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Army recruitment video advertisements in the US and UK since 2002: Challenging ideals of hegemonic military masculinity?

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Author biography

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Abstract

This article examines video recruitment advertising for the US and UK armies between 2002 – post 9/11 – and 2018 in order to unpack constructions of gender in a context of what has been called a military recruitment crisis. The findings suggest that the recruitment crisis has made possible some interesting representations of gender in the armies of the respective states. The US constructs its army in less traditionally masculine terms: women and people of colour are frequently present as equal team members and there is a focus on emotional as well as physical strength. In contrast, UK advertising pre-2012 does not feature many women, presenting them in subordinate terms, and focuses on risk-taking and physical strength. After this period, however, there is a marked change and British army advertisements begin to look more like those produced by the US. The author argues that this represents a rejection of hegemonic military masculinity and that such a rejection functions to obscure military violence by presenting armies as progressive.

Keywords: Gender, masculinity, media, military recruitment

Introduction

While Hooper (2001: 156) asserts that state ties with their militaries are not as strong as they once were due to declining policies of conscription, the action taken following the 9/11 attacks in the US very much demonstrated that many countries *are* still strongly wedded to their militaries. Indeed, militaries may, in fact, be growing in importance, perhaps operating in new ways and new contexts (Kronsell, 2005). It has long been assumed that masculinity is key to militaries (Kirby and Henry, 2012) and, over the last three decades, scholars have devoted considerable time to unpicking this idea and transforming military masculinity into military masculinities. In recent years, greater attention has been paid to military *masculinities*, especially what has come to be seen as the hegemonic variant of military masculinity, the ‘emotionally constrained, physically fit combat soldier’ (Chisholm and Tidy, 2017: 101). Two special issues on military masculinities, both of which urge the adoption of a more critical approach to hegemonic military masculinities, form the starting point for this article: a 2012 edition of *International Feminist Journal of Politics* and a 2017 edition of *Critical Military Studies*. In the latter, Zalewski (2017: 200) argues that the concept of hegemonic military masculinity – initially imbued with such promise – has failed to deliver, and that ‘this overly familiar and comfortable concept is perhaps falling short of its intended ambitions.’ To address this – as explained below – I ask wider questions about gender, but also what *work* is performed by the gendering of the army, explaining why this should concern security studies scholars.

Across the world, the practice of military conscription is in decline and, as a result, steps are being taken to entice people to join of their own volition. Perhaps the most important means of accomplishing this goal is advertising, which is designed to insert the army into people’s ‘consideration set’, as Timothy Maude, a former US Army Deputy Chief of Personnel, put it (*The Nation*, 2002). This article contributes to a further understanding of the military and masculinity by examining army recruitment video advertising in the UK and US between 9/11 and 2018. I analyse these recruitment advertisements at a point in time that has been labelled a military ‘recruitment crisis’ (BBC, 2018a) in the UK and an ‘alarming trend’ of declining recruitment (Politico, 2015) in the US. As outlined by the special issues described above, unpacking our thinking on hegemonic military masculinity ‘necessitates a re-orientation of where, to whom, and for what we look to understand the operation of gendered military power’ (Chisholm and Tidy, 2017: 99). With this in mind, beginning with the assumption that military practices are always gendered, the first research question broadens the scope beyond hegemonic military masculinity and asks simply how these

advertisements are gendered. Asking a wider question makes clearer the complex relationship between gender, bodies and the army at this particular moment in time, allowing me to unpack the contradictions that so often structure constructions of gender (Belkin, 2012). The second research question asks what these gendered advertisements *do*: that is, what is the work performed practically and discursively by the particular configuration of gender in this case?

I first outline the article's research design (a discourse-theoretic approach) before demonstrating how have I selected and collected the army recruitment advertisements using YouTube and unpacking the concepts employed to analyse these advertisements (predication, presupposition and subject positioning). Finally, I go on to analyse these videos, finding that – perhaps contrary to popular belief – neither videos from the UK nor the US portray an image of the army that conforms solely to hegemonic military masculinity ideals relating to strength and aggression.

This article seeks both to understand how the advertisements under analysis were made possible and what they in turn make possible themselves. I argue that the 'crisis' in recruitment described above makes possible army recruitment advertisements that reject traditional conceptions of hegemonic military masculinity as militaries seek to recruit beyond the stereotypical demographic of young, white, men. I assert that this matters because discourses and practices positioning the army as less aggressive, less white and more female-bodied (perhaps even as progressive) serve to obscure militarized violence by repackaging it in a more palatable form.

