

Men, Masculinity and the Military

Deep diving into a world of men and violence

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Abstract

My thesis examines the discourse and social practices of the Swedish Armed Forces in Afghanistan. The discourse analysis is used both as a theory and method and takes inspiration from Foucault, Laclau, Mouffe and Fairclough. The view on social relations and gender is that they are constructed through social interaction.

The purpose is to describe and illuminate discourses and social practices which influence the behaviour of soldiers. Today, the Swedish military is considered one of the most equal militaries in the world. Still, discrimination, prejudice, harassment and violence exist in the military society. The focus of similar studies has traditionally been on women but this study examines the men and masculinity. Certain attributes connected to masculinity are favoured and feminine attributes are seen as negative. Different material is used as a base for the analysis including soldiers who have served in Afghanistan, documentary series about the life of Swedish soldiers in Afghanistan and a newspaper article.

The study is done by analysing the interviews and other material with theory about masculinity, discourse, violence and the military. Social practices and structures that are affecting and reproducing masculinities are presented in the conclusion.

Key words: Military, Masculinity, Discourse, Violence

Words: 10000

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1 Introduction

During my time spent studying the topic of gender, I have not come across an organization that is more conservative and masculine than the army. Throughout the modern society progress has been made towards gender equalization, but in the various military organizations progress has been slow. This is important to study and not only relevant for the military organization but it also highlights a structure of masculinity that exists in society today. It is a structure of prejudice and ideas that hinders progress and in many areas and makes us reluctant to change.

In this thesis I will study the Swedish military from a gender perspective, which is important due to the fact that gender perceptions often change in conflicts. Especially when there are different cultures involved since the socially constructed gender varies between cultures and its military organizations (Leinonen, 2010, p.78).

Sweden is important and interesting to study since we have come far in the equalization process but still have more work to do. The focus is the everyday life of the soldiers and what is happening in Afghanistan.

I will use a theoretical perspective that is norm critical and focused on masculinity, since the military organization is highly dominated by males. To find the masculinities I will do a discourse analysis. This is also in line with my feminist perspective which says gender is constructed. It also reveals hidden power structures and stresses the importance of language (Ackerley – True, 2008, p. 696).

1.1 Question

What role does masculinity have in the Swedish Armed Forces and how is it depicted in the discourse and social practice in the organization?

Asking a useful research question is a challenging task. The question needs to be relevant, puzzling and interesting as well as feasible. To connect the question and the research to theory, one must ponder what the research problem is a case of. This can be done early in the methodological process (Svensson & Teorell, 2006, p.47).

1.1.1 Level of Analysis

I have chosen the military organization as my unit of analysis, more specifically the Swedish military in Afghanistan. This includes an analysis of the actors and the structure inside the organization in order to be able to see the whole picture. What a military organization is pretty clear which helps me making it easier to evade other things that are similar. If I would have chosen to study an international conflict for instance I would have a much harder time. I will not have to spend time finding my actual object of study and defining it (Esaiasson, 2012, p. 47-49). By limiting my research to one single unit I gain understanding of it, and describing it will opens up to other studies on the area which is one of my goals (Svensson & Teorell, 2006, p.26).

1.1.2 Level of Abstraction

The research question is essential to the level of abstraction. It is important to find a balance between having roots in reality and doing something that is principally interesting. I have chosen to ask an abstract question since my theory about masculinity is abstract, though I will make it more precise with my conceptions. This is done by determining a specific masculine behaviour, which then enables me to move down the ladder of abstraction (Badersten, 2006, p.88).

1.1.3 Level of Ambition

One of the first decisions one makes is to choose which of the three general types of questions to ask. There are describing, explaining and valuating questions. This is also the level of ambition. I have not asked a valuating question since I am not doing normative research. I will instead focus on the describing research with the intention and hope to understand a certain practice. After all, one must first describe something before it can be explained or understood (Svensson & Teorell, 2006, p.22-23).

My research has a series of conceptual elements. It is descriptive but I will also strive to explain, since I will try to find out why masculinity is so strongly rooted in the military (Esaiasson, 2012, p. 31). This will be best accomplished using a discourse analysis. The decision to use discourse analysis came after various methodological considerations. The aim of the discourse analysis is not only to describe but also understand (Beckman, 2005, p. 92-93).

1.2 Philosophy of Science

This thesis takes the angle that social relations are constructed. They are shaped through constant interaction between individuals and structures. Therefore, differences are not dependent on gender, but on how it is constructed. Attributes that are considered masculine or feminine are not in reality connected or restricted

to a specific gender. Gender is a socially practiced order that makes bodies different. Physical and emotional toughness is attributed to masculinity whereas sensitivity is connected to femininity, but the explanation to this is not biological but instead historical. We are shaped by our surroundings and what's expected from us (Connell, 2005, p.71-72). This process contributes to gender not being fixed but shaped through social interaction; we produce what men and women are through our society (Connell, 2005, p.35).

The constructivist perspective that also says social relations are constructed favours a less positivistic research method. Dependent and independent variables are hard to measure. To observe that X leads to Y, masculinity leading to violence for example is not possible. The relation is shaped through constant interaction (Esaiasson, 2012, p.50-51). There are multiple variables that create and/or influence other variables, therefore it is considered difficult to find and explain a causal relation with a constructivist approach (Nau, 2007, p. 395).

Therefore, the reality is socially constructed and much like the discourse it can be enabling or limiting for individuals in it (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 311).

2 Methodology

After a deeper dive into the world of methodology I have decided to do a discourse-analysis. This is due to the fact that I am trying to make masculinities visible and examine them, possibly providing means to understand them in structures. Masculinities are reproduced in social practices, for instance there can be violence, unaccepted emotions and prejudices about women and feminine attributes, and a specific way soldiers have to behave.

Through my study I am trying to find a representation of masculinity in the material, which is a piece of a discourse and social practice. I am doing a descriptive, investigative and understanding research. Why there exists a certain social practice as a cause of masculinity I will not ponder, but rather how a certain social practice exists and how it is reproduced, accepted and perceived.

