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Militarized Masculinities: Gender Norms, Women and LGBTIQ+ in European Armed Forces

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Summary. This article examines the construction of militarized masculinities within the European Union. It aims to identify the qualities deemed necessary for a militarized masculine man in this context. The analysis focuses on three dimensions: the normative image of militarized masculinity, the position of women in the military, and the integration of LGBTIQ+ individuals, particularly homosexual and transsexual persons. The findings suggest that women are often positioned as complementary to men, thereby reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies. Homosexual men may be accepted, but typically only if they conform to dominant masculine norms. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the article argues that militarized masculinity is not inherent but socially constructed. Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism is used to demonstrate how selective aspects of homosexual identities are incorporated into military structures in Lithuania, Greece, Germany, and the Netherlands. The empirical component is based on semi-structured interviews with eight military professionals, revealing prevailing gender norms, behavioral expectations, and the conditional inclusion of sexual minorities within military institutions. The article concludes that rethinking the military beyond a narrowly defined masculine ideal is essential for promoting greater inclusivity and challenging dominant gender norms.

Keywords: gender; gender norms; masculinity; military; NATO; LGBTIQ+.

Militarizuoti vyriškumai: lyčių normos, moterų padėtis ir LGBTIQ+ asmenys Europos karinėse struktūrose

Santrauka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama kaip konstruojami militarizuoti vyriškumai ir kokias pagrindines savybes turi turėti vyras, dirbantis NATO karinėse struktūrose. Analizė apima tris temas: militarizuoto vyriškumo normatyvinis vaizdinys, moterų padėtis karinėse struktūrose bei LGBTIQ+ asmenų – ypač homoseksualių ir transseksualių asmenų – integracija. Tyrimas grindžiamas interviu su aštuoniais karinio personalo profesionalais ir jų požiūriu į vyraujančias lyčių normas, elgesio ypatybes ir sąlyginį seksualinių mažumų įtraukimą į karines struktūras. Interviu dominuojantys vaizdiniai rodo, kad moterys dažnai suvokiamos kaip papildančios vyrus kariuomenėje, taip atkuriant tradicines lyčių hierarchijas. Homoseksualūs vyrai gali būti priimami į karines struktūras, tačiau dažnu atveju tik tuomet, kai atitinka vyraujančias vyriškumo normas. Remiantis Judith Butler lyčių performatyvumo teorija, straipsnyje teigiama, kad militarizuotas vyriškumas nėra įgimtas,

bet socialiai konstruojamas. Taip pat pasitelkiama Jasbir Puar homonacionalizmo sąvoka siekiant atskleisti, kaip tik tam tikri homoseksualios tapatybės bruožai gali būti integruojami į normatyvinį karinių struktūrų vaizdinius Lietuvoje, Graikijoje, Vokietijoje ir Nyderlanduose. Straipsnyje daroma išvada, kad norint skatinti didesnę skirtingų žmonių įtrauktį ir kvestionuoti dominuojančias lyčių normas, būtina iš naujo permąstyti karinių struktūrų sąvoką ir peržengti siaurai apibrėžto vyriškumo idealo ribas.

Raktiniai žodžiai: lytis; lyčių normos; vyriškumas; kariuomenė; NATO; LGBTIQ+.

Introduction

The study of masculinities is a relatively young discipline that primarily emerged from feminist scholarship around 1980. Key scholars in the field have explored militarized masculinities through categorical analysis (Higate 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005); the social-psychological relationship in between a father and a child (Kimmel 2008, 2013; Connell 2000), and the influence of Western social norms imposed on a man (Grønseth 1975; Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; hooks 2004). Considering current and future trajectories in the field, research priorities increasingly focus on digital masculinities and their relationship to representation and critique, as well as on issues such as masculinities and social justice, gender-based violence, power, and privilege (American Men's Studies Association 2025). One potential area of further development is the study of embodiment and masculinity. This subfield addresses the role of bodies, emotions, and materiality in shaping understandings of men and masculinities. In this context, the present article aims to emphasize the importance of examining militarization processes within masculinity studies. These processes are examined through the interrelation of the body, emotions, and discourse.

Recent socio-economic and cultural developments, including the Russian war against Ukraine and the war in Gaza, have reinforced the importance of researching militarization processes in NATO countries from an intersectional perspective. Increased attention to militarization is currently emphasized by various Western leaders. During a press conference following the London Summit on 2 March 2025, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen launched the "ReArm Europe Plan," which she described as follows: "This set of proposals focuses on how to use all of the financial levers at our disposal – in order to help the Member States quickly and significantly increase expenditures in defense capabilities." She concluded by stating, "ReArm Europe could mobilize close to EUR 800 billion for a safe and resilient Europe" (European Commission 2025).