Research design

The US and the UK were selected because both countries are in the top 10 military spenders worldwide (one and six respectively, see Perlo-Freeman and Solmirano, 2013), have a shared history of sorts (often termed a 'special relationship'), with a common language, a tendency to engage in military intervention together, and both have been engaged in the 'War on Terror'. In order to unpack the relationship between gender, bodies and the army in the UK and US, I employ discursive analysis. My work 'does not seek to deny the material existence of objects, but rather posits that we cannot interpret those same objects independently of discourse' (Walters, 2016: 654), making the examination of military discourses a worthy endeavour.

As stated above, recruitment plays an important role within the discourses and practices of the military. The largest quantity of previous work on military recruitment has focused upon practices or demographics (e.g. Bellany, 2003; Dandeker and Strachan, 1993). Within the works focusing on recruitment materials, most examine a variety, such as posters and videos¹ (e.g. Strand and Berndtsson, 2015; Woodward and Winter, 2004) or focus on historical recruitment videos, e.g. ones produced in the post-World War II period (e.g. Maartens, 2019). In this article, I contribute to these discussions by adding a deeper understanding of the nature of video-based recruitment advertising specifically and providing a comparative dimension by examining both the US and UK.

There are many ways in which these advertisements might be delivered to the public: they might appear before a video on YouTube, or you might see them on television, at the cinema, on a digital billboard or perhaps in news reporting of recruitment campaigns. As a result, they will be seen by a large number and a wide variety of people. YouTube was selected because it functions as a *repository* for army recruitment advertisements, including those from the past, shown across all of these platforms.² What is of interest in this case is not where they are located but rather the videos themselves. In order to obtain these videos, I employed YouTube's search facility and utilized the 'most relevant' setting, based upon view-count, viewer ratings and what proportion of the video viewers have watched.³ I input combinations of 'British/UK/American/US army recruitment ads/advertising/videos/campaigns' and manually selected relevant videos. I excluded fanmade videos, which tell us more about how the enthusiastic public might view the military, and videos that are not part of an official recruitment campaign, e.g. videos of the army in training. A case could be made that any video uploaded to the respective armies' official YouTube channels could function as recruitment material but, as it was not possible to examine such a volume of advertisements, I opted to draw the line at videos that were part of an official recruitment campaign. The number of video advertisements selected for each time period was five each for the UK and US. As Milliken (1999: 234) explains, a discursive 'analysis can be said to be complete (validated) when upon adding new texts and comparing their object spaces, the researcher finds consistently that the theoretical categories she has generated work for those texts.' Within each time period and for each state, the same themes were recurring (a brief examination of subsequent videos that were judged relevant did not find any new themes) and thus five were sufficient to identify the dominant discourse.

The results were divided into two brackets of time (see Table 1) in order to examine whether these representations changed: 2002–2012 and 2012–present (2018). The first date range accounts for the 10 years post 9/11⁴ and the second date range brings the videos up to the present day.

Videos for each of the UK and the US made between 2002 and 2018 are examined in order to understand constructions of the military in the immediate post-9/11 environment because, as Der Derian (2005: 321) notes, 'Before 9/11 and after 9/11: all social scientists must now survey international as well as domestic politics by this temporal rift.' The shift between pre and post-9/11 is also important because representations of gender change over time (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). One video from the first time period was re-released over the second with a different theme tune, and this was included because the US army appears content to project the same ideas.

It should be noted that the US typically features more generic advertisements on YouTube than the UK does over the 2002–2012 time period, either referencing different roles within the same advertisement, or featuring no job title at all. After 2012, the searches for both states returned generic results for the first five video advertisements.

In order to analyse these advertisements, I employ the discursive analysis tools developed by Roxanne Doty (1993) which have been held up as an exemplar (Åhäll and Borg, 2013). The three components of this framework are presupposition, predication and subject positioning. These tools are particularly helpful for examining gender because they make it possible to explain how the many elements of recruitment discourse interact: men, women, white people, people of colour, masculinity and femininity are all important in the gendering of the army.