I will research one military organization, the Swedish military with a focus on the ISAF mission. I will use the discourse analysis to investigate how presumptions can form and change what is being said and done inside the Swedish Armed Forces (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p.20).

2.1 Conceptions and Operationalization

An operationalization is not generally done in discourse analyses. In all studies there is however a need to concretize what is studied, and that is a form of operationalization.

One of the first problems with concepts is to make accurate definitions and leave out other possible values that can be interpreted as something similar in the concepts. The definition needs to be exhaustive and only contain one thing (Svensson & Teorell, 2006, p.42). I combine the nominal definition where only a general definition is made to increase my chance of interpreting masculinities, with the “pointing” way of definition where I will state out some general factors defining the concept (Svensson & Teorell, 2006, p.38). They can be homophobia, physical toughness and despise of weakness for example.

The conceptual definitions are closely tied to operationalization. An operationalization must be done to lay the fundamentals on how the concepts are found in research material (Svensson & Teorell, 2006, p.39). The goal of the operationalization is to take the theoretical definition and give it operational definitions so that it will be possible to examine (Esaiasson, 2012, p.55). I will base my concepts on Connell’s and Xavia Karner’s definitions in order to make my arguments stronger and have a relation to earlier research on the area. I

however adapt them to fit my object of study and research material (Svensson & Teorell, 2006, p.40).

2.1.1 Masculinity

It is hard to make an exhaustive definition masculinity; we should see it not as a specific object but as an aspect of a structure. It is a factor defining and affecting behaviour; a feminine person could behave differently and not be as violent, interested in sexual conquest and as dominant as a masculine one for instance. Masculinity points out a difference that could exist between persons, not bound by gender, since it is socially constructed, and affecting personal agency. The masculinities also varies between cultures and groups (Connell, 2005, p.67-68).

I will use Connell's and Tracy Xavia Karner's definitions. Xavia Karner studies the process and consequences of traditional masculinities amongst veterans. Physical strength, aggression, insensitivity, no expression of emotions, impulsivity and anger are some basic traits (Xavia Karner, 1998, p.200). The masculine behaviour is contrary to weakness and femininity and it resents it (Xavia Karner, 1998, p.207-208). Also Rachel Woodward talks about physical prowess, aggressive heterosexuality, homophobia and minimal complaint as traits of masculinity (Woodward, 1998, p.43-44). Masculinity can be seen as a consequence rather than a cause of masculine activities, which is consistent with my constructive perspective (Edley, 2001, p. 192). Masculinity is not bound by gender; a woman as well as a man can produce masculine practices.

2.1.2 Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as male dominance and power over women embedded in socio-historical relations. These relations exist in institutions like the military for instance (Chapple, 1998, p.188). Hegemony is a stage were some values and assumptions are totally dominating and not questioned, since they are the norm. There can be a hegemonic discourse controlling what can be said and it is the cultural dominant way of seeing and doing things (Edley, 2001, p. 190).

2.1.3 Social Practice

Discourse is in my concept the use of language and social practices. Texts are more concrete manifestations of discourses. Social practice is the way how integrating people do things. Patterns of behaviour, habits, conventions and also how this is governed by informal and formal rules are social practice (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 17-18). I will therefore examine social practice in my material

as behaviours, assumptions, statements and informal/formal rules and use theory on masculinity, discourse and violence to analyse it.

2.2 Discourse Analysis

There is no simple way of defining or understanding discourse analysis (Edley, 2001, p. 189). The discourse analysis is a combination of theory and methodology about how political behaviour can be explained. I will use the multiple science character of discourse analysis as both method and theory (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 306).

Discourses are not only text and statements but also presumptions and thoughts (Beckman, 2005, p. 87). Discourses are usually texts but can also include social practices, which I do when I widen the concept (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 309). For instance I will use interviews and series about Afghanistan to examine the discourse, thus widening the material and the text to include that. A discourse is a plurality of linguistic expressions and perceptions about a subject. It does not only highlight individuals but also structures. Politics and messages are not only based in individuals but also come from structures that individuals have in common (Beckman, 2005, p. 87-88).

The discursive perspective fits with my philosophy of science and gender theory, both says reality is socially constructed. For instance my theories about gender say masculinity and femininity are socially constructed (Beckman, 2005, p. 93). Actor behaviours can be seen and explained by studying discourses. What is said and done is shaping the political reality, in my case the reality of the military. The relation between presumptions and acts is not casual but constitutive. How do discourses affect reality then? It can limit action, make some things possible or accepted and other things not. It is the framework for how we act and what we think. For instance it can be a discriminative discourse which makes some attributes that exists in minority groups not likeable or favourable. In my case study this could be femininity and women in the army (Beckman, 2005, p. 92).

The discourse is a scientific and a social science which claim that language shape and shapes the discourse. Social identities are constructed and we can use discourse analysis to see how. Identities exist in relations to other identities and not in any material sense, for example the identity of man and woman.

In the essence, the discourse analysis emphasizes power and that the discourse recommends certain actions and practices. Some questions one can ask with it are: Who is allowed to speak? Who can do what? Who is represented? The focus is not on the background motives for actions but rather that the norms which the discourse creates (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 326-328).

2.3 Methodological distinctions and inspirations

When considering what kind of discourse analysis to do I decided not to focus on a single doctrine. This is because my material and what I am investigating is varying. The thesis examines power relations like in the Critical Discourse Analysis but also focus on identity like Laclau and Mouffe and action defining like Foucault.

There are no finished templates on how to do a discourse analysis; the researcher can develop tools for analysis themselves. I will do this but also be influenced by the previous researchers in the discourse analysis mentioned above (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 329).

What I am trying to find are power relations and perceptions and presumptions on how to behave. I will focus on several levels, individual, group, from officer and structural influences. Also the power relation between men and women are interesting to analyse. There is a power relation in what is considered masculine and feminine abilities. I will use the discourse analysis to try to map out how the military identities are constructed, how the power balance is, if there is a gender order and what is the hegemony of the organization (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 357).

