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# The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy

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This article examines the construction of hegemonic masculinity within the US Navy. Based on life history interviews with 27 male officers, this study explores alternative discourses and identities of officers from three different communities in the Navy: aviation, surface warfare, and the supply corps. Definitions of masculinity are relationally constructed through associations of difference: aviators tend to draw upon themes of autonomy and risk taking; surface warfare officers draw upon themes of perseverance and endurance; and supply officers draw upon themes of technical rationality. Further, these masculinities depend upon various contrasting definitions of femininity. Finally, this article explores a series of contradictions that threaten the secure construction of masculinity within this military culture.

Following the growth of women's studies and feminist approaches to research, an interest in the critical study of men — in 'Naming Men as Men' (Collinson and Hearn 1994) — has emerged. Studies of masculinity in various social institutions, have problematized the construction of masculinity and have made men visible as a social category. This includes the study of men and crime (Messerschmidt 1993); men in the printing press industry (Cockburn 1983); men in financial service institutions (Kerfoot and Knights 1993); male engineers on the shop floor (Collinson 1988) and studies of sports and masculinity (Messner 1992; Messner and Sabo 1990; Klein 1993).

The military is a prime candidate for the study of masculinity, not only because it is an institution populated with men, but also because it plays a primary role in shaping images of masculinity in the larger society (Connell 1992; Morgan 1994). Following Arkin and Dobrofsky (1978), 'The military has socialized millions of men according to some traditional blueprint. As such the dominant adult male role model could largely be the product of the military, particularly in as much as those who are thus socialized have returned to society' (p. 167).

Militaries around the world have defined the soldier as an embodiment of traditional male sex role behaviors. From recruiting posters that seek 'a few good men' to popular media images of John Wayne fearlessly

leading the troops in a World War II battle, Tom Cruise as a 'top gun' pilot, or Sylvester Stallone as Rambo single-handedly rescuing American prisoners of war, there has long been an association between the military and images of masculinity.

This study applies some of the analytic insights of critical men's studies to understand the construction of masculinity within the US Navy. This article explores how the Navy reproduces an ideology of hegemonic masculinity and how male officers' concrete practices and choices construct an order of gender relations. After reviewing a few of the core themes in the new critical men's study, I will deconstruct the notion of monolithic masculinity associated with the military and explore a number of alternative masculine discourses and identities that male officers construct in this culture. In particular, I will show how the various constructions of masculinity vary across job specialties. In doing so, I will argue that these versions of masculinity are relationally constructed through associations of difference. I seek to show how definitions of masculinity emerge within collective practices, definitions that reside as much within organizational patterns and practices as within individual personalities. Finally, I explore some of the contradictions within the Navy's gender regime. The view here is that gender is an actively constructed social accomplishment. Following Morgan's (1994) call to study a range of masculinities within the military,

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this study reveals that the link between masculinity, violence, and the military is more complex than the image of 'man the warrior' might suggest.

### The gender order and masculine hegemony

From the perspective of social constructionism, there is an important distinction between the categories of sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological categories 'male' and 'female'. But gender is a social organizing principle, a human invention like language, that organizes life in culturally patterned ways. Gender is an institution that structures social relationships and upholds and reproduces rules and patterns of expectation. Most of us learn to comply with these rules and experience them as natural and common sense. However, these structures have no validity other than through the daily practices and actions that people engage in. Human beings are agents, whose actions and practices either accomplish or challenge the taken-for-granted gender norms and expectations. Human beings actively accomplish, or 'do gender' (West and Zimmerman 1987) continuously — in the way we talk, walk, shake hands, and dress. But we 'do' these activities within the context of larger social patterns. Hence, the relationship between individual practices and larger social structures is recursive. Following Lorber (1994), 'The social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered societal structure; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face interaction, they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power' (p. 6).

The concept 'masculinity', then, is not a genetic instinct or a stable role set (see Connell 1987). Masculinity is embedded within an ensemble of social practices, symbols, discourses, and ideologies associated with the category of 'man'. In a landmark article, Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985), called for further study of a range of masculinities differentiated by structures of power dynamics, by different rules of emotional attachment, and by different rules regarding the division of labor. The term 'hegemony' originates with Gramsci's notion of class relations and refers to the dynamic process by which groups create and sustain power, how 'normal' definitions and taken-for-granted expressions come to define situations. Hegemony goes beyond the material holding of power and refers to the *process* by which

'normal' and ideal definitions emerge, how the terms of morality surface and persuade.

The term 'hegemonic masculinity' refers to a particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated. The hegemonic ideal of masculinity in current Western culture is a man who is independent, risk-taking, aggressive, heterosexual, and rational (Connell 1995). It is important to recognize that hegemonic masculinity is not the same as stereotypical sex roles, however. Critical men's studies refer to a dynamic conception of a gender order (Connell 1987; Messner and Sabo 1990) as a structure of social relations that are historically variable. Rotundo (1993), for example, traces the historical changes in American images of masculinity. Roper and Tosh (1991) trace the changing images of masculinity in England since the 19th century. These studies emphasize how hegemonic versions of masculinity achieve meaning within patterns of difference. They examine contrasting dichotomies such as reason/feeling, and mind/body, as well as various constructions of the 'other', contrasting images of masculinity with images of the child and the feminine (Roper and Tosh 1991).

Masculine hegemony refers not only to the various groupings of men and the ideals they uphold. It refers also to the process by which these groups and ideals form, the organizational situations and constraints that shape and construct these ideals and groups. Cockburn's (1983) study of British printing press workers illustrates this process: when new technology changed work procedures, systematic efforts were made to exclude women from the trade and to marginalize other categories of younger and unskilled men in order to sustain a definition of printing as a 'masculine' occupation. Messner's (1992) study of professional athletes and Klein's (1993) ethnographic study of professional body builders reveal that men produce a variety of masculinities as they struggle toward the hegemonic ideal that few of them can attain, and even fewer can sustain, in the face of such obstacles as competition, failure, injury, or retirement. Kerfoot and Knights (1993) demonstrate how paternalistic and competitive masculine discourses within the UK financial service industry reproduce a variety of masculinizing practices and identity maintenance strategies. Messerschmidt (1993) studies how criminal actions are one form of accomplishing masculinity that varies by class differences, from accommodating to opposition masculinities as a means to secure identity. These studies deconstruct a

monolithic image of masculinity and outline a variety of alternative masculinities and strategies various groups of men use to create, negotiate, and maintain a masculine identity.

