dynamics by which a particular category is able to perpetuate and maintain a central and privileged position in society. Hegemony relates to masculinity in that it can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” (Connell 1995, 77)

This is with the exception of sport and religion (see Morgan 1994).

The Sex Discrimination Act 1984 defines combat duties as those tasks which require a person to commit or participate directly in the commission of an act of violence against an adversary in time of war. The Act refers to combat-related duties as those tasks which require a person to work in support of, and in close proximity to, a person performing combat duties. These definitions are used within official naval discourses. However, the distinctions made are arbitrary since both share the combat environment and often the same level of risk. In reality there is little difference between a person who serves on board a war ship and one who serves on board a supply ship. In many respects personnel who serve on board supply vessels (non-combatant vessels) are at greater risk since eliminating supply is a tactic used to starve the war ships which rely on such vessels for refuelling, food, medical supplies, ammunition and so on.

It is a common perception that everyday men leave sexuality at home, before they enter the workplace (Roper 1994). Within the academic literature, however, sexuality in the workplace is now given a central place (see Burrell and Hearn 1989; Parkin 1989; Pringle 1989).

See for example Seidler 1991.

“Heads” refers to toilets.

WORKS CITED