2.3.1 Foucault

Foucault emphasizes commonalities and coinciding in the discourse. In my analysis this would be masculinity which provides the framework that makes individuals and organizations act within them, due to their subjective position inside the military (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 312).

According to Foucault discourses are controlling people. Processes work as mechanisms of exclusion. Power then becomes something that is practiced in relation between people. It limiting to some people and enables for others. It works more practically so that some things are forbidden, considered wrong or sick, not traditional or socially necessary (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 311). If we look at a practical example Foucault once studied what formed our sexual behaviour through prejudice and perceptions about masculine and feminine. He looked for pervert, sick, normal etc. perceptions and examined how they influenced and controlled the social practice and discourse, and therefore the reality and relations (Beckman, 2005, p. 87-88).

One assumption of the discourse analysis is that the language not only describes reality, it also has a part in forming it. Language and action is weaved together in the discourse way of analysing. The language sets boundaries for our way to act and behave (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 305-306).

2.3.2 Laclau and Mouffe

Two other thinkers on the discourse analysis are Laclau and Mouffe. They widen the discourse concept to all social phenomena. In my thesis I investigate the

relation between attributes considered to be masculine and feminine by examining processes which are constructed through the relation of different elements. The method of analysis researches how the continents of politics, in my case the military, are created (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 318-320). A practice could be feminine and soft and therefore not good since it's not masculine for instance.

Also Laclau and Mouffe use the analytical tool of hegemony. Inspired by the Marxist thinker Gramsci they provide a tool for analysing hegemonies where current social assumptions are not challenged. In the hegemony exist conflicts but due to the structure and system they are hidden. The power therefore lies in values and conceptions that are dominating in the hegemony (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 321).

2.3.3 Fairclough

The discourse analysis developed and used by Fairclough is called Critical Discourse Analysis. The CDA is an analysis of language in speech and it considers writing as a social practice. This discourse, which is socially constructed, shapes the institutions and the structures and is mutually shaped by them. The discourse is enabling in some practices, it leads to social practices and institutional possibilities. Things can be problematic in the discourse because some traits are seen as negative (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 308-311).

The CDA has a purpose of exposing veiled power structures. The discourse is constructing social identities, like masculinity, and it reproduces existing social relations. Therefore the discourse is contributing to upholding current structures of power. The discourse is a consequence of a special type of society. The CDA widens the concept of text and discourse to social practices (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 321-323).

The CDA relates social practice to ideology and power. Social practice can come from the gender relation of power for instance. In the CDA the discursive practice focuses on how texts are produced, distributed and consumed.

The introduction of the social matrix of discourse" widens the concept and analyses other structures which contribute and are constituted. That is how ideology and hegemony becomes relevant for the CDA, but then the CDA also becomes more similar to the Laclau and Mouffe analysis (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 324-325).

2.4 Interpretation

The problem with intersubjectivity is essential to all scientists. It is important to clarify, step by step, how the research was done and how one reaches conclusions (Svensson & Teorell, 2006, p.54). The texts must be interpreted and given a meaning. The interpreter has a subject role, in its assumptions the interpreting is subjective. Texts are seen as fragments of the whole picture which is affected by

the views of the interpreter. It is important to acknowledge that we have perceptions of both masculinity and femininity that affects us (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 23-25). In a discourse analysis the intersubjectivity is especially important because of the focus on interpreting. The researcher's views are subjective and a part of the research (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 353-354).

2.5 Material

For my thesis I will use different material. That includes course literature, series, newspaper and interviews.

The Interview persons were contacted through acquaintances and chosen because they were in Afghanistan in different periods and different camps.

The Swedish series "Krig för fred" and "Fredsstyrkan" are documentary series about the daily life of Swedish soldiers in the Afghanistan war zone which I will analyse. They are accessible on YouTube and are about 420 minutes long together and therefore quite extensive. The series are valid and useful to analyse since they provide the means to come as close to the everyday life in Afghanistan as I can. In a discourse analysis it is good to have different technics for the empirical material (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 351-352).

2.6 Method of Interviewing

In my interviews I will use the persons as informants to grasp a sense of the reality of the military. However since there is an obvious problem with objectivity, a person makes their own assumptions of things happening, he will also be a respondent and I will ask him about what he thinks of gender and how many women there should be in the army etc. (Esaiasson, 2012, p.227-228). The interviews are semi-structured with open questions. The interviews will be used to document the daily life and combat situations and analysed from a gender perspective. I will use the experiences of my object of analysis from a selected group, Swedish soldiers who has served in Afghanistan. I see the interviews as a part of the discourse both as first-hand information, as people with subjective views of what is masculinity and the military structures, and as persons with second-hand experiences (Esaiasson, 2012, p.252-253).

It will be deep interviews takes about an hour, and will be translated in the analysis. It is also important not to interview too many persons or persons who are subjective experts, i.e. they work with those questions (Esaiasson, 2012, p.257-259). My interview persons were non-elites, i.e. ordinary soldiers.

The questions need to be descriptive, short and open to not confuse interview persons. I also have to watch out for the interviewer effect when answers can change due to who's asking the questions (Esaiasson, 2012, p.264-265). Using the

subject as an informant is a good way to find out what is happening inside an organization. It is also useful to blend the interviews with other material (Esaiasson, 2012, p.269).

3 Theory

3.1 Military

The military is a remnant of a more despotic and violent time. Because it is so segregated from the ordinary society it takes time for it to change. The social and legal roots go way back in time and haven't changed much (Kovitz, 2003, p. 8). Some civil practices are forgotten and masculinity and violence is mixed and normalized, to legitimate violent military actions like killing (Kovitz, 2003, p. 6).

Men and militaries are very closely connected. In the military organizations men have the most social power. Almost every killing in militaries, conflicts, terrorism or domestic violence is done by men. Men dominate this area and have always done so (Hearn, 2012, p. 35-36).

Gender mainstreaming is however advancing, it emphasizes women's participation in post conflict security like peacekeeping with the goal of making the military an organization for both women and men. This includes perspectives of equality and democracy, for instance of women make up 50% of the world's population should they not be better represented in institutions like army then? This notion of a gender neutral military and militarism do not however focus on the gendering of men and their masculinities (Hearn, 2012, p. 37-38).