Presupposition asks what has been taken for granted within a discourse, unpacking the assumptions made (Doty, 1993). This relates to the ontology of the discourse in question: what is taken to be true within a discourse? What work do the presuppositions undertake in order to get the discourse to make sense or seem natural? Doty provides an example:

To use a perhaps too-simplistic example, the question, 'Have you stopped beating your dog?' presupposes several things: something called a dog exists; you have one; and you engage in the practice of beating it. Further, the presupposition is made that the questioner has the presumptive right of interrogation. (p. 306)

While this is, as Doty notes, a simple example, contained within it are several presuppositions, each dependent upon the others, and each facilitating a particular type of predication and subject positioning.

Table 1 Dataset: UK and US advertisements.

UK advertisements: citation	Role advertised	What the advertisement is about
British Army, 2004	Amy combat	About a soldier called Elliot Hughes who speaks about his childhood and his life in the army now
British Army, 2006a	Armoured infantry	Features the role, but not in detail
British Army, 2006b	Infantry air assault	Features the role, but not in detail
British Army, 2008	Generic	Features clips of training
British Army, 2012	Corps of Royal Engineers	Explains how recruitment works
British Army, 2014	Generic	Many roles are listed in this advertisement
British Army, 2017a	Generic	Soldiers walk on a snowy hill, while one sings
British Army, 2017b	Generic	Soldiers sit in a tent, drinking tea while it rains
British Army, 2018a	Generic	Soldiers wait for a Muslim colleague to pray
British Army, 2018b	Generic	A woman talks about how the army is a progressive institution
US advertisements: citation	Role advertised	What the advertisement is about
US Army, 2006a	Generic	Emphasises the elite nature of the army
US Army, 2006b	Generic	Emphasises the elite nature of the army
US Army, 2009	Army Officers	Narrated by actor Gary Sinise. Focusses on the army as a historical institution
US Army, 2011a	Generic	Outlines the benefits of being in the army
US Army, 2011b	Army Rangers	Explains the role
US Army, 2014	Generic	Re-release of US Army 2011a, with a different theme-tune
US Army, 2015	Generic	Many roles are listed in this advertisement
US Army, 2016a	Generic	Features an amphibious assault
US Army, 2016b	Generic	Soldiers release a drone in a desert area
US Army, 2016c	Generic	A father discusses his daughter, who has enlisted

Predicate analysis, Milliken (1999: 232) explains, ‘focuses on the language of predication – the verbs, adverbs and adjectives that attach to nouns ... [which] construct the thing(s) named as a particular sort of thing, with particular features and capacities’. Put differently, predicate analysis examines how subjects and objects are constituted through the ideas attached to them. To return to Doty’s work, examples of predicates attached to the concept of ‘the Philippines’ in US foreign policy in the 1950s include ‘potential future world citizen’, ‘undeveloped’ and ‘inept and wasteful’ (p. 311). Taken together, these portray the state as infantile.

In the example above, the construction of the Philippines as infantile makes possible (perhaps even necessary) guidance from another subject, explicitly representing it as subordinate. This example demonstrates the value of unpicking subject positioning. Within a given discourse, multiple subjects are likely to be present and the final of Doty's discursive tools asks us to examine how these are positioned in relation to one another. Which subjects are granted agency? Which are represented as followers rather than leaders? This enables us to see whether a hierarchy is present and which subject positions sit where, allowing us to trace the normalisation of power structures.

Presupposition

A presupposition of hegemonic masculinity

Some advertisements in both the UK and the US sets presuppose hegemonic military masculinity, focusing on risk, aggression weapons and a strict gender binary. The only US advertisement to focus on risk and violence – without featuring any identifiable female soldiers – was the Army Rangers advertisement (US Army, 2011b), described on their website as the 'Army's premier direct-action raid force' (US Army, nd), that used risk-taking behaviour throughout. This is typically in a combat setting, featuring a night scene lit with red flares, with soldiers being lowered to the ground into rising smoke, giving the impression of a fire-fight (shown in greater detail later). Soldiers also blow up/ kick down doors, cause/watch explosions and jump out of helicopters; fast pace was utilized most in this video, not surprising given that this is a combat branch. Throughout this advertisement, cuts between scenes were short and the camera was constantly moving, quickening the pace and disorienting the viewer (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2005: 167), portraying life in the army as one of risk.