In many of these studies, subjectivity and identity are essential themes. Power relations, discourses, ideologies, and practices produce multiple and sometimes contradictory masculine identities (Collinson and Hearn 1994). Many of these studies discuss the precarious nature of masculine identities that must be achieved, negotiated, and contested in day-to-day interaction (Kerfoot and Knights 1993). Because every gender regime has internal contradictions between ideology and practice, a relational theory of masculinity must identify how men work through these contradictions and challenges to achieving a secure identity. For example, if the hegemonic ideal of masculinity involves an image of rugged heterosexuality, independence, and toughness, how do these men carve out an identity in an organizational world in which such day-to-day work neither demands nor allows for these displays?

### Methods

This study focuses on three themes: the construction of masculinity in the lives of male naval officers; the differentiation of masculinities within various sites within the Navy; how these men draw upon themes of hegemonic masculinity to negotiate their various organizational situations. This study employs a life-history method of research. The strength of this method is that it documents social structures and institutional change in addition to personal practices. In using life story methodology, Connell (1995) cites Carter's (1963) concept of personal practice as project developing through time in which social structure, institutional change, and personal life intersect.

Within the US Navy there are three combat specialties (surface warfare, aviation, and submarine warfare) and numerous 'support' communities (including supply corps, medical corps, intelligence, and general unrestricted line). This is part of a larger study in which 58 life history interviews were conducted with male naval officers from each of these communities. This study reports on a subset of those officers and focuses on the dynamics of three communities: aviation, surface warfare, and supply corps. Ten cases from the aviation and surface warfare communities were analyzed for this study; seven cases from the supply community were analyzed. The predominant rank of these officers

was lieutenant junior grade, lieutenant and lieutenant commander, the approximate equivalent of middle managers.

Each subject was asked to discuss concrete incidents in his life as he passed through various social institutions — family, school, career — and significant events in his career path in the Navy. In particular each was asked to focus on the nature of various jobs, positions and duties, the quality of relationships with peers, subordinates, and bosses. The interview lasted between one hour and two and a half hours. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed, generating over 1,000 pages of transcripts. In addition to the interview data, as a civilian member of a naval institution, I had unique access to the inner workings of the culture. I was privy to informal interactions in the classroom, at meals, in the gym, and at various social gatherings, arenas where identities were being constructed, displayed and contested. I developed personal friendships with officers from the various communities, and these men often became my informants. When I was puzzled about certain themes or wished to explore something further, I would often meet with them over lunch or dinner to ask about the implications of a theme I was pursuing.

In analyzing this data, my first and basic unit of analysis was the single case study; I wrote up and analyzed each individual case. In analyzing life histories, a theory of social structure must serve as guide. I followed Connell's (1987) theory that gender practices form patterns within three substructures: relations of power, division of labor and rules regarding emotional attachment. Each case history was intensively studied along these themes.

Following individual case analyses, groups of cases from various sites within the Navy were constructed and analyzed for common themes, using a method of constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to differentiate between groups. In an effort to draw a preliminary sketch of the gender order within the US Navy I began to look for patterns of collective practices. I paid particular attention to the dynamics of the construction of the hegemonic ideal of masculinity: how individuals identified with certain masculinities and differentiated themselves from others, and how they differentiated themselves from forms of femininity.

Using qualitative data to supply similarities within groups as well as differences between groups is sometimes difficult. As common themes emerged within each of the locations, their meaning was continuously

checked for relevance against individual life cases. To document the main themes, I have selected details from a few of the cases to illuminate experiences at various sites within the organization. I also provide detail to give a flavor of the variations and alternatives available to these men.

In every interview, confidentiality was promised. For this reason, the names of particular officers that appear in this article are fictitious.

These interviews were conducted between 1992 and 1994. During this period, two trends affecting the US military were relevant to this study. In the post-cold-war era, the US Navy has been downsizing and integrating women into combat positions. From a total active duty enrollment of 509,950 in 1993, the Navy is projected to decrease to 394,000 by 1999. The total number of ships the US Navy deployed in 1990 was 575 (George 1992). This includes aircraft carriers, attack submarines, surface combatants, amphibious ships, and support ships. The projection is that these will decrease to 330 by 1999. The number of deployable aircraft carriers will reduce from 14 in 1990 to 11 in 1995.

In addition to this downsizing, a 1994 policy change allows women to assume duties of operational combat positions, including the positions on surface war ships and fighter planes. Of the 64,430 active duty naval officers, 8,364 are women. While most of these women currently hold positions in administration and health care, the Navy anticipates that more women officers will be integrated into warfare specialties. One consequence of these trends is that men are competing for fewer positions.

### Constructing masculinity in the US Navy

#### 1. Masculinity as discipline, perseverance, and toughness

Various studies of military training reveal that the military persuasively bounds off the recruit from civilian life in an effort to socialize 'boys to be men'. Recruits learn the value of appearance, cleanliness, exacting detail, and respect for rank and tradition. They come to value conformity and obedience, and learn display rules for exhibiting aggression and courage in the face of risk. Like Goffman's notion of a total institution (Goffman 1961), socialization is pervasive: recruits are 'cut off from the wider society', and live in an enclosed 'formally administered

round of life' (p. xiii). Lovell's (1964) study of the professional socialization of cadets at West Point and Zurcher's (1967) study of recruits' nine week indoctrination in Navy basic training (boot camp), discuss the deliberate efforts to shape recruits into becoming what Janowitz (1960) calls 'professionals in violence' (p. 3). From small rituals such as shaving heads and discarding civilian clothes for uniforms, to warrior initiation rites, violent drill instructors, hazing rituals, sex education films on the harms of venereal disease, recruits learn that there is 'a cult of toughness and masculinity traditionally associated with making soldiers out of civilians'. They are taught that the proper response to tests they face is to exhibit 'courage, endurance, toughness, and lack of squeamishness' (Stouffer *et al.* 1949, p. 156).