It has been taken for granted for a long time, even though there has been a lot of fighting women, that war is something men do and therefore also militarism belong to men (Hearn, 2012, p. 38-39). In the army men dominate the higher ranks, even in Sweden which is considered one of the most gender neutral countries there are not many female officers (Försvarsmakten).

The masculinity is context adapted. The process of constructing masculinity and reproducing it is on-going and what is the preferred masculine social practice change from situation to situation. Showing emotions after a comrade has fallen for instance is not considered weak as it would in other occasions; all emotions become accepted and treated with care. They are accepted because of the special circumstances (Hockey, 2003, p. 23-24).

3.2 Violence

The military, which is the most violent feature of society, has always been closely connected to masculinity and men. The military is the most important platform for the definition and reproduction of the hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005, p.214). The violence and reproduction of the hegemonic masculinity is, argued by

Connell, necessary for the survival of the military due to the fact that it needs to produce violent behaviour. This is needed both to minimize own casualties and the cost of war but also to end conflicts quickly so the general population of civilians can be safe (Connell, 2005, p. 215).

The military organization's violence is organized violence; it does have rules and goals. Therefore the collective level of the organizational violence is important. The violence can be structural, patriarchal and also existing in social relations (Hearn, 2012, p. 45). For instance soldiers punish each other when something which is not accepted or is against the rules has been done.

To use the extreme violence needed in war soldiers dehumanize the enemy. The dehumanization of the enemy, or distancing from the victim, is practiced in the military training process. It changes the individual psyche to follow orders, trivialize serious things, distance itself and rationalize the thinking. This leads to a bureaucratic way of looking at violence and the organization which in bombings, massacres, concentration camps, torture and violence can be done without reflecting on the act. The frequent use of rape is also an example of dehumanizing of the victim (Hearn, 2012, p. 46).

Inside the group there also exists a harsh way of socializing in the form of a masculine conduct. The soldiers have to protect his or her friends no matter the cost and failure; if one fails it the soldier can become punished. The punishment can be either formally if severe or informally from the group if not so severe. The punishments can be both verbal and physical. This is embedded in the masculine structure and a way of self-checking. The higher ranking officers or the other soldiers do not have control over it (Hockey, 2003, p. 18-19).

3.3 Boys become Men

The masculine socialization and combat training is not separated, in the military it is basically the same thing. Privates who join the army and receive combat training are formed into masculine soldier, because that is the current view on what is needed to serve in the army (Xavia Karner, 1998, p.209). They learn masculine attributes and reproduce the role of the man as violent, not sensitive and tough (Hearn, 2012, p. 39).

Not only through the training will they get affected but also the group of soldiers provides significant influence. Gender attitudes can be shaped by groups in locker rooms etc. and smaller informal meetings (Torch, 1998, p.170-171).

Inside the military men are treated as a heteronomous group. There are few individual differences in these groups. It is in this interaction that social practice is constructed. Unity is formed among the soldiers. Heterosexuality becomes one norm and anything that is different is a threat to the current order and therefore bad (Hockey, 2003, p.17-18). There are however people who do not fit in. These people can leave on their own if they do not adapt or are expelled and have to leave (Kovitz, 2003, p. 3).

While in the army women may have to take certain roles and adapt to the social structure. If some attributes are not considered useful or even bad they have to hide them. Some feminine traits have to disappear and the more masculine ones developed. Empathy and softness has to make room for sturdiness and insensitivity for example. Traditionally there has not been a lot of women in the army since the military culture is conservative and hard to change (Valdenius, 2007, p.40-41). In the military exists an identity which everyone has to adapt to and the expectations on how a women should and should not behave is particularly strong (Kronsell, 2012, p.50-51). They need to adapt to a more masculine identity.

Through the process of training and combat multiple ways to shape the soldier is practiced. Pressure, break down, sexual incentives, taunting and accusations, humiliation, flattery, exaltation, and idolization of violence are some methods to shape a warrior. The training of a soldier is closely related to being a man; warrior hood is equal to manhood (Kovitz, 2003, p. 5). Being a man becomes associated with military values like aggression, insensitivity and violence. When a boy turns into a man he learns this attributes in the military. The soldier is taught that aggression is good and that complaining is bad (Hockey, 2003, p. 15-16). Failure and complaining are attributed to femininity and it is a bad and a weak thing. Aggression is seen as extremely important and valuable in the army (Hockey, 2003, p. 17).

3.4 The Masculinity and Femininity relation

The military have a very deep rooted masculine culture. One of the aspects of the masculinity, which is hegemonic in its cultural dominance, is the perspective on and perception of femininity. The masculine behaviour resents the weak. Soldiers are trained not to complain and not to be soft. They need to be able to close of emotions like empathy and regret to be able to function as soldiers. Feminine attributes are looked upon as “weak” or “soft”, sensitivity and compassion for instance (Xavia Karner, 1998, p. 207-208). Therefore the social practice of resenting attributes that are seen as feminine is formed. This leads to the shaping of both men and women into masculine soldiers.

Masculinity and femininity have a pole relation, seen as opposites of each other. Masculinity favours some skills and emotions and femininity others. Since there is a total domination of masculinity due to the training and uniformly construction the solder, femininity and things perceived not to be masculine is a disruption. Some examples of the masculinity/femininity opposites are war/peace, death/life, strong/weak, defenders/defended and military/civilian (Kovitz, 2003, p. 9).

Some argues that men can get confused when they are fighting alongside women. Men can become distracted and lose focus of their mission which would be devastating. The representation of women in the fighting forces is therefore seen as dangerous and problematic. Women are sexual distractions in field which

leads to sexual jealousy that could be bad for the operational effectiveness (Kovitz, 2003, p. 2). This is a very controversial way to look at it since the blame for women sexuality lies at them, they get victimized. The men do not have to take responsibility for their libido, and seems unable to control it.