In this context, I examine militarization through a gendered lens, focusing on masculinity studies and their relationship to the experiences of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals within the military. The objective is to understand how the militarization of the masculine body is defined, what characteristics are assigned to it, and how these are connected to the status of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals. Additionally, I explore how women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community – such as gay men and transgender individuals – are positioned within military structures and what challenges they may encounter in the field.

The thematic focus of this article aligns with ongoing academic debates within masculinity studies. Specifically, it contributes to discussions on embodiment and masculinity, which explore the role of bodies and emotions in shaping masculine identities (American Men's Studies Association 2025). To analyze the disciplining mechanisms of bodies in militarized settings, I apply Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, arguing that the identity of the masculine soldier is constructed through hierarchical masculine norms – just as gender itself is produced and regulated by a dominant heterosexual masculine order. Furthermore, the article engages with current debates on power and privilege within masculinity studies. This includes critically examining how the field can challenge existing power structures while promoting solidarity, accountability, and resistance to dominant gender norms (American Men's Studies Association 2025). In this context, Jasbir Puar's theory of homonationalism is employed to analyze the criteria by which sexual minorities are included in or excluded from the military in the United States. Puar (2017) argues that only homosexual individuals who embody privileged identities – such as whiteness and Christianity – are accepted into the symbolic unity of the United States, while antagonism is often constructed between the homosexual community and Muslim identities.

I seek to contribute to scholarship on militarization, hegemonic masculinities, and patriarchal gender relations, building on studies such as Christensen and Kyed's "From Military to Militarizing Masculinities" (2022). This article addresses how certain identity categories – such as sexuality and even gender – are included or excluded within specific military institutions. It also engages with research examining how militaries function as gendered institutions that discipline bodies, such as the work of Dvorak (2024). The aim is to deepen the understanding of which gender norms are reinforced within military institutions.

The article consists of five sections and a concluding discussion. The first section reviews the theoretical discussion on the militarized masculine body and its core characteristics. The second section analyzes NATO's policies on diversity and inclusion, with a specific focus on the situation of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals. Addressing NATO's Diversity and Inclusion policy is crucial, as all the EU countries examined in this article are members of the alliance. The third section presents the primary methodological approach, focusing on interviews conducted with respondents. The fourth section applies Judith Butler's (2006) theory of gender performativity to the collected data, examining how interviewees define the militarized masculine man across three dimensions: appearance, behavior, and speech. The final section explores the interviewees' accounts on the integration of women and homosexual individuals into the military, highlighting key challenges. These issues are discussed within the framework of Jasbir Puar's (2017) critical theory of homonationalism.

The Militarized Masculine Body: Defining Its Relationship to Gender Norms and Homosexuality in the Military

The exploration of the militarized man from a socio-cultural perspective is rooted primarily in feminist theory. Since the mid-1980s, the steady increase of feminist scholarship has contributed to conceptualizing questions related to gender and militarization across various disciplines, including international relations and masculinity studies (Svedberg 2021). Among the most frequently cited characteristics of the militarized masculine body are toughness, violence, aggression, courage, control, and domination (Eichler 2014) – all of which are critically examined as social constructs. In this article, I focus on the concept of *domination,* using the logic of binary thinking. Historically, militaries have been – and continue to be – male-dominated institutions in which the process of domination and subjugation play a central role. The process of domination/subjugation is often explained through the binary logic (i.e., men versus women). Connell provocatively illustrates the connection between militarization and masculinity by referencing male genitalia: "the gun is a penis symbol as well as a weapon. Gun organizations are conventionally masculine in cultural style" (Connel 2005; 212). Despite significant shifts in gender relations, men continue to be associated with the military, while women are linked to pacifism (Eichler 2014).

It is important to highlight that the discourse of high-level politicians – both male and female – often reinforces gender binarism in discussions of militarization. The relevant example would be Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, who, during the live conference of the Feminist Foreign Policy Ministerial Event (20 September 2023, United Nations), claimed:

> When I see conflicts around the World, Wars around the World – We are not seeing enough women there. And man, I have to say this what it is, but you know: You want to win a War, we want pathways to peace (United Nations 2023).

The mentioned quotation repeats the thought in which the man is considered warriors who guard the feminine beautiful souls (Gopal 2023; 35). Beautiful souls are considered as innocent and pure, and therefore vulnerable. The dualistic thinking logic of men versus women could be illustrated by the concept of *complementarity*, which firstly started to be applied by Simone de Beauvoir in the book *The Second Sex* (2011 [1949]). The gender norm becomes one of the aspects that helps to define the militarized masculine men.