Throughout all communities in the Navy, the image of masculinity that is perpetuated involves physical toughness, the endurance of hardships, aggressiveness, a rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic, and a refusal to complain. And yet it is never assumed that such character traits are permanent. Indeed, the Navy creates structures and routines that call for continual testing of these qualities. This is a culture that chronically creates trials that separate the 'weak' from the rest. From the first day of training, the culture creates a testing ground that creates boundaries of inclusion around those who exhibit strength, endurance and competence. Passing these early tests is a sign that one is capable of perseverance and toughness. One lieutenant, John Baker, came from a working class background and joined the Navy after college because it offered a good career opportunity. He found the experience of Basic Training to be challenging, but affirming: 'At OCS [Officers Candidate School], it was very demanding, it required a lot of discipline. I loved it. We started with 23 and ended with eight. We got very close. I'm a person who doesn't quit.'

Many officers echoed the feelings of Lt. Baker, who embraces the experience of 'not quitting', of exhibiting the rugged discipline that separated a select group from those who quit. Lt. Tom Knorr grew up in Kansas and graduated from college with a degree in engineering. While in college, he volunteered for a few years as a paramedic. He felt a lack of direction in his life. An influential moment occurred when he saw the movie, 'An Officer and a Gentleman' and saw the military as a career that would give his life discipline and direction. In particular, he decided to become a pilot because 'In a jet you're the one in charge'. He learned very quickly that Officers Candidate School (OCS) would not be easy.

[OCS] was tough, but there was no way I would quit. I cut all my ties to the past when I left. I figured, I'm at OCS now, I can't quit. If I quit and went back home after six months people would wonder why, they'd think I was a quitter. I couldn't face those questions. They overload you at OCS. Every day you have two hours of physical training. Mentally you're thrown in situations you're not familiar with. You're stripped of your identity. You either make it or you don't survive. Some people quit. I wasn't going to quit. Even if I was last, no one would call me a quitter. What we learned to say was, you can strip everything away, but you can't touch my pride.

Masculinity achieves meaning within patterns of differences. If success for men is associated with 'not quitting' in the face of hardships, femininity becomes associated with quitting, complaining, and weakness. This follows Kimmel's (1994) notion that definitions of masculinity depend on changing definitions of women and gay men who serve as the 'others' against which heterosexual men construct and project an identity. In fact, there is a tradition in the military of reserving the labels associated with femininity for the 'other' (Enloe 1990; Strange 1983; Jeffords 1989). In many of the world's armies, for example, it is a tradition to insult a potential or defeated enemy by calling him a 'woman' (Enloe 1990; Strange 1983). During the Vietnam War, US Marines often depicted the South Vietnamese Army as 'faggots' because they were reluctant to engage in combat (Levy 1992). Association of fear, passivity, and the feminine was sometimes extended to American soldiers who were afraid to fight in World War II (Gray 1959). In basic training, drill instructors sometimes called marine recruits 'faggots' to imply that they lack the aggression associated with masculinity (Levy 1992).

The subjects for this study confirmed this. They reported that, from the first day of training, recruits who complain or do not keep up with the others are the targets of gendered insults: they are called girls, pussies, weenies, and wimps by the instructors. Often, while marching, the instructor leads the men in songs that demean women as weak and feeble.

However, in the 1990s, more women are being integrated into the Navy, creating a challenge to the traditional image of the male warrior. If these grueling tests separate the men from the boys, what does it mean if a woman can pass them? One way that men transform this contradiction is through

constructions of women as physically weak and unable to do what men do.

The association between weakness and women was reproduced in stories that officers told about women officers during training. Every officer interviewed had some story to tell about women who could not endure the hardships associated with military life. One officer remarked that women cannot tolerate the same stress that he and his male colleagues can:

We do this fitness test — you have to hang from a bar. Some women hang there and just quit when it hurts instead of enduring the pain for 45 seconds or so. They'd just stop when it hurt. In boot camp you have to endure the pain or you go home. That's why women can't do combat.

Many of the officers spoke in metaphors of surrender and relinquishment when discussing women. They talked about women who 'folded', who 'gave in' or 'fell out', expressions that invoke an image of someone collapsing from the weight of something they cannot handle. Like helicopter pilot Lt. Ted Smith, many officers recalled that the women had to be given easier physical tests:

In flight school we had this obstacle course. We thought we were in great shape, but running in sand is tough. You have to go over this 6 foot wall. The women didn't have to do any of that. They could run around the wall. Men who couldn't do it had to go back and do it over.

Many men told stories about women who 'got off easy'. One officer discussed the difference between the men who endured and the women who 'fell out'.

Some good [male] officers [came] out of there. The good ones were up front, intelligent, had good physical prowess, didn't fall out on marches. They didn't have to be brought in on a truck like some of the women. They [the women] just lose credibility when they fall out on physical exercises. They lined the roads.

The 'good ones' achieves a meaning of 'up front', 'intelligent', physically powerful through a gendered contrast to the women who surrendered to the stress of the OCS tests. By engaging in a collective interpretive practice, the men reach a consensus that what constitutes pride is associated with 'not quitting'. Passing these tests constitutes membership in an elite, seemingly homogenous group.

You succeed or fail as a unit. There's a lot of stress. Like one day, you're doing trench assault. It's hot and humid. One of the colonels would say, 'That's horrible. Do it again.' You're tired, you've been crawling for hundreds of yards ... When you're done, you have a beer together and say, 'Look what we just did'. We live or die together. We put our lives into each other's hands.