Even though Sweden has come a far way in integrating women into the Swedish Army there is a problem with the roles of men and women are. Women are often victimized and seen as they need to mark when something is done to them. The official view is that women need say stop and this is a way to rob men of their responsibility for sexual desires. With being a man come an uncontrollable lust for sex. It's is seen as totally normal to be attracted to women and that the norm of sexuality is heterosexual. The gender power relation illuminates military reality; men and heterosexuality is the normal and primal. Women bodies are not normal but different. Men who harass are not obliged to control their sexuality, it is their heterosexual norm. This is although there should be no difference between the sexes and they should be treated the same (Eduards, 2012, p. 54).

4 Analysis

I will try to put myself in a position as an analyst to question norms which I could accept and take for granted. I will interpret and question my material looking for what they mean and how they influence the social practices. The language will be very important and also prejudice about what is good, bad, allowed or taboo. The goal of my questions was to analyse the language and power structures in the Swedish Military, investigate how the masculinities are perceived, reproduced and seen social practice. The interviews both took about 65 minutes each; they were in Swedish so this is my translations. The Krig för Fred series was a total of 170 minutes and the Fredsstyrkan were much more extensive with about 254 minutes, they were also in Swedish therefore I have translated them.

4.1 ”Krig för Fred”

“Krig för Fred” is a documentary series about a Swedish group of soldiers in ISAF in Afghanistan in six episodes. The series cover interaction with the locals, Afghan police and military, combat situations and the daily lives and reflections of the soldiers.

One of the soldiers, Erik, do not think Sweden presents the right picture of what is going on in Afghanistan and that the states don't take responsibility.

The focus of the Armed Forces is elsewhere on what is important. So much fucking soft values and lull lull. It's about time to... yeeeeeeah (Krig för Fred, Episode 1).

The soft value is something negative. Erik dislikes the soft which is a masculine practice (Xavia Karner, 1998, p.207-208). Erik continues:

Another thing they don't talk about much at home, everybody wants to be in combat. But that is something, I think, that when you talk about it in public, at schools etc., it is something, something that is a little filthy. [...] It's like nobody wants to be a part of that. Sure as hell you want to experience that. You want it to explode, you want to get tested. That's nothing weird. Everyone wants that. (Krig för Fred, Episode 1)

Erik thinks that everyone wants to experience violence and combat. He glorifies it (Kovitz, 2003, p. 5). About the enemies he says:

The enemy is the enemy, they are not people who are confused and don't know what to do with their future. We fight the enemy, it's easier to think like that rather than talk in terms of him being a human with a family etc. I mustn't mix in personal feelings with what I do at my work. Especially when it's about, literary, killing people. I don't want to do that. I don't do that I don't kill people. I solve my task. That can be fighting enemies. I will not stand here and say I kill people, fuck no. I complete missions. (Krig för Fred, Episode 1)

After he reflects upon if it is a father with a family and says it could be someone who just got a few dollars to shoot at the foreigners. In the talk about the enemy he dehumanize them, clearly sees them as objects, enemies, instead of human beings. This is a distancing from emotions but he has multiple ways to think. It is like a switch when he after reflects on the possible family of the enemy. The violence also becomes bureaucratic and normalized, the enemy just a mission (Kovitz, 2003, p. 6).

Combat and killing is trivialized. Mortar fire is ordered by the Swedish against an insurgent who has not been active for a while to get a reaction. They make fun of the firings and call it pause music and laughs (Hearn, 2012, p. 46).

Tjooo! (Krig för Fred, Episode 1)

Shouts a Swedish soldier when they fire a mortar round, mimicking fireworks. After they shot mortars with the purpose of getting a reaction they call in an airstrike. The justification for the bombardment and the view of the enemy was:

They have chosen themselves. They are aware of the risks, they are simply our enemies (Krig för Fred, Episode 1).

One Swedish soldier is filming the bombing a digital camera, no doubt thinking the explosions was cool. After the bombardment the Swedish soldier in charge says:

Okay let's take lunch now (Krig för Fred, Episode 1).

There is no reflection of the human life lost. The dehumanizing of the enemy and trivialization of the bombs while joking expresses a certain kind of mind-set. Also the soldier filming couldn't possibly think he is filming someone's death (Hearn, 2012, p. 46).

Later in the series the Swedish forces are attacked during a night patrol, the enemy is then called:

Fucking gays!
Whores! (Krig för Fred, Episode 5)

The language is very revealing of a social practice to call names; you weaken the enemy and also soldiers during training by using negative terms for them. By calling the enemy gay for instance you also put something negative and weak in

being a gay. This shapes the reality with the language. It could also mirror beliefs in the army and the using of such words reproduces their values (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p. 305-306).

4.2 ”Fredsstyrkan”

Fredsstyrkan is similar to Krig för Fred but also cover family relations. It has six episodes. For instance the wife of the Swedish commander says that Mats (the commander) has two sides. When she saw him at work he was authoritarian and handsome. Not as soft as he is at home. She says he is a lot of man but also has feminine sides (Fredsstyrkan, Episode 1). His masculinity is dual and he is not the same person home as in the field as commander (Hockey, 2003, p.23-24). In the 4th episode an officer also talks about interaction with the locals.

One of the most important things I learned the last time is not to let people come too close. You simply have to close off and that is the tip I have given to the boys also (Fredsstyrkan, Episode 4).

One of his ”boys”, people under his command, agrees with this and says it is hard if you get attached. This is a distancing from human emotions is a part of the military masculinity; the soldier cannot be allowed to feel (Xavia Karner, 1998, p.200).

4.3 Interviews

Fredrik as I have chosen to call him served in Afghanistan at the same time as Krig för Fred was recorded. He was stationed at a smaller outpost with only about 60 operatives. He describes it as being freer with fewer rules on the camp than Camp Northern Lights, which is the big camp.

Jens has just gone on his second rotation to Afghanistan. He is stationed with about 500 men. His job is to ensure protection and keep the roads safe, doing regular patrols as a side gunner.