The strict male heterosexual conduct is the other attribute that characterizes the Western type of masculinities and its relation to the militarization process. Militarized masculinities are created around the narratives related to the protection of femininities (e.g. masculine warriors to protect feminine beautiful souls) as well as in relation to devaluating the gendered others as well as those othered by race or sexuality. One of the most generic ways to conceptualize militarized men is related to heterosexuality (Eichler 2014). Scholars stress that "many states specifically disallow gay/homosexual men from serving in the military, and in some countries, men in the military who are defined in this way can be prosecuted" (Hearn 2012; 39). In a general way, the

traditional characteristics of the militarized man, such as visible physical strength, sustainment of soft emotions, or precise, short communication are opposed to the characteristics, related to the stereotypical view of how a homosexual man historically is portrayed.

I would argue that the perception of homosexual men's integration into the military has historically been contradictory. The case of the United States provides a relevant example. The U.S. only relatively recently abolished its ban on homosexual service members, with the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy enacted in 1993. Three main arguments were commonly used to justify the exclusion of homosexuals from the U.S. Army during the 1980s and 1990s: "(1) homosexuality is a mental disorder rendering a person unstable, (2) homosexual service members are a source of poor morale for military units, and (3) homosexual service members are poor security risks" (Jones and Koshes 1995; 16). The first argument framed homosexuality as a mental illness that deviated from normative standards. The second justification focused on military order and morale, citing concerns such as the potential impact of homosexual or anti-homosexual cliques on discipline, or the supposed problems arising from the presence of a known homosexual in an environment where soldiers lacked access to heterosexual partners. The third argument – regarding security risks – was explained as follows: "homosexual service members are security risks, since they would be subject to blackmail or (sexual) seduction" (Jones and Koshes 1995; 19). It is important to note that the mentioned regulations were only conditionally abolished on July 19, 1993, under newly elected President Bill Clinton. During his presidency, the policy known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) was implemented, stipulating that a service member's sexual orientation should remain private and not be openly declared. This principle is also relevant in analyzing the empirical data in this study.

The main justification for adopting the DADT policy was that men and women should be evaluated based on their ability to perform military duties, rather than on their sexual orientation. An important aspect of the policy was that, after its implementation, military personnel were not to be questioned about their sexual orientation during the enlistment process. However, if an individual voluntarily disclosed being homosexual, this could create a presumption of potential engagement in prohibited conduct. In such cases, the service member would be given the opportunity to either confirm or refute that presumption (Burrelli and Feder 2009; 1).

This suggests that military authorities retained discretionary power to exclude homosexual individuals based on subjective or non-evidence-based assumptions.

Women's and LGBTIQ+ Rights in NATO's Diversity and Inclusion Policies

NATO has its own Diversity and Inclusion policy, which is structured around five main thematic areas: (1) Women, Peace, and Security; (2) Gender Balance and Diversity in NATO; (3) Combating Conflict-Related Sexual Violence; (4) Gender Perspectives in NATO Armed Forces; and (5) Human Security. The second and fourth thematic areas are particularly relevant to this research, as they focus on internal dynamics and institutional practices within NATO, aiming to improve its internal organizational structures. This contrasts with the other areas,

which emphasize external actions – such as policies applied in countries where NATO has conducted military missions.

In relation to these two thematic areas, four key documents are particularly relevant: the *Annual Report. Diversity and Inclusion* (NATO 2023); the *NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives: 2022 Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations* (NATO 2025); *Women, Peace, and Security* (NATO 2024); and the *NATO Gender-Inclusive Language Manual* (NATO 2020). Most of the available data focuses on objectives and outcomes related to gender norms, particularly the integration of women into the military. However, limited attention is given to issues concerning homosexual men, as well as disabled or transgender individuals in the military.

Regarding the LGBTIQ+ thematic area, NATO has three Staff Resource Groups that support Diversity and Inclusion efforts. One such group, Proud@NATO, provides support to staff members who identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community and their allies. Several published articles highlight events organized by this group – such as the NATO *Run for All* marathon – which aim to promote a more inclusive workplace environment. It is important to note that the activities of this staff group are voluntary, meaning that employees engage in Diversity and Inclusion initiatives on their own time and without obligation.

In terms of transgender people inclusion, some guidance is provided in the *NATO Gender-Inclusive Language Manual*. Section 4C, titled *Transgender*, states: "When writing or referring to a transgender person, make sure to use the appropriate title and pronouns for the person's gender identity" (NATO 2020; 16).