Earlier UK advertisements represent risk through breaking the fourth wall (Auter and Davis, 1991). This occurs in the British Army (2006a, 2006b), locating the viewer within the action. British Army (2006a) shows soldiers running with a stretcher, connoting urgency and, in one scene, soldiers run directly at the camera, running towards the viewer for help. Next, the camera emerges from a dirty pool of water in first-person perspective, as a colleague shouts 'one more!' directly into the camera, as though expecting the viewer to follow his commands. The first-person perspective is immersive, placing viewers inside the advertisement as video games do. Constructions of risk in these earlier advertisements are enhanced by editing to create a fast pace. British Army (2008) employs a zoom (in and out, and a 360-degree camera pan) disorienting the viewer, constructing a sense of the chaos that recruits might encounter. This is achieved by switching camera angles within

one scene (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2005), e.g. British Army (2006a) opens with a scene of tanks driving at speed along grass in a wood-like area; this 4-second scene sees three camera angle changes. This fast pace is also created by quickly cutting between scenes – a prominent technique in British Army (2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008) – for example, British Army (2006b) is 32 seconds long, featuring five scenes, making each an average of 6 seconds long, constructing risk through fast pace.

Related to risk, weapons are another shorthand for hegemonic military masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In earlier UK advertisements, guns are mostly employed in combat settings. The second scene in British Army (2006b) shows soldiers carrying guns, storming into a building before throwing a grenade which promptly explodes. Diegetic sound can provide clues to the audience about the environment they find themselves in (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2005), and here the sound of gunfire outside the building is used to heighten the sense of real-life pressure. In British Army (2004), soldiers extricate people from houses damaged by bombs, with reality being reinforced through the presence of civilians. In US advertisements, only the video for Army Rangers (US Army, 2011b) – a combat division – featured weapons in use, producing five large explosions. The type of weapon shown is much more varied in this video than others, with different types of gun and rocket launchers being used.

These aspects of these advertisements presuppose that the British and US armies should conform to a hegemonic military masculinity of aggression, risk and unproblematic use of weaponry. The work performed by representations such as these is to portray the respective armies as strong, making it unwise to pose a challenge. As I show below, when hegemonic military masculinity is not assumed, what is made possible contrasts markedly.

There is no need to conform to all aspects of hegemonic military masculinity. Following others (Cheng, 1999; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), I conceptualize hegemonic military as aggressive, risk-taking, and coded as male, but in many advertisements there is little presupposition that the UK or US army should conform to these ideals. Risk-taking is minimal in advertisements examined. While risk-taking is present in earlier British Army advertisements (2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2014), this is not a strong theme. Contrastingly later advertisements (British Army, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b) have no focus on risk-taking, instead emphasizing inclusivity. Risk-taking appeared in nine out of ten US videos (US Army, 2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2011a, 2014, 2015, 2016b, 2016c). Combat-based risk-taking was employed infrequently, with lower-risk training activities more prominent, e.g. parachuting out of helicopters (the most popular activity) (US Army,

2006a, 2006b, 2011a, 2014). Failure to focus upon risk represents a contradiction of hegemonic military masculinity (see Barrett, 1996) but serves an important purpose. I argue that these advertisements are made possible by the context of a military recruitment 'crisis' (the shortfall grew from 5,850 in 2007 (House of Commons, 2007: 5) to 8,200 in 2018 (Ministry of Defence, 2018)) and resulting aims to recruit beyond the typical pool of white men, enlisting more women, who are constructed as more risk-averse. Women have typically been under-represented within the army, but their numbers are growing steadily and, as such, are a prime recruitment target (Woodward and Winter, 2004).

Weapons are a further indicator of risk but can also emphasize aggression. Guns – while prominent in later UK advertisements – remain unused, with a greater focus upon teamwork (discussed below) (British Army, 2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b). Guns are a military reminder; without them, these could be advertisements for orienteering or camping, and the same is true of almost all US advertisements (except for 2011b). The representation of recruits holding but not using weapons represents the possibility of violence whilst positioning this as undesirable or unlikely.

Hegemonic military masculinity is not only coded as male but also white in western states (Prividera and Howard, 2006), subordinating military women and military men of colour. However, within these advertisements, while white men make up the majority of bodies, there is no strong presupposition within the advertisements that recruits should be white men, with recruits who are female and/or of colour prominent (this presupposition is reliant upon subject positioning and is discussed in depth below).

Military masculinity is based upon contradictions such as these and they are one of 'the ways in which the overseas projection of American power has been made to seem unproblematic' (Belkin, 2012: 25). I argue that these advertisements present a contradictory military masculinity in recruitment advertisements, concealing military violence by presenting the institution as less prone to violent behaviours.