I started the interviews with some introduction questions and immediately had some interesting responses and differences when talking about their family at home. Fredrik often talked with his family, about twice a week, in Sweden whilst Jens practiced something called distancing. He closed off Sweden and his life there, instead focusing on his job during his stay in Afghanistan. He tells me others did that too:

Me personally I closed off pretty much, [the life at home]. I thought it was easier to handle it that way. [...] My perception is that many people do that.

It was easier to cope with being in field if you closed off the other life you had and only focused on what was going on now, and the job. You distance yourself and rid yourself of emotions which could be distracting.

Jens did his training in southern Sweden and pointed out some differences between basic and professional training, I asked him if it was okay to talk about fear and he said yes, although there were a difference in the basic training.

If you felt fear and wanted to talk about it you could talk about if of course. [...] During basic training you did not understand. It [basic training] was a totally different thing. [...] you thought you were the biggest, best and most beautiful. [...] As soon as you moved on [to professional military] you were nothing.

When the soldier reaches the next level the masculinity changed. In the basic training sensitivity was not socially accepted but the professional it was (Xavia Karner, 1998, p.200). In the professional tolerance for deviant behaviour dropped.

As soon as you were cocky or roused or something like that, they brought you to down to earth, either verbally or physically sometimes.

Jens says this is to keep people in line, make them behave like the army wants to. Here certain behaviour is reproduced and identities formed in the military discourse. The Army pressures and shapes the soldiers to fit in the pattern. (Bergström - Boréus, 2005, p.321). Jens makes a comparison to old tribal society.

The alpha male oppresses the new ones and makes them fall in line. I think it is a military phenomenon that something like this happens, unique for a firm like the defence.

It is a male who is supposed to be the leader, and the society in the military is referred to as a more primitive one based on violence and authoritarian rule. When asked who was the alpha the answer was simple yet complicated.

It is absolutely not the officer. It is kind of like the mentality they are looking for everybody to have, they try to uncover that mentality in everyone.

He describes a structure of self-checking the soldiers with violence and harassment. The alpha male mentality is the preferred norm, to be biggest and baddest and keeping other people in check but this is everyone, the discourse creates this power between people and creates a norm (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p.311, 326-328).

One important part in the shaping of the soldier is the mental break-down. This is done to make the soldiers compelled to follow orders. Jens says:

...you break them [people from the civilian world] down to build them up again. That is how you build a soldier, or create a soldier. [...] You shall not talk up, sure you are entitled to views but an order is an order and you must be able to execute it. [...] Defiance cannot exist.

This illuminates how things work in the army. Change is hard because you can have your own views but an order is still an order which needs to be followed. You are forced to accept the chain of command and military culture (Hearn, 2012, p. 45-46). Other than the chain of command I asked Jens if there were other rules that needed to be followed.

Yes I would say that it exists [informal rules], there is an approach that people want you to have. There are a lot of informal rules.

The informal rules shape the approach which is favoured in the army, not only by officers and soldiers but of the military structure as a whole. The discourse works to favour certain behaviour and shape the social practices within the structure. (Bergström – Boréus, 2005, p.321)

In the interviews I also tried to investigate the heteronormativity. I got no direct answers but what really came to my attention was the language Jens used when talking about the contact with home when he says.

It is those who have girlfriends at home who are a little bit more open.

This is a sign of the heteronormativity in the language. It is presumed the soldier is a man and heterosexual with a girlfriend (Hockey, 2003, p.17-18). He didn't say partner which would be more open. The social interaction in the smaller group Jens was in was much focused around sex and the other gender.

When you are there it is a lot of sexual frustration, dick and twat. It is very strong...

Me: You don't talk a lot about dick I presume?

No but it is a lot about what is funny. You talk about dick and twat because it is positive on one front and negative on the other. You try to humiliate each other because it is a fun thing. You "troll" people to pass the time.

They expressed sexual frustration and talked much about sex, which shapes their perception of gender in the group (Toch, 1998, p.170-171). To kill time they humiliate each other for fun. The relation between these genitals is also interesting since one thing is positive and one negative (Bergström – Boréus, p.310-311).

Anger was not an emotion constant present, as I had thought, but more contextual. Fredrik witnessed a traffic accident which resulted in the death of a child. The driver just kept on driving as they tried to save the girls life. The civilians and the police did nothing. They Swedish medic team tried to save the girl and after that a guy broke down, not in field but when they entered their camp.

He took it out with force, he hit things.

They were angry at the Afghani state which they thought had failed the people and it resulted in violence, not in any combat situation though since they were not exposed to any threats by then.

People are more aggressive. People can be aggressive sometimes, and, then, nothing physical ever happened but they have taken quite stupid decisions which could have ended pretty badly. [...] ...anger takes control of the rational thinking (Jens).

Aggression took the overhand when the soldiers were mad and this posed a risk, emotions were in control.

When you are in field you do not break, then you have each other but when you come home... (Fredrik)

Much mental stress comes from combat but not until leaving the army the problems begin, since you have good support. It is very situational on how to behave (Hockey, 2003, p.23-24). This has also been revealed in more recent times after an incident 2010 the Swedish Military are now looking over new ways to handle the problem (SVD, 2012).

There is a practice of verbal or physical punishments for informal rules which do not come from higher ranking level. Jens describes it as a system.

It is never from officer level. It's between worker and worker. [...] You say what is required, for the person to step in line. [...] It is just a thing that has aroused, nothing is written. [...] You try to keep each other in check. If someone jumps out of their box you try to do what is required to get them back in. [...] If someone accidentally fires a stray bullets, people are tired, sleeping on their post or something like that. [...] Yes it is something unofficial, basse between basse, it is never an officer who goes and gives you a smack.

The physical violence is more at the soldier level and not from commanders. What Jens is describing is a social practice. The punishments shape the soldiers behaviours by enabling and disabling certain behaviours. It is not extreme violence but more a smack or hit on the arm. This is accepted; it is parts of the cultural hegemon where violence is present in social relations (Hearn, 2012, p. 45).

