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**Toys, Teams and Toughness: a Comparison of UK and US Army Recruitment
Video Advertising**

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Toys, Teams and Toughness: a Comparison of UK and US Army Recruitment Video Advertising

Natalie Jester

This article provides a comparative analysis of US and UK army recruitment video advertising found on Youtube. The analytical framework, adapted from Frank Barrett's (1996) *'The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy,'* is utilized in conjunction with a discourse analytic approach in order to establish the extent to which the advertising in the dataset is gendered, and in what ways. The conclusion reached is that the US and the UK army recruitment advertisements *are* gendered, each featuring several different types of army masculinity, and varying degrees, of masculinity. There were two key differences: the portrayal of women (more stereotypical in UK advertising), and networks (more emphasis on the army as a family in US advertising).

Keywords: military recruitment, masculinity, gender, media, United States, United Kingdom

Introduction

The primary aim is to establish how, if at all, army recruitment advertisements make use of masculinity. Types of advertising include posters, videos, and now computer games like America's Army, all designed to insert the army into people's "consideration set," as Timothy Maude, the US Army deputy chief of personnel, explained (The Nation, 2002). In this case, the focus is video advertising. The dataset is examined through the discourse analytic method, with the key conceptual tool being *articulation*. Articulation is "the process through which meaning is produced out of extant cultural materials or linguistic resources" (Weldes, 1999: 98), functioning to produce culturally and temporally specific meanings (Weldes, 1999: 99). Analysis must be carefully defined both spatially and temporally.

The second aim of the research is to add to understanding of national differences/similarities in military discourse, and as a result, a comparative approach is used. In terms of space, then, the countries examined are the US and the UK, selected for two reasons: firstly, both countries are in the top ten military spenders worldwide (one and six respectively (Perlo-Freeman and Solmirano, 2013: 2)); in the broadest sense, they consider the military to be important. Secondly, these countries have a shared history of sorts (often termed a "special relationship"), with a common language, and a tendency to engage in military intervention together. Time is also a consideration, and videos were selected from the same time-period because articulations of gender change over time (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 833); only videos made between 2002 and 2012 are examined in order to understand current articulations. The discourse examined is 1) official (i.e. articulated by militaries themselves), and 2) for public consumption (i.e. openly available). As a result the dataset is drawn from official US and UK army recruitment videos posted on YouTube.

The research questions are, therefore, as follows:

1. Are these articulations gendered? If so how and to what extent?
2. How, if at all, do these articulations contradict ideas of hegemonic military masculinity?
3. Are other forms of masculinity created and valorised in place of or alongside hegemonic masculinity?
4. How and to what extent do US and UK articulations of the military contrast, and is the country of origin more important than the type of role advertised?

I take as my starting point Frank J. Barrett's article 'The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy' (1996), as it is an in-depth analysis of masculinity in the military, and the ways in which masculinity is in fact pluralised. No similar work has been done on armies, and therefore this framework serves as a useful approximate guide. The dataset – YouTube advertisements

– was examined for risk, calmness under pressure and “technical rationality” (Barrett, 1996: 138), allowing for the possibility that other types of masculinity could also be present.

The conclusion reached is that the US and the UK army recruitment advertisements *are* gendered, each featuring several different types, and varying degrees, of masculinity. There were two key differences: the portrayal of women, and networks. The US sought to portray themselves as “the greatest team on earth,” which was almost entirely absent from UK advertisements. In addition, US advertisements featured more women, in less stereotypical roles than UK advertisements. The video sets were similar in several different areas, especially in their sense of risk-taking as adventure (often in remote places), and their use of military toys. Overall, however, differences could be a result of the roles found in the dataset.

Examining gender in the military is important because certain articulations of gender could have implications when forces are deployed on missions: “problems stem from a particular form of military masculinity, hegemonic within western armed forces, associated with practices of strength, toughness and aggressive sexuality,” which could jeopardise peacekeeping missions (Duncanson, 2009: 64). The military also has a role in defining hegemonic masculinity in societies (Connell, 2005: 213), and while Coker suggests that the military is becoming feminised, Kronsell reminds that the world of security is changing, with the war on terror gaining importance, which may mean that military institutions continue to grow in significance (Kronsell, 2005: 282).

Furthermore, recruitment advertising matters because “The ways in which people make sense of world politics is, in large part, via the knowledge and understanding created through interactions with the world in the realm of the popular, the mundane and the everyday” (Rowley, 2010: 309). Popular culture acts as the battleground upon which meaning is constructed (Rowley 2010: 311), and in today’s digital age, popular culture is more important than ever. YouTube opened in 2005 and now accounts for 10% of all traffic on the internet (Cheng et al, 2007: 1), reaching millions of people all over the world. Army recruitment videos on Youtube are therefore important because they send out a message to the world about the actions and nature of these institutions.