NATO institutions collect and present more information related to women, as supported by statistical data. The document The *Annual Report. Diversity and Inclusion* announces that: "Over the period 2017 to 2022, the percentage of female civilian staff has remained stable NATO-wide. Of the 6,635 NATO Civilian staff members employed, some 26,8% (1,778) are women" (NATO 2023; 21). In addition, the report *NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives 2022* (2025) declares that the average of the NATO Member Nations armed forces was 12,73% women and 87,27% men in 2022. It is a 0,2% increase from the previous report. By considering the longer time perspective, the steady increase of women in the NATO ally's armed forces is also noticed, from 10,30% in 2014 to 12,73% in 2022. The average distribution of women by a branch in NATO ally's armed forces in 2022 is stated as follows: 17,68% (air); 45,76% (land); 14,43% (navy) and 18,40% other. In order to increase women's visibility within military, certain initiatives are implemented at the NATO level, such as learning and development initiatives, focusing on harassment, bullying, and discrimination in the workplace. Some communication activities to increase women's visibility within NATO were also noticed, for instance: within the allies, NATO commemorates the International Women's Day or International Day of People with Disabilities.

Methodology

For this study, the semi-structured interview was chosen as the primary research method. I consider it an effective approach for achieving the study's objectives, such as understanding how the militarized masculine man is perceived across three dimensions – appearance, behavior, and speech – or analyzing the figure of the militarized masculine man in connection with gender and minority rights. Longhurst (2009; 582) claims that one of the main strengths of semi-structured interviews is their ability to explore personal, sensitive, and confidential topics that informants may find difficult to disclose. Consequently, this method enabled me to conduct interviews in a conversational manner and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives.

An in-depth, semi-structured interview guide was developed to analyze militarized masculinities across multiple levels. It included questions related to the beliefs and behaviors of individual men and women, as well as institutional perspectives – such as policies and regulations at the national level. Additionally, the guide addressed the role of mass media in shaping public perceptions of the military. More specifically, the interview covered the following topics: how informants define the militarized masculine man; what they consider to be the most typical characteristics – both physical and psychological – attributed to such men, both locally (in their home country) and internationally, particularly within the NATO context. Informants were also asked to identify the essential traits that individuals must possess if they wish to pursue a military career.

One section of the interview focused on exploring accepted and rejected gender norms within the military sector. For example, I asked whether the informants believed that homosexuality, transsexuality, and military service are compatible, and requested them to justify their answers. To conclude the interview, I presented images of various political leaders (such as Donald Trump, Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin, Emmanuel Macron, etc.) on a screen – each representing a different type of masculinity as conceptualized by Connell (2005). Using these images, I posed a series of questions designed to examine the core mechanisms of hegemonic masculinities.

Table 1. **Overview of the interviewees**

Name	The Identity	The working position
Informant A	Male / White / 42 years old / Lithuanian	A senior specialist of the Military Personnel to the Ministry of National Defence Republic of Lithuania
Informant B	Male / White / 48 years old / Dutch	Dutch Military Veteran / A former soldier in the Dutch army and the United Nations Peacekeeper (Blue Helmet)
Informant C	Male / White / 57 years old / Lithuanian	Official in leadership position of the Institute of Military Affairs in Lithuania

Name	The Identity	The working position
Informant D	Male / White / 48 years old / Lithuanian	An expert of the Military Theory to the Military Institute (under the Lithuanian Army)
Informant E	Male / White / 31 years old / Greek	A commander Officer of an observation post on a rocky island on the Greek border
Informant F	Female / White / 54 years old / Dutch	Gender Advisor to the Dutch Ministry of Defence
Informant G	Male / Mixed Ethnicity / 31 years old / German and Nigerian	Programmer (Application Support) within NATO as a German military personnel
Informant H	Male / White / 52 years old / Dutch	Military Commander of the network of cultural and humanitarian affairs within the Dutch Ministry of Defence

The table above lists all the professionals who participated in the interviews. In total, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with military personnel based in various European Union countries, namely Lithuania, the Netherlands, Germany, and Greece. All interviews were conducted online using platforms such as Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp. The online format was chosen because the participants were located in different EU countries, making in-person interviews impractical. Seven of the eight interviews were recorded. One participant from Lithuania (Interviewee A) declined to be recorded, though no specific reason was given. Among the interviewees, seven identified as male and one as female. The minimum age for participation was set at 18, as this is the legal age of adulthood across all EU countries.

Although the original aim was to interview only male participants, one woman was included in the study due to her direct relevance to the research topic. Interviewee F is a gender expert working at the Dutch Ministry of Defence. Her expertise in the integration of women and minority groups – such as homosexual and bisexual men, as well as people with disabilities – into the military provided valuable insights for this research.