Many officers described such ritualized collective celebration as occasions to re-live the experience. The colonel's humiliating exhortations are superseded by the group's re-affirmation: they talk to each other in codes that only a select group could understand, to remind one another that *they did it, they did not quit*. Those men who drop out of the training and those who appear unable to pass these grueling tests help define those who do pass as strong, competent, reliable, members of an exclusive club. Lt. Smith continued: 'This is like a big boys club. It's the varsity ... There's a status to being here. You know that other guys ... passed the same tests. They're with you. They're your peers. It's a boys club. It's the elite. You earned it.' The telling and retelling of stories, the collective sense making that produces a communal feeling, maintains the boundaries and legitimates the status of those who pass the tests. By reproducing stories of women who quit or 'stop when it hurts', the integration of women into the Navy is less likely to dilute the tough image associated with the ideology of masculinity.

One privilege of membership includes the freedom to continue aggressive and crude language, to go beyond barriers of a more 'civil' society. Within an all male group, the men are permitted to 'be like boys', to swear, tease one another. The officer above continued: 'If you make a mistake, others heckle you, needle you. There are no barriers, you're free to be rude to each other. It's part of the boys club. But with women, you have to be a gentleman, you feel ill at ease. You can't do that stuff.' Having to be 'a gentleman' around women invokes a patriarchal masculinity (Kerfoot and Knights 1993) and differentiates men from women, furthering the sense that women are 'soft' and need to be protected from the 'hard' rudeness and incivility that the other men can tolerate. Engaging in 'improper' behavior is a socially differentiated staging area that constitutes friendship, status, and self-identity. As in Fine's (1986) study of the 'dirty play of little boys', this behavior does not represent a personal, destructive impulse as much as a 'showing off' in the presence of others (Fine, p. 140). Like the

men in Collinson's (1988) study of engineering culture, these men secure a masculine identity and achieve group acceptance by tolerating degrading and humiliating remarks.

## 2. Naval aviators: masculinity as taking risks in the face of danger

The specialty that evokes the highest status among naval officers is aviation. Nicknamed 'fly boys' and 'airedales', pilots come closest to embodying the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. They represent aggressiveness, technical mastery of complex machinery, courage, and autonomy — a traditional preserve of men (Hacker 1989; Cockburn 1985). As one pilot said, 'At the age of 26 I was flying this multi-million dollar aircraft on my own. I had all this technology in my hands.' In addition pilots have a reputation for boldness, irreverence, aggressive heterosexual activity. There are numerous stories about aviators attending wild, drunken parties, engaging in anonymous heterosexual relations. Each of the aviators interviewed confirmed that his life is marked by a degree of recklessness and wildness and each attributed this risk-taking behavior to the danger associated with flying. Many echoed the words of one pilot who said: 'Each time we go out, we never know if we'll be back ... So, we live for today. We do tend to be wild and take more risks. It's a mortality thing'. After a recent fatal crash of an F-18 jet, one pilot joked: 'We're aviators. We laugh in the face of death'.

All of the aviators discussed the thrill they experience when flying. In particular, they enjoy the moments of autonomy, the freedom to leave the base or the ship and fly through open space. Lt. Hanks, navigator aboard an anti-submarine aircraft said:

We'd launch at 5 a.m. chasing subs. It was exciting. Decisions are made based on data you feed back. We'd be out for 6 hours, turn off the radar, the ship didn't know where we were. We climbed above the clouds. It was fun, like a video game in real life. It was awesome.

For those who engaged in combat, the experiences were unforgettable. The three officers interviewed who had flown in combat missions recalled them as the most intense experiences of their lives:

Flying combat in the Gulf was an incredible high. It cheapens the experience to even talk about it. I was totally in tune with my surroundings ... It was synergy ... We flew at 10 feet (above ground) because of all the oil smoke, so we were going at over



110 miles an hour at 10 feet above the ground ... One day we flew the entire length and breadth of Kuwait in one day. You could see the incredible devastation, the burned out tanks, the bodies. It was awesome ... If you hit a telephone wire, you were dead. So I was totally in tune with my surroundings. I was the right guy at the right time. I was very scared. It was like a great video game and I had the keys to the car.

This aviator's feelings of transcendence and vitality render this experience almost inexpressible ('it cheapens it to even talk about it'). This is language usually reserved for the sacred. The passion and intensity surrounding this passage echo Gray's (1959) recollections of combat in World War II in which he recalls the experience of being completely outside himself, feeling 'ecstasy', 'powerful fascination', in language that borders on eroticism. Following Hacker (1989) and Game and Pringle (1983) such feelings of power associated with operating 'hard' technology mark this as an area of male preserve. Following Connell's (1995) notion that masculinity practices serve as ideologies that blur contradictions, the erotic pleasure the pilots find in 'playing' these real-life high-tech video games displaces their awareness that people are being killed and maimed.

The elite status of the aviators is institutionalized. Their specialty is, in fact, the highest paid in the Navy. In addition to receiving a special \$250 monthly stipend, called 'flight pay', above the base salary commensurate with their rank, after five years they receive an additional \$650 per month, a bonus that increases incrementally with tenure. Other naval officers single out jet pilots as the Navy's elite, the object of jealousy and resentment from surface warfare officers who feel that they live under much harsher conditions than do the 'airedales'. Being considered the elite comes at a price: aviators find themselves under intense scrutiny. Only those who pass highly competitive aptitude and physical exams are considered for flight school. Even after an officer is selected to attend flight school, there is a 'weeding out' process. Aviators recall stories of flight instructors who deliberately try to challenge the student pilots, to 'stress (us) beyond our capacity' as one put it, 'to see if you can take it'. Students are taught a given number of maneuvers each day, and then are regularly tested to see if they can correctly perform the maneuvers, at first in simulators and later in a training aircraft. Every training flight is graded by an instructor, who often yells at and belittles