Predication

The army as a site of adventure

The UK and US armies are constructed as a site of 'adventure' which is congruent with but not the same as hegemonic military masculinity. For example, British Army (2006b) encourages enlisting 'For the action, for excitement, for adventure', while a nightclub scene adds 'for the fun, for the friendships, for the Friday nights', while a soldier takes a woman's outstretched hand before leaving with colleagues. Similarly British Army (2006a) states

For the rush. For the challenge, for the action. To help, to protect, to serve. For the places, for the people, for the laughs. With compassion, with courage, with confidence. As a unit, as a team, through it all together. Armoured infantry: forward, as one.

Despite being an infantry role, the focus was not upon aggression or strength but rather adventure.

In contrast, US advertisements utilize sweeping scenery – for example, mountain panoramas (US Army, 2011a, 2014) and space exploration (US Army, 2009) – or onscreen text: army uniform is a 'key', enlistment 'a passport' (US Army 2011a, 2014), and 'the US army is prepared for ANYTHING ... in any environment' (US Army, 2015). A voiceover in US Army (2009) states that the army leads 'frozen rivers', 'over island to island', 'to free a continent', representing a life of travel. This voiceover is significant, narrated by longstanding military-supporter actor Gary Sinise, who famously played Lieutenant Dan Taylor in *Forrest Gump*.⁵ Indeed UK and US advertisements employ images of the vehicles – what Higate (2003: 34) might call 'big boy's toys' – necessary for traversing these terrains. Planes, helicopters and tanks feature frequently in earlier UK advertisements and in only two (British Army, 2008, 2012) are vehicles shown briefly. US Army (2006a) is typical of US advertisements, with 15 helicopters, 3 boats and 2 tanks visible.⁶ In both cases, therefore, there is a strong focus upon transport over weaponry which de-emphasizes violence in favour of adventure.

Army recruits are physically strong

In keeping with the finding above that earlier UK advertisements presuppose a hegemonic military masculinity, physical strength is key in all but one of the earlier UK advertisements. Strength is most prominent in British Army (2012), where the Corps of Royal Engineers seeks to remind viewers that they require the same level of fitness as every other part of the army. UK advertisements feature soldiers/potential recruits demonstrating physical ability in training (British Army, 2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2012) and in combat, e.g. carrying a stretcher (British Army, 2006a, 2006b).

Contrastingly, the strongest representation of physical strength in later UK videos is in British Army (2014), which features a game of football.

US advertisements emphasize physical strength to a greater degree, although it is not represented through aggression or as the most important attribute. For example, onscreen writing states that being a soldier 'can make you stronger' (US Army, 2011a, 2014), that 'there's strong, and then there's army strong ... It is a physical strength ... It is an emotional strength ... There is nothing on this green earth that is stronger than the US army' (US Army, 2006a). However, the additional focus upon emotional strength – discussed below – has the effect of making physical strength appear less as a threat of violence and more as a self-improvement practice for individual recruits.

US army recruits have emotional strength

Emotion is typically constructed as feminine (Cheng, 1999), a trait to be exorcised within hegemonic military masculinity, and is not directly ascribed to UK recruits. In contrast, US advertisements emphasize emotional strength: 'It's more than physical strength, it is emotional strength' (US Army, 2006a, 2006b). These words are simultaneously reinforced graphically, e.g. in US Army (2006b), a returning soldier hugs a woman tightly while US Army (2006a) shows a suit-clad man dressed looking out an office window, cutting to a scene of the man fishing with a young boy, perhaps his son. This is congruent with research on military recruits themselves, such as blogs by military personnel in the 'War on Terror' age which abandon 'the suppressed emotion of earlier memoirs and ... [rely] on new, more explicit forms of affectivity' (Chouliaraki, 2016: 67; see also Niva, 1998). The focus on emotional strength in US advertisements is a direct challenge to conceptions of hegemonic military masculinity. It is an official institutional representation of US soldiers as sensitive – again, at a time when the military has exhausted its traditional recruitment pool of white men – and presents an image that is antithetical to violence.

While the term 'emotional strength' is a feature of US advertisements, it is absent within the UK recruitment videos though may appear indirectly through the subject positioning of recruits as a team, on the same side (discussed below).