Defining the Militarized Masculine Body

To examine how the militarized masculine body is constructed in practice, I asked the interviewees to characterize a (male) soldier according to three dimensions: how he should look, act, and speak. The main two thinking patterns were noticed in terms of how the person within military (soldier) should look. On the one hand, three informants directly named the physical characteristics that define the soldier (namely the informants A/B/E). On the other hand, three informants chose a more abstract approach (namely the informants C/D/F). If we would like to understand how the interviewees described the militarized man based on the physical level, we could agree that most of them defined it as an athletic, young man around 23 years old who is grounded by advanced physical performativity and endurance.

A strong build man around 23 years old. (Informant A)

Short hair, shaven and very good personal hygienic. (Informant B)

Able to run, he has to have endurance, he has to be able to lift his body armour. (Informant E)

From a more abstract perspective, the interviewees did not explicitly name specific physical qualities but rather integrated them implicitly into their responses. Some informants emphasized functional ability, as illustrated by Informant C: *"In terms of physical appearance, he needs to be able to complete a certain function."* Informant D highlighted the evolving role of physical strength in the context of modern technologies: *"Physical readiness was much better in the past compared to today […] Today's youngsters are much less developed in terms of physical readiness, but the lack of physical strength is compensated for by new technologies."*

Notably, Informant F provided a contrasting perspective that challenged the views of other participants by emphasizing interpersonal traits over physical ones: *"I think their attitude should be more friendly because then you gain more trust. That is more effective. To me, muscles – no relevance. But then, they are young soldiers; they enter the military, and muscles do count. How strong you are."*

In terms of acting, most interviewees named the direct qualities of how a male soldier should act. Interviewees B/E/F/H directly named the main attributes, such as active listening or rigid walk, endurance which grounds the definition of acting. The Informant E separated the sense of obedience, which, according to the respondent, the soldier should have. The comprehensive description in terms of acting was provided by Interviewee G who included a highly relevant concept *The Citizen in Uniform.* The concepts outline the idea that the soldier is a citizen of a certain country whose characteristics should not be changed even if he is on duty:

Act and speaking. He or she should speak clearly. They need to be understandable. In the German military, there is a concept which is called citizen in uniform. This literally means that you start as a citizen and when you wear a uniform. This basically means in this regard you should act as a citizen […] So, basically, only because you wear a uniform, it doesn't mean that you are special because, in the end, you are for society. This is basically the most important thing when it comes to the Western military. (Informant G)

In terms of speaking, the answers of the informant were quite direct. The interviewees said that the soldiers should speak in a short way and be as precise as possible. The sentences should be relevant, even a bit broken. In addition, the content of what you say should be rationally justified. The way of speaking should be grounded by confidence, with no visible insecurity as Informant F concludes: *"Confident attitude […] Confident as confident. Someone who is not insecure […] You can tell from people who are confident. The way they speak. They speak more clearly, they speak without question marks"*. Consequently, self-assurance is separate from the other relevant qualities that the person within the army should be able to have.

I also included a section in the interview to explore how the militarized masculine body is expected to be subjugated according to the rules that exist within the military sector. By providing the answers, the interviewees mentioned highly relevant concepts such as indoctrination

or confirming the standard behavior within military. The standard behavior should be understood as the normative understanding of military, grounded by physical strength, short precise communication, and the sustainment of soft emotions (as an example, Interview F elaborated on that). Basically, both concepts emphasize the idea that we become soldiers, not that we are inherently soldiers. The process of becoming is an essential part of the process of indoctrination.

I am to relate the three analytical dimensions – appearance, behavior, and speech – to Judith Butler's critical theory of gender performativity. Butler in the canonical book *Gender Trouble* argues that "The disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain" (Butler 2006; 185). Butler argues that the aim of coherence construction, projected on gender conceals the gender discontinuities if we think about a variation of gendered behavior within the heterosexual, bisexual gay, and lesbian contexts. The scholar aims to emphasize that sex (the biological aspect) and gender (the social aspect) in many cases could be not easily combined. As the scholar emphasizes "gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender" (ibid.; 185). However, any kind of gender confusion is sought to be suppressed for the sake of coherence. Coherence is emphasized through the stabilizing regime. Coherence should be understood based on the gender relations grounded by heterosexual construction. As the scholar claims, gender coherence is desired, wished for, and idealized. The same desire together with certain acts, and gestures produces an internal core of substance that is projected on the surface of the body. Butler argues that the mentioned acts and gestures are performative "in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal and other discursive means" (ibid.). In other words, Butler argues that gendered behavior is manufactured together with the help of acts, gestures, and discourse which are projected to reflect heterosexual relations. The mentioned thought is also supported by Butler's notion of substantive identity. Butler claims that to reach the substantive identity is to dismantle different layers of a person which are comprised of ruled-generated identities. Butler describes rule-generated identities as the ones that "rely on the consistent and repeated invocation of rules that condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity" (ibid.; 198). By outlining the concept of identity and the elements that directly affect it, Butler pays a lot of attention to a discourse that exists as "pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life" (ibid.). Butler argues that the act of repetition is the crucial aspect of consolidating the culturally intelligible identity.