students who make errors. A failure to adequately perform a maneuver is called a 'down'. Every time a student receives a 'down', he must appear before an attrition board made up of senior training officers in his squadron, who question him about his knowledge of flight procedures and determine if the student is fit to fly. Because the performance is so public, failing a flight test is humiliating. Few officers were willing to discuss the experience of failure in much detail, but those who did recalled these moments as very painful and isolating. One pilot recalled that his wife had just given birth to a new baby and he was very nervous. 'I was a bundle of nerves that day, our first child had just been born. We went flying and I did awful. He broadcast over the radio in front of everyone, so they could all hear it, "We have a down." It was a kick in the ass.' Following this incident, this officer went to his room and 'had a tantrum', destroying the room in a 'fit of anger and frustration'. He recalled it as one of the most humiliating and painful experiences of his life. One of the contradictions inherent in this masculine culture is that, while the organization creates experiences of inevitable failure, there is no legitimate way for members to justify failure.

Flight instructors and attrition boards, in addition to testing for knowledge of maneuvers, also appraise the students' mental and emotional disposition. Capacity to analytically and rationally function under conditions of considerable stress is one of the requirements for surviving flight school. 'Flight school is a weeding out process. A lot of instructors are dicks. They want to see how much you can take. They ask you to do these maneuvers and if you blow it, they start screaming at you right there in the airplane.' The 'tough ones' learn to deal with these belittling gestures. One aviator, Lt. Cdr. McCorkle, a former college football star and an F-18 attack pilot, described how he handled the pressure by framing his instructors' 'tantrums' as 'a game'.

Maybe it was because I was used to getting yelled at in football practice by the coach, or getting yelled at by the upperclassmen at the naval academy, but I just took it as a game. Some guys couldn't take it, they'd fold. You just learn to keep your mouth shut and take it. You're steaming on the inside.

Previous masculinizing practices, in particular having a football coach who belittled and ridiculed the players, provided an anticipatory socialization for Lt. Cdr. McCorkle. In playing sports, judgement under pressure, stoic



courage, endurance of pain, and controlling emotion are all considered signs of manhood (Whitson 1990). Lt. Cdr. McCorkle's language is strikingly similar to that of male athletes who learn 'to take orders, to take pain, to "take out" the opponents' (Sabo 1992, p. 160).

Successful pilots are the ones who demonstrate that they can 'take it' without flinching, that they can continue to think analytically and suppress emotions. Lt. Cdr. McCorkle described flying 300 miles off the coast of Japan at night, 250 miles from his aircraft carrier when his electrical systems began to malfunction. He had no instruments to track his velocity speed or altitude and had to perform various emergency procedures simultaneously to save the aircraft and return safely. In his words, 'Emotions are out of place. You have to keep thinking and stay focused or you lose the aircraft. Every second is precious.'

Organizational practices reinforce the status hierarchy that marks the risk-takers as elite. Upon graduating from flight school, each officer is continuously ranked against his/her peers. Those ranked highest receive priority in choosing the aircraft they wish to specialize in. They can choose jets, propeller planes, or helicopters, each with a different mission.

As Foucault (1977) points out, power relations are embedded in processes of categorization and differentiation. Jet fighter pilots are seen as the most masculine and most prestigious. (Even among aviators, there is a status hierarchy based on risk taking and gender. Jet pilots refer to helicopter pilots as 'wimps'.) Even after the pilot receives his wings, the system of ranking and surveillance continues. For a jet pilot, successfully completing an aircraft carrier landing is an important rite of passage. This is known as a 'trap' or an 'arrested landing' because the plane's momentum is halted by a wire across the carrier, a very dangerous operation, especially when landing at night. Each final approach and carrier landing is graded by the LSO (landing signal officer) on a scale of 0 to 5. At the end of each tour of duty, patches (which are later attached to uniforms for all to see) are awarded to the five highest rated pilots in each squadron.

The surveillance goes beyond formal ranking. When a carrier is underway, all flight deck activity is filmed and telecast in the officers' wardroom. The pilots who are not flying that day often gather to watch the approaches and landings and talk about their colleagues' performance. Pilots who handle their approach well are lauded, just as those who make a 'shaky' approach often find

themselves the target of jokes and teasing. One officer said, 'Every time you come in, your buddies are watching you land, talking about if it's good form or not'. Statistics are tracked in a log book: how many hours of flight each pilot has; how many 'traps' and 'cats' (a euphemism for being catapulted off the carrier at takeoff); how many flight hours; how many combat hours. These statistics are posted on each pilot's fitness report and become a source of bragging rights.

### *3. Masculinity and the surface warfare officer: enduring hardship and calmly demonstrating competence in the face of pressure*

Naval officers who operate surface ships — destroyers, aircraft carriers — make up the largest community in the US Navy. When life at sea is referred to as 'a man's job', the implication is that only rugged, robust characters can thrive in such conditions. This is no life for the frail and weak. When discussing life on board ships, the officers described the physical conditions as stark and severe. An officer shares a tiny room with one other officer, usually of equal rank. The bed is barely wide or long enough to hold a body. One officer described the formidable conditions:

You run out of fresh milk ... You're drinking powdered milk, powdered eggs ... You have to decide to store people and bullets or eggs. The water is a problem. You have to make your own on the ship ... The boilers need water to make steam. They get it before we get it to drink or take showers. They often just shut off the water controls. A 'navy shower' is one that takes two minutes ... Plus the ship is rocking so you're slipping and sliding.

Life is described as physically strenuous and mentally exhausting. While at sea officers rarely get adequate sleep. In addition to their daily tasks ensuring that the engineering, electrical, and weapons systems on board ship are in full operation, officers also must take turns standing watch on the bridge at night. Many said that if they average four hours sleep per night, they are lucky. It is not unusual for an officer to be awake for 48 hours straight. This endurance is seen as commendable. One officer said, 'For two years on ship I think I never slept. I'd go 48 hours with no sleep. But that's a sign of endurance. The XO says to me, "Now there's a man".' Another officer gave this description: 'You stand watch about every three days. You

get up at 2:30 in the morning and stand watch till 4 a.m. It's pitch black on the bridge ... The sound of the engine rumbling, it's very hypnotizing. If you fall asleep and someone catches you, you get written up.'