Military masculinities

Masculinities are “multiple, dynamic and contradictory in nature” (Duncanson, 2009: 64) as Barrett shows (Barrett, 1996). Examining the US Navy, Barrett found that aviators constructed masculinity as risk-taking (Barrett, 1996: 134), and surface warfare officers created their version of masculinity as the ability to survive hardship and display calm under pressure (Barrett, 1996: 136), while supply officers felt that masculinity meant “technical rationality” (Barrett, 1996: 138).

Hegemonic masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005: 77). Dominance arises out of the language and practices constructing these concepts, and is made to appear natural, rendering it undebatable (Kronsell, 2005: 282).

Barrett notes that hegemonic military masculinity in the Navy is one of “discipline, perseverance and toughness” – a ‘warrior masculinity – as well as staunch heterosexuality (Barrett, 1996: 132). Despite changes in society, politics and technology that might allow for alterations – e.g. the integration of women, and new technology which compensates for lack of physical strength (Masters, 2010:176) – this ideal type still endures in the army (Regan de Bere, 2003: 94).

Hegemonic masculinity is aggressively anti-feminine, as femininity is associated with weakness, providing a “constitutive outside” (Mouffe, 1995: 261), for armies to define themselves against. As a result, new recruits are often bombarded with feminine insults (e.g. ‘woman’), and enemy armies can be portrayed as ‘faggots’ (Barrett, 1996: 133). Hegemonic masculinity positions itself at the top of the hierarchy because it is a standard that only a select few will be able to meet, and one that fewer still will be able to maintain (Barrett, 1996: 130), making it is something to strive for, even through pain. As Enloe puts it “if masculinity ‘in the raw’ were sufficient, there would be little need for the sweat, blisters, and humiliations of basic training” (Enloe, 1993: 55); successful struggle to achieve this standard of toughness grants recruits entry into an elite club with a strong sense of team (Barrett, 1996: 133). Themes identified by Brown in army recruitment advertisements include toughness, weapons and the chance to prove yourself, which are all congruent with warrior masculinity (Brown, 2012: 41).

Risk-taking in dangerous situations

This type of military masculinity was most often found in Navy aviators (1996: 314). Hierarchy continues beyond hegemonic masculinity, and risk-taking masculinity is next because it most closely resembles the hegemonic masculinity of the institution (Barrett, 1996: 314). Risk-takers were also fashioned as courageous and capable of mastering highly complex machinery. They were granted autonomy, meaning that they were not subordinated and therefore feminised (Barrett, 1996: 314), and often had a reputation for aggressive heterosexuality (Barrett, 1996: 314). This type of masculinity often features in recruitment advertising; this type of military man “wades waist-high through a river, leading a patrol of followers, weapon ready, camouflaged against the backdrop of reeds and branches, over the caption ‘ACTION YOUNG ON-THE-MOVE SORTED WELL-TRAINED’ (sic)” (Woodward, 2000: 644).

Enduring hardship

The second type of military masculinity is the ability to endure difficult conditions, which Barrett found most often displayed by Navy Officers, with recruits describing their conditions as “stark and severe” (Barrett, 1996: 136). They often ran out of fresh produce, could take only one minute showers, and felt lucky to get four hours sleep in one night (Barrett, 1996: 136). This ability to endure hardship was seen as positive (Barrett, 1996: 136), as one recruit said, “For two years on ship I think I never slept. I’d go 48 hours with no sleep. But that’s a sign of endurance. The XO says to me, ‘Now there’s a man’.” Therefore, not only is this attribute valorised by the recruits, it is reinforced by their superiors (Barrett, 1996: 136). This situation was seen as unsuitable for women, who may let it affect their performance (Barrett, 1996: 138).

In the army, ‘enduring hardship masculinity’ is often seen in infantrymen, beginning in training where recruits must go through a demanding set of activities carrying a considerable load (Hockey, 2003: 16). Again, a recruit’s ability to endure is seen as a sign of masculinity, with this message being reinforced by superiors and peers (Hockey, 2003: 16).

Rationality and bureaucratic efficiency

The prominence of new technology in war situations means that recent years have seen an increase in non-combat staff in militaries (Barrett, 1996: 138). This group was often composed of supply officers, who monitor all equipment and material on board the ship. Other personnel locate this job at the bottom of the hierarchy because “they have fewer opportunities to demonstrate courage, autonomy and perseverance, the hallmark of the hegemonic ideal in this culture” (Barrett, 1996: 138). This is demonstrated by insults like ‘supply pussies’ or ‘little dicks’ (Barrett, 1996: 138-9).

Despite this, other personnel concede that this group has a power of sorts because they can withhold things (Barrett, 1996: 139). While outsiders are grudging about ‘bureaucratic efficiency masculinity,’ those within easily form their own version of military masculinity, often based around competition and rank. For example, rankings are created through bi-annual inspections of each ship’s supply department, and the top spot is highly coveted. Not only does this give supply officers a chance to rank themselves against each other, it allows them to demonstrate achievements to other crew on board their ship. As one supply officer put it “On one ship I headed, we gained fleet-wide notoriety for the ship. We caused the engineering department to pale in comparison” (Barrett, 1996: 139).