The process of becoming a soldier bears notable similarities to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. I argue that militaristic behavior, much like gender performativity as outlined by Butler, is constructed through three dimensions: appearance, action, and speech. To become a soldier, a man must follow specific norms – just as gender identity is not self-evident, neither is the role of a soldier. This identity must be constructed and maintained through repeated performance.

Militaristic behavior is reinforced through: appearance (e.g., short hair, athletic physique, good personal hygiene, as noted by interviewees); action (e.g., active listening, rigid posture, endurance); speech (e.g., concise, directive communication). These components are cultivated within the masculine body through a process of indoctrination. If indoctrination is understood as a formative practice, it aligns with Interviewee E's assertion: *"Once you are joining the army, you are the kid; once you are leaving the army, you are the man."* The concept of *becoming* is central here. This process of becoming is sustained through repetition – particularly in visual presentation, physical conduct, and verbal expression – all structured within a heterosexual normative framework. Repetition, as a core aspect of Butler's theory, plays a key role in shaping the ideal military subject. According to Interviewee F, this ideal soldier is someone who conforms to the behavioral standards institutionalized within the military.

Therefore, the militarized man can be seen as an example of how a specific social identity is manufactured through performative acts, aligning with Butler's critical theory of gender performativity. The apparent coherence of the militarized masculine body – shaped by heterosexual norms – serves to obscure gender discontinuities and alternative expressions of identity, including bisexual, gay, lesbian, and other non-normative experiences. The following section focuses specifically on the integration challenges faced by women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, aiming to explore what kinds of gender performances are expected or permitted within the role of a soldier.

Policing Gender Norms within Militarized Setting

The main guidelines of NATO's Diversity and Inclusion policy reveal that significantly more attention is devoted to the integration of women into the military than to that of homosexual or transgender men. This section focuses on the accounts of military professionals, aiming to practically understand the key integration challenges faced by women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community within the military.

In terms of women's integrational aspect to military, I asked the interviewees to comment on what they think about the gender equal military service among the European Union countries and whether they support women being equally required, like men, to complete military service. Most of the informants had positive attitudes towards women's inclusion to military. In many cases, the interviewees formulated their answers in a politically correct way by claiming that women are allowed to join military based on the same conditions as men but at the same time different obstacles are mentioned that hinder the women's successful integration into military. This argument is in line with the view expressed by Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985; 577), who note that "the dominant group – the white, educated, heterosexual males […] can adapt to new circumstances without breaking down the social-structural arrangements that actually give them their power". To illustrate of what was said, I will use the case of the Informant D.

Once the Informant D was asked what he thinks about the Gender Equal Military Service, the interviewee commented as follows: *"I am for it […] I wanted to emphasize the wholeness.*

The wholeness to conscript everyone". Then the interviewee started to recite some difficulties in integrating women based on the political perspective. However, his answer still sounded positive in terms of gender-equal conscription. Finally, once I asked the interviewee to answer if he perceives any direct integrational issues of women's inclusion into military, the interviewee commented as follows: *"There is no space where these women could be accepted. Firstly, we need to expand the system […] Also, women are more like caring people […] There is a high demand for doctors in Lithuania. We are lacking the doctors in Lithuania"*. The response of the Interviewee D has a direct relation to what was said about the politically correct answers. From the first time, the interviewee agreed that women should be integrated into military equally as men. However, once I attempted to probe the interviewee's response further, the interviewee became more subjective, suggesting that instead of integrating women into the militarized domain in Lithuania, it would be preferable to relocate them to the medical sector, where their so-called "soft" characteristics – such as caring for others – would be a better fit. The informant's answer directly reflects the argument made by Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985). Rather than considering the alternative ways to disrupt the highly hierarchical militarized setting in Lithuania, the interviewee opted for non-intervention by proposing reassignment. A similar response was also given by Interviewee C. On the one hand, he claimed that gender is irrelevant when asked about his opinion on universal conscription. On the other hand, he contradicted himself by stating, *"Currently, the system would not be able to prepare such a big number due to the lack of infrastructure, bed, guns and etc."* The interviewees tended to view the issue from an external perspective rather than considering women as equal participants in the military alongside men.

One part of the interview focused on understanding the interviewees' perceptions regarding the integration of individuals with diverse identities – such as homosexual and transgender people – into the military. A central question asked was: *What do you think about the inclusion of individuals with diverse identities, such as gay men, transgender people, and disabled individuals, in military service across European Union countries?* I would argue that homosexual and transgender identities are generally tolerated in the military only when individuals conform to pre-existing norms and standards.