Subject positioning

Women as subordinate to men in earlier UK advertisements

In earlier UK advertisements, those coded as women are almost absent but when present are subordinate to men, conforming to hegemonic military masculinity. Of women portrayed, all have traditional gender roles, e.g. in British Army (2012), the first woman shown is a nurse, and in British Army (2006a) women wear only bikinis, while in British Army (2006b) women engage with soldiers in a nightclub. This advertisement breaks the fourth wall, treating the audience as though they were a member of the group; the woman plays on this male gaze, looking back into the camera with desire, at the audience as soldier. Only two of the earlier UK advertisements featured female army members, presupposing the institution to be male in this period. British Army (2012) features the aforementioned nurse, as well as a potential female recruit (seven women are visible) while the first person in the British Army advertisement (2008) is a pink-clad woman strolling into a recruitment centre. The representation of the British army as protectors of the vulnerable is reliant upon this subject positioning of women as subordinate to men.

Wolin (2003) suggests that, although gender stereotyping appears to be declining in advertising, it is more likely to appear in male-oriented publications. It is interesting, therefore, that earlier UK advertisements differ markedly from later ones that do not position women as subordinate at a time when the army hopes to recruit beyond its typical pool of white men.

The UK army protects the vulnerable

Earlier UK advertisements position the British Army as holding the agency to protect the vulnerable (British Army, 2004, 2006a, 2006b). British Army (2004) features a soldier and his sister sitting on a sofa discussing their relationship in which he is positioned as the protector. The other women in this advertisement are also in need of aid, with combat soldiers helping a woman and two girls out of a house. The soldier says, 'you have to grow up, to do the job, protecting people', the 'people' in question being women and girls – interestingly assuming female as default – and recalling Enloe's (1993: 167) phrase 'womenandchildren', which demonstrates how women are infantilized through their association with children.

Female civilians are not the only ones requiring protection, however. A voiceover tells us that enlistment is 'to help, to protect, to serve' (British Army, 2006a) portraying a soldier carrying an injured colleague. Similarly, in British Army (2004), Elliot Hughes, the main 'character', sits with his

sister on a sofa. She tells us that 'when we were small, he always looked out for his big sister', representing army recruits as holding a responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves even before they enlist. As discussed above, Hughes later states that 'You have to grow up, to do the job – protecting people', representing this protection of the vulnerable as a form of duty and a part of growing up. This is corroborated by Brown (2012: 47), who asserts that 'television advertisements are more likely to follow a service and patriotism-oriented track, which allows the potential recruit to imagine himself in the traditional role of protector.' Interestingly, however, while service is a feature of earlier UK advertisements, it does not feature in the US advertisements examined.

The positioning of women and people of colour as equal to white men

Short phrases, in text or voiceover further construct the US army as a team. For example, the viewer is told that being a soldier means 'a secret handshake', that they can wear 'the jersey of the greatest team on earth' (US Army, 2011a, 2014), that it is 'Not just strength in numbers, the strength of brothers' (US Army, 2006b). These statements make it clear that the US army is an elite team, encouraging viewers to 'join the team that makes a difference' (US Army, 2016a) because 'only one team in the world has what it takes to succeed no matter what gets in the way' (US Army, 2016b). This is reinforced by scenes of groups, e.g. there are many sequences of soldiers together, often jogging (US Army, 2006a) or standing together (US Army, 2006b). They are also shown helping each other or expressing kindness, for example helping each other over obstacles (US Army, 2011a, 2014, 2006a), putting up a tent (video US Army, 2006b) or giving high-fives (US Army, 2011b). In these advertisements, the US flag reminds the viewer that they are not just a team but a special team: an American team. The flag appears four times in US Army (2009), and five times in US Army (2011a, 2014), where the final scene is that of soldiers sitting in a room in front of a giant US flag, supporting Brown's (2012: 47) assertion that US Army recruitment advertisements valorize patriotism.

Although the US Army seeks to present itself as an elite team, no type of person is constructed as more important than any other. Belkin (2012: 26) argues that 'Femininity is coded as an arbitrary, fictional construction that represents weakness, subordination, emotionalism, dependency and disloyalty' and these qualities are taken to be dangerous ones that the military should disavow. Hegemonic military masculinity is based on exclusion (Barrett, 1996: 130), yet women – whose most obvious predicate is 'feminine' – are positioned as equal to men within later UK advertisements and all US advertisements. Women are increasingly integrated into militaries (Niva, 1998) and this is mirrored within US Army advertisements. Far from embodying the

hegemonic, masculine sense of exclusivity, the advertisements portray an inclusive ideal, featuring those who are women and/or of colour in abundance, as in the scene where soldiers of colour are embracing (US Army, 2011a, 2014), or the clip where a female soldier is helped over a wall by two male colleagues (US Army, 2006a). Equality and inclusivity are typically associated with femininity, posing a direct challenge to hegemonic military masculinity as exclusive, male and white.