When asked about specific informal rules Jens said that almost everything accepted but made a contradiction when he mentioned a taboo:

Afghani friendship, a human can smile and take your hand and say you are a good boy but when you turn around it feels a little like he is trying to stick a knife in your back. That is a thing that is very taboo. Preferably you don't talk about that. [...] It is possible to become friends with them, but it's still... You don't do it to be able to think they are not like me. Because if it comes to the extreme and I would need to take a life it is pretty hard to think that I have taken a human life. You don't want to talk about them because then they are suddenly real if you say so.

This is also a distancing, not only from the enemy but also the Afghani people. You protect yourself from feelings and there were kind of like a mutual understanding that you don't talk about these things. You should be detached (Hearn, 2012, p. 46). We came in to the topic of gender advisors Fredrik had not met anyone but Jens had met three.

Their purpose it is not like many people think, going around and be like “Yes now you have to think about being people be politically correct. The task of a Gender Advisor is to support the leadership of the contingent, thus everybody down there in gender issues and everything concerning children, school, integration and women’s politics. You name it.

He said that they made a good work, on the contrary to what he thought before. Apparently prejudice exists among the soldiers about the gender advisors before they knew what work they did. Gender issues are seen as something problematic, foreign to the discourse and therefore a threat. Maybe the word gender is perceived as something negative and difficult.

On the topic of discrimination they both answered that they hadn’t experienced or heard of any direct discrimination. When I asked Fredrik if they used feminine examples as words of abuse he said

Absolutely. But really not more than home here in Sweden. But absolutely it is used there.

Me: Even when women were present? Did it change anything?

No. [...] gross expressions like, not really foul, but genital language. I think, they [the ones who said those things] was also humble guys, in my platoon. [...] But sure it was used in occasions, words like that, when women were present.

Jens only recalled heard it once.

Are you frail? Are you built like a woman’s chassis?

These are examples of connecting weakness and negativity with femininity. The result is that femininity is produced and perceived to be something negative. Sturdiness, hardness and to not complain is preferable. This illuminates the relation between masculinity and femininity where’s one is good and one is bad (Kovitz, 2003, p. 9). Fredrik defended this sort of behaviour with saying that it was common in society also. The behaviour and practice in the army is not questioned due to its hegemonic standing. Apparently this is also viewed as acceptable in the civil society also. It is interesting, and a contradiction, that this is not seen as discrimination but accepted in the discourse because the masculine culture is the hegemon (Edley, 2001, p. 190).

It was the Swedish attitude, we [Sweden] didn't want to bring down a lot of cannons and seem frightening in that purpose. They didn't want the peacekeeping mark to disappear. A side effect was that our lives were risked (Fredrik).

Fredrik expressed masculine values when annoyed at the Swedish Armed Forces since they risked their lives by a more peace attitude. Peace is traditionally connected to femininity and war to masculinity (Kovitz, 2003, p. 9).

When we talked about what was a good soldier they both mentioned humility as an essential trait. Jens said:

The combination with being humble but still able to be aggressive. [...] A good soldier is one who can keep their head cold and make decisions. [...] if you lack the cold to control your feelings when something happens...

There are signs of a dual masculinity as mentioned above. One needs to be able to change quickly and also close off your feelings. You need to be both calm and aggressive which is contradictory (Hockey, 2003, p.23-24). Further Jens never experienced a cliff between the men and the women in this case, they are not masculine or feminine but individuals. Some women were the toughest. Still he says:

It's a very masculine show; it is a little invidious, brusque attitude. [...] Guys generally have a little bit more of biggest best and most beautiful attitude. [...] It is a certain type of person who is looking for this job. There are many varieties of this [persons]. It is a very humble person but who can ignite and become another person. You have to use a word like killer instinct.

The killer instinct, as Jens describes it, is needed to be able to cope with the environment and it means to a big extent to be able to do quick decisions, being alert and ready for everything, a "mind-set" which is necessary according to him for being a good and able soldier. Jens also mentioned aggression as a favoured trait which is a masculine attribute (Xavia Karner, 1998, p.200).

4.4 Newspaper

I will use an interview with a woman named Paula Fisker who has been in Afghanistan to highlight some prejudices and get a woman's perspective. When Paula Fisker joined the military the jargon was hard, at first she felt inferior and had second thoughts, unsure if she could perform as good as the men. She did however and continued her career in the military.

As a girl I could chose to do the military service (at the time men were conscripted) and knew that there would be almost only guys there. I think it

was harder for them, they had to do military service and maybe they didn't expect to live with a girl.

She expresses a norm that the soldier should be male since it would be foreign and problematic with a female soldier (Beckman, 2005, p. 92). She does not believe in the traditional transformation that boys become men in the military. Maybe it is an obsolete concept now when the army is getting more gender aware, she calls it maturing instead. Paula never felt unwelcome in the Swedish military and says that women contribute to making the male dominated institution less sexist, the jargon and the mood changes.

I do not think boys become men by doing military service. But everyone found new sides in themselves. They matured. It was like that for me also.

The max percentage of women I could think of is thirty. Fifty-fifty would be hard, too much bickering. Women twist and bend everything generally. Guys are straighter; let's do this, now we do it." (Moreno, 2012).

In her experience female presence changes the jargon but and that having more women would lower the efficiency in the job. She reproduces a discriminating discourse where some traits are considered feminine and bad (Beckman, 2005, p.92).

5 Conclusion

The military is a secretive organization which makes it hard to research and change. I had no previous experience of the military which is both positive and negative. It is negative because I don't have that many connections in the military and had a harder time understanding and navigating in its structure. What is positive is that I am not biased towards the military and didn't take certain practices for granted, even though I might have presumptions about them from elsewhere.

Some problems with my study were to get accurate and honest answers from my interview persons. They have loyalty to the army and their friends there which is understandable but could affect their answers. It could be hard for me as a man to question norms traditionally contributed to men, and also to see what they are. I had to question why everything is as it is, or perceived to be. It is also unfortunate that I didn't find a woman to interview; it would have been useful for my study. Two interviews do not provide a generalizing ability for my study but that is not my goal either. If I only had the two interviews the material would be weak and that is why I complement it with the series and the article.