Interviewee A suggested that homosexuality and militarism are compatible only if homosexual individuals are able to adapt to the expectations of Western military institutions, including conformity in physical appearance and behavior. More broadly, the notion of *adaptability* emerged as a recurring theme in the interviewees' responses when discussing the integration of homosexual and transgender individuals into the military. This concept was further illustrated by Interviewee E, who stated: "*Homosexuality is kind of taboo in the Greek army. There are people I have seen, soldiers, at least in my point of view, they are homosexuals, but they are trying to behave like they are not because of the pressure they have from the other soldiers*". This response suggests that homosexual men in the military often feel compelled to perform according to rigid, heteronormative standards aligned with hegemonic masculinity. As previously outlined, these standards tend to revolve around three key dimensions: appearance, behavior, and speech.

A similar perspective to that of Interviewee E was expressed by Interviewee F, who described adaptability as conforming to standard behavior: *"Their life is easier if they conform to the standard behavior. That means they talk as the majority talk, so they are masculine. They behave as the majority behaves, for example: making jokes together, meeting cool guys, or whatever […] They know once they conform to the standard behavior, their life will be easier"*. Thus, Interviewee F suggests that men who conform to hegemonic masculine norms within the military are more easily integrated into the Western militarized setting compared to individuals with other identities.

An interesting response was also given by Interviewee D, who claimed that homosexual men may function freely in the military environment only if they do not harass others at work. Harassment here refers to sexual gestures or acts, specifically when a homosexual male soldier makes advances toward a heterosexual male soldier within the military context. Interviewee D's answer resonates with the argument by Jones and Koshes (1995; 19), who asked "In many military settings where soldiers do not have ready access to heterosexual partners, what are the effects of the presence of a known homosexual person?" According to Interviewee D, homosexual soldiers might be perceived as a potential risk, due to fears that they could harass others. This aligns with Jones and Koshes' notion that homosexuals could be seen as sexual seducers who disrupt military discipline and order.

The accounts presented above suggests that identities such as homosexuality and transsexuality are considered compatible with the military only if individuals adapt to the strictly masculine militarized environment. I would like to bring the gathered theoretical insights into dialogue with Jasbir Puar's (2017) critical theory of homonationalism. Puar introduces the concept of homonationalism as the emergence of national homosexuality in a highly dense book *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2017 [2007]). She claims that "there is a commitment to the global dominant ascendancy of whiteness that is implicated in the propagation of the United States as an empire as well as the alliance between this propagation and this brand of homosexuality" (ibid.; 2). The scholar claims that there is a tight relationship between the nation, its egalitarian perception of the acceptance of certain homosexuals within the state, and the race (ascendancy of whiteness in comparison with others). The United States is the most frequently referenced in Puar's book. However, the certain parts of her theory have some affinities in the Western European countries, especially in the former imperialistic countries such as the United Kingdom or the Netherlands. The concept of the U.S. sexual exceptionalism, which is found in the book consolidates the picture of the United States as a national normative country in which the racialized others, mostly Muslims are rejected based on the certain assumptions that this diaspora presumably carries in terms of LGBTIQ+ topic. The certain categories of races are being rejected within the nationalistic framework based on the narrative of the war on terror:

> as the U.S. nation-state produces narratives of exception through the war on terror, it must temporarily suspend its heteronormative imagined community to consolidate national sentiment and consensus through the recognition and incorporation of some, though not all or most, homosexual subjects. (Puar 2017; 3–4)

The mentioned thought could be explained as the case when non-inclusive narratives are constructed in a way by creating exceptional national subjects, whose purpose is to antagonize the different groups of people within the nation. Puar claims that homonationalism helps to construct the "narratives of excellence, excellent nationalism when the national population comes to believe in its own superiority and its own singularity" (ibid.; 5). The purpose of creating such kind of narrative is to exclude some subjects. The excluded subjects are racialized based on the elements such as ethnicity or class.