Previously, women's presence within the army has been constructed as disruptive to 'the bonded, homosocial team' (Woodward and Winter, 2004: 292). Despite this, all US advertising similarly features a range of women. Eight out of the ten advertisements feature women – one is also about a woman who is not shown on screen, 'a born leader' (US Army, 2016c) – and these challenge traditional gender stereotypes. They are shown participating on equal terms with men, standing to attention with other soldiers (US Army, 2011a, 2014, 2009), watching a presentation, scaling a rope wall (US Army, 2006a) and as a proud father's daughter (US Army, 2016c). All but one of the women featured in the US army recruitment advertisements are a part of the US military in some capacity, and none are portrayed as subordinate to men. Two roles break traditional gender stereotypes: a female scientist, and women receiving army awards. US Army (2009) shows Ann Dunwoody, America's first female fourstar general, a rank women are often excluded from because a combat job is usually required to achieve it; she was nominated as head of the US Army supply arm (CNN, 2008). She wears full army dress uniform, while receiving a medal for achievement; similarly, US Army (2006a) shows a female soldier receiving a medal. These advertisements appear aware of the nature of this content: the female scientist is captioned with the words 'it can take you further than you ever imagined', and when Dunwoody appears, the voiceover says 'to break through barriers'. These videos acknowledge their subversion of gender stereotypes and present this as part of the US Army mission in the same way that British Army (2018b) does. Ette (2013) finds that other media, such as news reporting, represent the military in clearly masculine terms while Brown (2012) finds that the army advertising, out of all military branches, is the most neutral, a position supported by the above examples.

UK advertisements vary greatly by time period, with an almost complete absence of the theme of teamwork – inclusive or otherwise – in the earlier British Army recruitment video advertisements, the only sign in the first period of UK advertising being two phrases stated by voiceover in British Army videos (2006a, 2008, 2006b): 'through it all, together' and 'forward as one'. The second period of UK advertising is markedly different, with teamwork one of the most prominent themes. British Army (2017a) features a team of colleagues on a snowy mountain, while

they tease each other about their singing abilities, and British Army (2017b) shows a soldier shivering in a tent as rain can be heard outside before a colleague joins him and hands him a hot drink, while another ruffles his hair. These later UK advertisements do not just feature white men, however, challenging hegemonic military masculinity as white. British Army (2018a), for example, has no focus on the role of those pictured: the entirety of this advertisement, titled *Keeping My Faith*, is the representation of belonging. The advertisement opens with images of soldiers on a misty moor, and one (a man of colour) washes his face in a stream. The camera pans out to reveal three soldiers standing up and keeping watch while one kneels on the ground, bowing his head to the floor in prayer. Although it is not stated anywhere, the soldier can be read as Muslim through his prayer practices: the requirement to pray at a particular time whilst in the field, washing himself first (*wudu*), and bowing whilst kneeling. One soldier, who appears to be in charge then prevents another from responding to a call on his radio to allow their colleague to pray in peace. The final shot pans out to reveal two more soldiers keeping watch further away on the edge of the hill, representing the protection of their Muslim colleague as a true team effort. While this is only one advertisement, it is still important to note that the religion of this recruit is the sole theme.

In both later UK advertisements, however, women are represented as part of the team, participating on equal terms. For example, in British Army (2014), while men are listed as HR specialist, plumber or fully trained chef, women are represented as 'infantry soldier' and 'bricklayer', with a mix of men and women occupying a mix of traditionally masculine and feminine jobs. The Media Operations division of the UK Military aims 'to protect and maintain the UK military organization now, and in the future, in terms of securing resources, recruitment and retention' (Maltby, 2012: 257). The change in the discursive representation of women within British Army recruitment advertisements comes at a time when there is a shortfall in recent military recruitment. Writing in 2004, Woodward and Winter assert that while the army made efforts to attract women in this period, leaders took care to emphasize that 'this approach is about modernising, not mollycoddling' (John Reid, Secretary of Defence, quoted in Woodward and Winter, 2004: 288), reasserting the masculine nature of the army. The same discourse is present within earlier British army recruitment advertising, but more recent campaigns have seen a marked shift, focusing more on teamwork.