Many officers told stories of being subjected to a series of tests and observations during their early careers at sea. In what they referred to as 'baptism by fire', they are 'thrown into messes', difficult situations and maneuvers. Many of the men called these experiences 'deliberate set ups' in which their superiors put them through challenging situations 'just to see if (we) blow it'. A few echoed the experience of this officer, who described an early experience as a young ensign on board his first ship:

My first ship, the CO stuck me up on the bridge. I was the steering control. I gave the commands, I'd tell them the speed, the course change, place the ship in position. It takes absolute concentration. I was scared to death, the ships could collide. It's part of the training. He sticks you up there to see if you blow it. The CO deliberately set up experiences like that. I qualified as a quarterdeck watch officer, the ceremonial watch on bridge for honors, ceremonies, that kind of thing ... The CO said I was the finest ensign ever. When the second CO took over he asked the first 'who should I trust to drive this ship?' and the first one said it was me. I had the honor of driving the ship out for the brand new CO. The second CO asked me to stay. I was gung ho.

This officer and his colleagues know the symbolic significance of standing on the bridge and steering the ship through the open ocean. It embodies the totalizing power of technology, an experience traditionally reserved for men (see Hacker 1989). And yet, this is not a task that is simply to be enjoyed. Many things could go wrong. Errors are highly consequential in this culture; much of the territory through which these officers must navigate, both literally and metaphorically, is marked by lurking dangers: if the ships collide, careers would be terminated. Anxiety runs high, and yet it is necessary to maintain 'absolute concentration', to prevent feelings of fear from interfering with performing the complex maneuvers correctly. The rewards for executing these tactics are highly public and coveted. Not only does the young ensign successfully achieve a 'qualification' to serve as quarterdeck officer, but he also becomes the officer in charge of piloting the ship during ceremonial operations, including the 'honor' of driving the ship out for the new CO. Masculinity in this culture is very

public, but never secure. It must be continually demonstrated.

If passing these trials is a chance to display competence, they pale in comparison to the opportunity to excel under conditions of a *real* incident. Even under these conditions, however, one knows that one is the object of surveillance and evaluation, which even further magnifies their significance. Lieutenant Junior Grade (Lt. J.G.) Ricky, was a 26 year-old division officer on a ship in the Gulf for six months. One day he was officer on deck, in charge of driving the ship in the gulf, when he received a report that there were 14 people stranded in the water. (They were later discovered to be 14 Iranians escaping from their homeland.) The ship was cruising off the coasts of Kuwait and Iran. Ricky describes the story in vivid detail:

We were off the edge of a mine field along the coast of Kuwait. We were entering a dangerous zone and it was my show to run. The CO came up but he sat back and watched and let me handle things. The captain wanted me to be the officer and junior officer on deck — to drive the ship and run the rescue effort because the junior officer had made a minor mistake earlier.

One failure is enough to create a reputation in this culture. When a real crisis emerges, the CO decides not to rely on this lieutenant's colleague, who had made a 'minor mistake' earlier. Everyone who is on deck at this moment knows that these are events that shape careers. This is the *real thing*, the opportunity to either shine or fail. But the other junior officer, having failed to demonstrate the ability to function competently under pressure, will not get the chance. Lieutenant J.G. Ricky went on to describe the intensity of the action — the complex, simultaneous events that he had to control.

I ordered the second engine full speed and called the CO. I called the [rescue] boat crew. You call the boat, the engineering plant, the combat info center, the radars. Tell them what to do ... I'm in direct contact with the helo (helicopter). I call flight quarters — make sure the winds are correct so the helo can land. They had a search and rescue swimmer on board. He had to land the helo while doing 25 knots. It was a very fast speed trying to get a search and rescue out. I was getting constant status reports, coordinated everything. The CO said you've got it under control ... He let me handle the show ... We got all 14 of them out. It was high viz [high visibility] big time.

The experience of power and total control, the cool rationality engaged in the physical operation of levers, balances, dials, and switches are occasions for the display of mastery. (These experiences have traditionally been withheld from women [Hacker 1989].) The excitement associated with the possibility of danger and failure heighten the senses: something could go very wrong. He's displaying discipline and technical skill, coordination and agility of physical movements, rational processing of complex information under conditions of extreme stress. These are the qualities that define the terms of the gender hierarchy — not only between men and women but between groups of men. Not everyone on the bridge is seen as capable of executing these maneuvers. The lieutenant is under constant surveillance by his CO. The contrast between the 'real' experience and the drudgery of daily life on ship makes this significant.

Before that it was just back and forth along the coast of Kuwait. The crew was excited. It lifted everybody's spirits, we actually did something. I did a really good job. There were a thousand things going on and I didn't miss a beat. The other officers came up and patted me on the back and said 'good job'. The CO was excited too ... He got on the intercom system for the whole ship and announced BZ (Bravo Zulu) to Lt. J.G. Ricky for handling this. He congratulated all the crews, but me personally ... The admiral who was the task force commander sent a BZ letter to the ship. It was a big time for us.

The Navy has an elaborate system of awards and rituals that reinforce the value of demonstrating mastery, especially successful performance under pressure. In part because of the letters of commendation from the Admiral that followed this incident, and others like it, the captain of the ship was promoted, the lieutenant above was promoted, and other officers involved in the operation were highly commended. These organizational practices — surveillance, testing, recording, keeping career records — begin to shape and guide the passions of these men. They yearn for the opportunity to demonstrate prowess under pressure.