The mentioned narratives are applied to consolidate the political stances against immigration or cultivate certain culturally intelligible stereotypes against certain diasporic groups such as Middle Eastern immigrants in the context of the United States. The proposed elements of homonationalism by Puar could be relevant by considering the answers of the interviewees on the topics of homosexual or transgender people integration into military. The interviewees narrated their answers in a way to claim that only certain types of homosexuals or transgender people could be accepted into the militarized setting. The interviewees directly separated that adaptability (Interviewee A as an example) or gender performance based on the heterosexual masculine matrix (Interviewee E as an example) are the necessary qualities for a man to be successful within the militarized setting. I would like to apply the concept of filtering it out by considering the gathered data. By filtering it out I mean that in both cases (the original text of Puar and the interviews), only certain types of homosexuals are accepted based on selected characteristics. The presented notion by Puar gives an idea that the American LGBTIQ+ people who have some relation to the Middle East context are expected to be rejected to be included in the singular unity of homonationalism. In the meantime, the different identity having people such as homosexuals or transgender are rejected to be included in military if they do not adapt themselves based on heterosexual thinking logic. Only homosexuals who act based on heterosexual masculine power order would be included in the militarized setting. Consequently, the application of homonationalism helps to disclose the narratives under which the unequal, non-inclusive mechanisms are created through the process of filtering them out.

The relationship between the militarized masculine body and the integrational aspect of women and minorities, such as people who belong to the LGBTIQ+ community was outlined. The interviews conducted with professionals helped to understand the outlined statistical data at the level of Diversity and Inclusion within NATO. As an example, the scarcity of statistical data on the integration of homosexual men into the military is partially explained by the fact that they often prefer not to disclose their sexual identity due to the risk of discrimination. They prefer to adapt and assimilate to heterosexual rules of conduct rather than maintain their own individual identity. In addition, the responses from the interviews regarding women suggested that they are viewed as complementary within military. Those whose gender identity is openly accepted but only with certain limitations.

Discussion

I examined the interplay between the militarized masculine man and the gender norms as well as the questions of sexual minorities and their integration to military institutions. The image, behavior, and verbal communication of the militarized masculine man are constructed according to heterosexual, hegemonic masculine principles. Consequently, the hegemonic type of masculinity with hard characteristics (short, precise communication; the sustainment of soft emotions) is considered the dominant example, which exist in the army. The dominant hegemonic characteristics of masculinity within the military shape the acceptance of other gender norms and identities. The outside-in concept might be applied to define women situation within military. The mentioned concept means that women within military setting are perceived as complimentary rather than the equal members as men. In most cases, the women's complementary role in the army is justified by a lack of infrastructure and high costs or the principle of relocation. Rather than acknowledging women as integral and equal members of the military, the interviewee proposed to assign them to the medical sector by claiming they possess inherently nurturing qualities, such as caregiving. The similar logic was applied to consider the integrational aspect of homosexual men or transsexual people into military. However, rather than viewing homosexual men from an outside-in perspective, these identities were subjugated to heterosexual masculine order. I consider this is an interesting thought which also proposes the possible thematic areas of the research, for instance: to investigate in which sections of military women as well as homosexual men work the most and why. There is an expectation that women or homosexual men, due to their presumed possession of more developed soft skills such as communication, choose or are relocated to work in more administrative roles because their lives are then easier and they do not feel as much pressure from their male peers. As the article mainly reflects men experience within military setting, to investigate only women or homosexual men would be beneficial as they would bring the different perceptual angle to the topic.

The article was written using a more categorical approach to analysis. In other words, hegemonic masculinity proposed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) functioned as the analytical lens through which the topic was examined. Different scholars criticize such kind of approach by claiming that categorical analysis portrays masculinity "as a static and fixed entry despite their attempts to theorize its fluid multiplicity" (Waling 2019; 89). The categorical analysis of the studies of masculinities tends to focus on power manifestation, and experience of discourse rather than all included elements. Waling emphasizes the lack of emotional reflectivity which the categorical analysis of masculinities is not able to disclosure by claiming that masculinities should be considered as:

> a systematic structure that shapes men's subjectivities, and a consideration of how men actually experience the World. Theories of masculinity tend to be concerned with the former, with little consideration of the latter […] consideration of both power/system structural inequalities, and men/boys lived experiences of masculinity is necessary. (Waling 2019; 95)

The focus here is on reflection. The scholars emphasize the importance of reflecting on men's decisions rather than solely on how men perform masculinities. I see the potential contribution of my research in examining how men engage in militarization through their everyday practices. The outcomes of this article focus on how the militarized masculine man is expected to behave and which gender norms and social groups are accepted within the military setting. However, it does not address how these militarized gender norms and social group dynamics are produced through daily practices. I believe it would be beneficial to study the indoctrination process itself – for example, how individuals are socialized, trained, and adopt values within the military. Such an approach would allow for a more nuanced analysis, one that not only identifies the characteristics defining militarized masculine identities and acceptable gender norms within the military framework (as discussed here) but also critically explores the processes through which these constructs are socially produced from the ground up. Field observation, as one possible method, could contribute to understanding these grassroots processes by examining the physical settings where the militarized man operates, the interactions he maintains with others, and the daily routines in which military personnel engage.

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