Dyvik (2014) asserts that militaries can be portrayed as liberating oppressed women in other countries (e.g. Afghanistan) but I add to this to argue that the presentation of women and men of colour as the equals of white men makes possible the construction of armies as a liberatory

institution for its personnel also. One advertisement, British Army (2018b), is fully dedicated to exploring a woman's experience of the army. It begins by asking 'will I be listened to in the army?' and the answer is swiftly delivered: in contrast with her 'normal job' where 'men talk over me', in the army 'all that matters is that you're good at your job'. Here, then, the traditionally masculine army is represented as a place of liberation for women ('I lead a team of 30 women and men'), in contrast to a 'normal' job outside the army in which women are held back. Other advertisements described above (British Army, 2018a; US Army, 2006a, 2009, 2011a, 2014, 2016c) – allude to the same point: that the army is a place in which traditionally oppressed groups will not be held back but can thrive. As a result of these representations, the army comes to be constructed as progressive. This is supported by Strand and Kehl's (2018) examination of Swedish Armed Forces advertising campaigns. They find that the Swedish Armed Forces are also portrayed as forward-thinking and that this reinforces and is reinforced by the conceptualization of national identity as progressive.⁷

The work performed by these representations of inclusivity is important: what do they 'do'? The construction of the self as progressive makes possible the portrayal of a backward, violent Other. As Strand and Kehl (2018: 1) put it, 'We argue that constructions of a tolerant and modern Sweden (re)produce treacherous, single narratives of distant and dangerous Others.' That is, presenting the self as progressive makes possible violent practices in the name of defending this way of life, which is taken to be a positive. In conversation with Terrell Carver, Aaron Belkin (Belkin and Carver, 2012: 558) asks for a moment of reflection upon the work performed by military masculinities in the 'erasure of violence'. This is a subject worthy of consideration. I argue that the construction of the military as less masculine functions to obscure practices of violence because women are conceptualized as 'beautiful souls' who are both anti-violence and anti-war (Elshtain, 1992: 341). Thus, the move towards representing women as members of armies keener on teamwork than aggression makes it harder for policymakers and wider society to label and question violent practices within militaries because it is taken as 'common sense' (Milliken, 1999: 237) that women are a force for good.

Conclusion

Overall, much like military masculinities themselves, these advertisements contain myriad contradictions. They come at a time when both armies – and militaries more widely – face what has been labelled a recruitment crisis and I argue that this makes possible a construction of gender that

does not neatly conform to hegemonic ideals of masculinity, embracing teamwork, positioning women and recruits of colour as the same as white men, and rejecting risk and aggression. I further argue that this presentation of armies as perhaps progressive enables an obfuscation of past and potential military violence, making it harder to critique the use of military force. It is beyond the scope of this article to 'problem-solve issues of military power' and the aim is instead 'to problematize this power' (Millar and Tidy, 2017: 147) so that further work can be done to unpack gendered representations in the military and what these make possible.

Over time, US army advertising appears to have changed little and receives little coverage in the domestic press. UK advertisements have begun to construct the army as an inclusive team, in contrast to earlier advertisements that represent women as lacking agency and feature white men almost exclusively. This change has not been embraced with open arms in the UK press, suggesting that the contestation of masculinity is controversial. In particular, the press has said that the 'Army [has been] accused of political correctness in recruitment campaigns' (*The Guardian*, 2018), with 'softer' advertisements (*The Telegraph*, 2018) that 'won't appeal to new soldiers' (BBC, 2018b). It will be interesting, therefore, to see if the British Army continues to offer a challenge to hegemonic masculine ideals, or whether it will revert to the more hegemonically masculine representations within their earlier advertisements.

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¹ There is also some work on recruitment through videogames (e.g. Toussaint, 2015).

² YouTube material has also been used by others researching the military (e.g. Strand and Kehl, 2018).

³ Google does not state that its most relevant filter is tailored to the computer or account performing the search (as it is in the 'recommended videos' section of the page) and is instead based upon view-count, viewer ratings and what proportion of the video viewers have watched.

⁴ This occurred in the final quarter of 2001, so 2002 was taken as the start date as this would allow any changes in representations within recruitment to filter through.

⁵ In a reference to Sinise's military ties, he also narrates Steve Roger's biographical film at the Smithsonian's fictional Captain America exhibition in *Captain America: Winter Soldier*.

⁶ A minority of advertisements did not feature weapons or vehicles.

⁷ In contrast with this article, Strand and Kehl (2018) focus also upon LGBT+ representations in their analysis, for example an advertising campaign featuring soldier's boots with rainbow laces. Representations of this kind were not present in the advertisements examined here.

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