Some of the officers interviewed said that these testing experiences should be a masculine preserve. They expressed concern that women could not 'take it', could not tolerate the grueling conditions that the men suffer through. They fear that if women assume combat positions, they will be unable to handle the pressure. One officer, discussing the

challenge of taking command of a ship underway said, 'The first time some woman gets up there and cries because she can't stand the pressure, that's it. It's over for her and any other woman who tries to come up there'. A helicopter pilot recalled that when he was instructing a female student pilot on a maneuver, she lost one of the checkpoints and was unable to find her way.

What would a man do? You'd just go back to the last check point until you find your way again. But she just lost it. She started crying and said 'I'm lost. I'm lost.' I took over the controls, but boy I laid into her when we got back. You can't do that. You have to separate your emotions and stay focused. That's what I worry about with women.

Many echoed the attitude of this officer, who has served on ships for 10 of his 15 years in the Navy: 'I'm tired of these women officers who are prissy bitches ... with hang nails ... They don't pull their load. They might do special things for the CO on the side. I remember one would leave a shirt button undone and rub her breasts all over you.'

#### *4. Supply officers: masculinity as technical rationality*

With the advent of new technology, there is an increase in non-combatants and support services in militaries (Connell 1992). This has produced a new kind of masculinity, the professionalized calculative rationality. Seidler's (1989) study of the connection between masculinity, disembodied reason, and bureaucratic efficiency also supports this conclusion.

Supply officers are considered 'non-operational support' and occupy the lowest status in the Navy. They have fewer opportunities to demonstrate courage, autonomy, and perseverance, the hallmark of the hegemonic ideal in this culture. The gendered nature of this status hierarchy is expressed in the derogatory terms used to describe supply officers. Combat specialists often refer to them as 'supply pussies' or 'suppo weenies'. One jet pilot described how the supply corps is viewed by aviators.

The supply community is seen as rejects. They're suppo weenies. They couldn't be aviators, couldn't do submarines. There's usually one or two of them on a ship and they're separate from the surface guys. They have nothing in common with them. They're always ostracized and different. There's no glory in their jobs ...

They have no fun. They do all these work-ups that go on forever.

Another aviator described the supply community:

The supply guys are by themselves. They act like little dicks. You depend on them. They see themselves as lower on the totem pole so they act like little jerks to compensate for their inferior feelings. They don't want to share their knowledge of the support system so people can't get around them.

This is a fairly common appraisal of supply officers. The metonymy of small genitalia connotes a lack of virility and power in this culture. There's some irony in this. They do have power; as this aviator said, 'you depend on them'. And some officers feel that supply officers overcompensate for feelings of inferiority with regard to combat specialists by displaying power in other ways, such as withholding the flow of supplies and the appropriation of funds. As a consequence, the line officers are often careful to 'stay on their good side'. As one said, 'The suppo could be your best friend if you really need something'.

The conferral of lower status is not lost on the supply community. As one supply officer said:

Supply officers are considered staff. We are never allowed to command the vessel ... [or] to be risk takers. If you fly you get to deviate from the guidelines. They [aviators] get to be more autonomous. We're like CPAs [certified public accountants]. We have to follow these rules and laws, not these general guidelines like the pilots. It looks boring.

Unlike aviators and surface warfare officers, supply officers are not permitted the traditional masculine experiences: the opportunity to take risks, to command and be in charge, and to be autonomous.

Supply officers employ a number of strategies of self-differentiation, a way to demonstrate their competence. One way is to achieve a superior ranking. Like all department heads, the supply officer is ranked against other officers on the ship. Also, as a result of bi-annual inspections, each supply department is rated against other ships' supply departments within the fleet. This becomes an important way to distinguish oneself, to stand out from the others. One supply officer reported that his peak experience in the Navy was receiving recognition for running the

top-rated supply department of all the ships within his fleet.

On one ship I headed, we gained fleet-wide notoriety for the ship. We caused the engineering department to pale in comparison ... All my junior people got promoted as a result ... We were rated the best boat in the Pacific fleet. All the supply and food operations were rated the best. It's a very coveted award.

The job of a supply officer is often one of material tracking, fiscal accounting, and administrative planning. The supply officer needs to know the status of every piece of equipment and every material part under his watchful eye. Inventory inspections occur approximately once every six months and the supply officer is rated on how well he accounts for his equipment. Also, the supply corps is responsible for food operations on board ship. One supply officer described his job this way: 'Every day you check the inventory. Sometimes there's 22,000 line items that have to be checked ... You have to make sure the food service spaces are immaculate.'

Given that they keep the squadron well-supplied, many supply officers echo the feelings of this officer, who argues that his job is indispensable: 'Where would they be without us?' Many said that they deliberately chose the supply corps because it is excellent preparation for a career in the civilian sector. 'To manage \$16 million when you're 25 years old — to have to balance to the penny — jet pilots can't do that'. Many are like this officer, a graduate of the Naval Academy who wanted to become a pilot, but due to football injuries was not permitted to assume a combat specialty. He draws on masculine themes of rationality and responsibility as a source of identity.

The good suppo officer sees himself as a vital link. Okay, tomorrow you tell me how your life is without supply. They say, 'You're just a chop' ['chopping on paper' is a demeaning reference to filling out forms and doing paperwork] ... They say [you're a suppo officer] because you're not physically qualified ... I did this because it's a good business move for after my Navy career. I get to manage people. I get to run information systems. It prepares me for the business world later — after I retire.

This tone of apology and justification was heard from many of the non-combat males in support communities. This officer differentiates his status in an area where he is able to exert control. For men like this, it is impossible to ignore the hegemonic masculine ideal

of control, autonomy, and authority. They may not fly a jet or command a ship, but they control people and information systems. The search for a stable masculine identity is embedded in a theme of upward mobility. This pre-occupation with hierarchical advancement and competition for career progress is a common theme of middle-class men in organizations (Collinson and Hearn 1994) and was commonly heard among supply officers.