Both in the series and in Jens case the distancing was important. The soldier distanced from things that were connected to emotions and foreign to the military, like the life at home or Afghan people. This is done to not be emotional but instead insensitive. It leads to dehumanization with the purpose that emotions wouldn't intervene with the mission. The enemy is a task that would be harder to kill and have graver mental consequences in combat if thought of as a human being. The insensitivity is connected to the masculinity and the discourse, Afghani friendship was something not spoken aloud, not tolerated by the discourse and informal rules. The will not to recognize the enemy as humans in the series was substantial, both with the outright expression by Eric, Jens and by the soldiers bombing an enemy and videotaping it. The distancing is problematic because it can lead to extreme forms of violence like massacres, humiliation, and torture etc. (Hearn, 2012, p. 46).

In the military exists a different culture from the civil society. Certain formal and informal rules on how to behave shape the social practice and the soldier. Violence, for instance, is reproduced both in the social interaction and in the purpose of the military. Violence is not the purpose of the military but it is the method and therefore always present. It needs to be violent to achieve its goals. Violence however becomes trivialized and bureaucratic; it is part of the everyday life which is not taken notice of or questioned. The soldiers in the series do not reflect upon the deadly force but sees the violence as normal (Kovitz, 2003, p. 6).

To be able to cope with the various challenges he soldier needs a specific mind-set. Attributes favoured are aggressiveness, rationality, insensitivity and

killer instinct but also humility. One is learned these through the training and socialization in the military. The aggression does not only protect life but also the masculinity. Through the selection of aggressive individuals and the construction of aggressive behaviour the masculinity is preserved in the military structure (Xavia Karner, 1998, p. 229). This could be problematic if the masculinity is also connected to other traits as racism, homophobia, violence etc. which will be negative for the efficiency and reputation of the armed forces.

Feelings are allowed to be expressed more in the professional army in certain situations. The masculinities accepted are very situational and clashing, one situation favours coldness and one emotion. Soldiers are encouraged to be sensitive and talk about experiences but in the field they need to stay cold. This is a contradiction and could sometimes spill over, especially when there is no help to get at home for example. Mats wife described him as having very different personalities when in field and when at home. Both Jens and Fredrik talked about being cold in the field but talking and expressing emotions when at camp. These are signs of the dual masculinity that exist in the military.

There is a relation between masculinity and femininity. Hardness is positive and masculine while soft, like the Swedish strategy described by Erik, is negative. Jens also talks about dick and twat where one is negative and the other one is positive illuminating the relation. Also Paula thinks men have a more direct attitude while women twist and bend, masculine attributes are good but feminine weak. The insensitivity required is a masculine attribute.

The discourse analysis asks questions about consequences of dominating conceptions about reality for our actions which I use to question the hegemonic discourse of the military (Beckman, 2005, p. 95). Some things are taken for granted and not questioned, like discriminating language, harassment, violence, killing, and the norm that the soldier is a man. These things control the social practice and reproduces masculine behaviours. Things alien to the discourse are met with prejudice and problems, like the Gender advisors and female presence for instance. These discourses can change with the interaction when military traditions meet newer gender thinking, and an increased female presence could also change.

The language says a lot about the discourse of the Swedish Army. It is very important to acknowledge the power of language because it shapes reality, if you use something as a word of abuse it gets a negative charge. Discriminating language where femininity and gays are weak and resented are reproduced in training and used in combat on the enemies. It is also connecting women with traits seen as negative for the military which hinder their participation, and makes them required to change.

The jargon seems vary but in Paula and Fredrik's case can be quite hard, this could also be connected to the jocular harassment Jens experienced which would create this jargon. Some women are bothered by this but do not want to become normalizers of the language (Valdenius, 2007, p.38). They need to adapt to the masculine identity and this could be why Paula and Fredrik have met differences in the jargon. The language is also seen in combat where it is used to depreciate the enemy.

A lot of the practices, i.e. things the soldier is allowed to do and not, is determined by a structure which no one has direct control over. Like the soldier to soldier checking system Jens described which controls behaviour with violence and harassment. This is a social practice that reproduces itself, the army looks for the alpha male identity, according to Jens, in everyone which keeps soldiers in balance. Combat is also idolized by Erik, he thinks everyone wants to experience it and that it is something exiting, a masculinity idolizing violence.

A further study could be done at this material regarding what is good and what is bad in these social practices. Sweden is one of the best at gendering the military but there is more to work with.

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Interviews:

"Jens" 2012-12-09

"Calle" 2012-12-13

7 Appendix

Questions

Personal

Who are you and what did you do?

How did you feel before you went?

How was it to be there, what were your thoughts during the mission?

How did you feel after?

Why did you choose to join the army and go abroad?

How was the training?

Did it differ between men and women?

Group harmony

Were there any women?

How old were the group members?

What ethnicities was the group comprised of?

Did you talk about emotions?

What were the rules on how to behave?

Also did you have informal rules, like it was not socially accepted to do something?

Any subjects you could not talk about?

What did you talk about “off duty”?

Did you express fear to each other?

Did you consume Alcohol or other drugs?

Officers

What kind of rules were there? formal/informal. Also did they hint to break the rules?

What were the punishments?

How did they treat women?

Structure

Did you see a lot of anger?

What were the punishments like?

Did any frustration lead to anger?

Were there some people who were not good for service?

Why not?

Have you had any contact with gender advisors?

Events

Did anything illegal occur?

Do you know of any criminal acts?

Did you see any negative behavior towards women?

Did you see any aggressive violence?

Do you know of any fights that occurred?

Did you at any time experience down talk about the society? Like democracy or institutions?

Did you hear discriminating language like shouting of words little girl, woman etc?

The Soldier

What is a good soldier?

What properties should a good soldier have?

Did anyone shy away from combat or resisted it?

Finishing reflections

Did you experience the part when "they" try to break you?

Who are they? And why do they want to break you?

Can a woman close of her emotions? Can a man?

Do you think there is difference between women and men? Biologically and socially? Then what?

What is a feminist?

What is a woman?

What do you think is the role of women in the army?

What is a masculine man?

What is masculinity?