## Conclusion

Critical men's studies view masculinity as dynamic patterns of ideologies and practices constructed in interaction. In this vein, Coltrane (1994) argued for comparative studies that challenge a 'falsely universalizing concept of gender'. However, Collinson and Hearn (1994) warn against treating multiple masculinities as another set of static categories. Instead, they encourage the study of the dynamic, shifting, and contradictory character of gender relations. Specifically, they contend, it is important to attend to the construction of unities, differences, and inter-relationships between men. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to men's location within the structure of the gender order.

In this article, I have taken such a relational perspective on the construction of gender and explored alternative masculinities within the US Navy. There are a number of different strands of hegemonic masculinity that these officers can draw upon to secure masculine identity. These themes include: risk taking; discipline; excitement associated with operation of powerful technology; tolerance of degradation; stoic endurance of hardship; tenacity and perseverance in the face of difficult physical trials; rational calculation; absence of emotion; and technological mastery. While this article has focused on differences between occupational specialties, there are also variations within these groups, a theme to be addressed in another paper. To illustrate, risk taking is a high value in this culture and not the exclusive privilege of aviators. One supply officer said, for example, 'If there's a fire on board ship, I want the CO to know that I'll risk climbing in there to save someone just like anybody else'. However, these officers' discourses are constrained and facilitated by the resources available within various communities. While aviators have more opportunities to display risk taking, surface warfare officers have opportunities to demonstrate physical hardships and

grueling work schedules, and supply officers frequently have more opportunity to display rational calculation and responsibility for resources. By focusing on the themes within each organizational community, I have drawn attention to the importance of organizational position in constructing a masculine strategy.

Besides the opportunities and limitations nested within organizational positions, these officers attempt to secure a masculine identity in contrast to others. Aviators are seen as 'the elite' in relation to surface warfare officers and supply officers, who suffer harsh conditions and bureaucratic surveillance but who rarely experience the autonomy, the thrill and the glory of high-tech flying. Surface warfare officers consider their jobs 'manly' because they survive more rugged conditions and endure more intense competition than do other officers. Supply officers often distinguish themselves as technical specialists preparing for a successful business career.

However, one cannot overlook how masculine hegemony becomes a successful strategy for subordinating women. All of the masculinities achieve meaning in contrast to definitions of femininity. In men's interviews, women are depicted as emotionally unstable, less able to endure physical challenges, and unable to tolerate the harsh conditions of ship life. This is consistent with western masculine socialization, in which boys learn that being a man has no other definition than not being a woman: '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 what one is' (Kimmel 1994, p. 126). One recent review of research on women's increased participation in militaries of western nations concludes that in addition to experiencing limited career opportunities, women are often depicted as 'innately unsuited', lacking aggression, discipline, and commitment (Chandler *et al.* 1995). The authors suggest that this construction may have consequences for American naval women now able to serve on board surface ships — perhaps they will be limited to peripheral support tasks or 'women-friendly' tasks such as supply and communications.

There is a contradiction between the masculine display of rugged individualism/autonomy and the subordination and surveillance to which all military personnel are subject. These officers are hardly free and autonomous, a traditionally core feature of masculine hegemony. Officers must find other modes of expression of non-conformity, which might explain some of the wild, 'uncivil' behavior that occurs at social events and

parties, including the scandalous sexual escapades that occurred at the 1991 Tailhook convention (Tailhook Report 1993). This also might explain the intensity with which women are 'othered'. Discipline, obedience, compliance, and exacting detail, ideals that are depicted as 'tough' and masculine, depend upon contrasting images of the feminized 'other' — being undisciplined, scattered, emotional, unreliable. Homosexuals have also been 'othered' using these terms. For years, one of the core arguments for excluding homosexuals from military service was their lack of discipline and unreliability — it was feared that they would be a security risk (Herek 1993, 1990). The argument here is that the more the masculine theme of discipline and endurance is emphasized, the less important it is to exhibit autonomy and independent control. One way to emphasize discipline, endurance, and rationality as masculine traits is to depict lack of discipline, unreliability, and emotion as feminine.

There is another contradiction at the heart of this culture that suggests attempts to achieve a secure masculine identity create conditions that undermine the possibility of such an achievement. The military life is very demanding. Every officer, at some point(s) in his career, is likely to experience degradation and humiliation that often accompany continual surveillance, testing, ranking, grueling life conditions, and the constant possibility of failure. This study suggests that their investment in masculine discourse is a strategy they employ to compensate for these negative experiences: one way to overcome subjective insecurity is to re-interpret the tolerance of grueling conditions and constant surveillance as manly experiences. ('This is so awful and painful that most can't tolerate it, but I've hown I can take it'.)

But as Collinson (1992) demonstrated in his study of masculinity among manual laborers, such efforts are precarious. Depending on external confirmation — the approval of a commanding officer, the awarding of a surface warfare pin, promotion, the accolades of peers — to affirm and re-affirm to themselves and others who and what they are, is potentially self-defeating. Preoccupation with differentiating self and discounting others creates an enduring sense of subjective insecurity. This persistent sense of fragility and precariousness generates a greater need to display worth. Such defensive posturing — differentiating self by out-performing others, validating self by negating others — is not only unlikely to lead to the achievement of a secure identity, it creates the very social conditions that drive men to strive for a chance to

demonstrate exceptionality. These officers are chronically aware that their peers are eager to surpass them. The achievement of masculinity in this culture is never secure. It must be continually confirmed and exhibited. This follows Collinson's conclusion that a culture that encourages continual comparison 'recreates the social insecurity it is intended to transcend' (1992, p. 97).

The military is a gendered institution. Its structure, practices, values, rites, and rituals reflect accepted notions of masculinity and femininity. But it is also a gendering institution. It helps to create gendered identities. This article discusses the various power struggles and obstacles that surround men's practices, as well as the multiple strategies of assertion and differentiation male officers enact in attempts to secure a masculine identity. Since upholding a hegemonic ideal of masculinity takes collective effort, a second focus of this study has been the organizational rules, practices, and structures, particularly the systems of ranking and testing, that contribute to the construction of the hegemonic ideal.

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