Methodology

Firstly, the official Youtube channels for the US and UK armies were examined and a note was made of any recruitment videos posted; surprisingly, this generated only one result for the British Army. On the official US army channels, this produced six videos, five of which were made for their ‘Symbol of

Strength’ campaign, with one leading advertisement and four adverts concentrating on specific attributes: opportunity, leadership and education (as well as one in Spanish). A focus on only one campaign was rejected, because it would capture only a single moment in time (these adverts could have been affected by a specific military operation that year, for example), rather than speaking to slightly more broad trends. Therefore only the leading advertisement was selected from this batch.

Youtube’s search facility was then used to find the remaining videos, inputting combinations of ‘British/UK/American/US army recruitment ads/advertising/videos/campaigns’ (excluding fan-made videos). For reasons explained above, of the videos available, a maximum of two videos were selected from each campaign. Videos for specific parts of the army – e.g. air assault infantry – were included because research indicates that different military jobs may create their own versions of military masculinity (Barrett, 1996), and this research seeks to understand the nuances of military masculinity.

As discourses are constantly being re-stated, analyses of these videos will never truly be complete, however, Milliken asserts that it is acceptable to draw research to a close when the same ‘theoretical categories’ are recurrent (Milliken, 1999: 234). The chosen videos were watched and re-watched in the early stage of analysis, and it was felt that five videos from each country was enough to establish patterns.

Key concepts include the male gaze, where men look and women are imbued with “to-be-looked-at-ness,” which “plays to and signifies male desire” (Mulvey, 1975: 13), and the fourth wall. Traditionally, characters in advertisements do not acknowledge the audience, which sits behind a ‘fourth wall’ (imagine a stage set). When the fourth wall is broken, this means that characters have spoken to, or looked at, the audience (this goes beyond simply looking into a camera). Other media techniques, such as cuts between scenes, zooming, panning shots, diegetic sounds (where the source is visible to characters on screen) and non-diegetic sounds (off-screen) were also investigated for impact.

Dataset

Table 1: key details of the dataset		
UK army recruitment advertisements		
Video	Branch or role (if any)	Details
UK1	Corps of Royal Engineers	Explains recruitment
UK2	Generic	Features clips of training
UK3	Armoured Infantry	Explains the job
UK4	Infantry Air Assault	Explains the job
UK5	Army combat role	About a soldier called Elliot Hughes, who, along with his sister, speaks about his childhood and his life in the army now.

US army recruitment advertisements		
Video	Branch (if any)	Details
US1	Generic	Outlines the benefits of being in the army
US2	Army Officers	Narrated by actor Gary Sinise. Focusses on the army as a historical institution
US3	Generic	Emphasises the greatness of the US Army
US4	Generic	Emphasises the greatness of the US Army
US5	Army Rangers	Explains the job

Analysis

The role of women

Wolin suggests that although gender stereotyping appears to be declining in advertising, it is more likely to appear in male-oriented publications (Wolin, 2003: 113). This was corroborated by British Army recruitment advertising videos, but not those from the US.

In UK videos, women are almost absent, and of those that are featured, almost all have traditional gender roles, e.g. in UK1, the first woman shown is a nurse measuring recruits' physical characteristics. Similarly, UK3 utilises the male gaze, showing only women wearing bikinis, while in UK4 women are present only in a club, where one of the soldiers aims a 'call me' hand signal at one of them. UK4 breaks the fourth wall several times, treating the audience as though they were a member of the group of soldiers. The woman featured plays on this male gaze, looking back into the camera with desire, at the audience as soldier. The message is clear: women *want* soldiers, and this could be you. This confirms that men are the target audience for adverts like these, because heteronormativity dictates that women should only look with desire upon men, not other women.

Only two of the British adverts featured women involved with the army themselves. UK1 features the aforementioned nurse, as well as a potential female recruit (seven women are visible). The first person in the advertisement UK2 is a pink-clad woman, strolling into an army recruitment centre, although she is one of only two women in the whole video. Overall, women are usually victims, nurses or playthings, and it is rare that they will feature prominently in any other capacity. This may be a result of the fact that the sample includes three videos for combat sections of the army, however.

In contrast, women were well represented and portrayed in a variety of non-stereotypical roles in US advertising. Four out of the five advertisements feature women, and these challenge traditional gender stereotypes. All but one of the women featured in the US army recruitment adverts are a part of the US military in some capacity, and none are portrayed as victims. Two roles break traditional gender stereotypes: a female scientist, and women receiving army awards. US2 shows Ann Dunwoody,

America's first female four star 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, US3 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. As well as being exceptional army personnel, women are also permitted to be ordinary. They are shown standing to attention with other soldiers (US1 and US2), watching a presentation (US3) and scaling a rope wall (US3). Brown notes that the army advertising, out of all military branches, is most gender-neutral, featuring many women and making appeals to economic reasoning as well as more traditionally masculine themes (Brown, 2012: 41-2), and the US advertisements support that.

Brown also asserts that "television adverts 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" (Brown, 2012: 47). One of the UK advertisements corroborates this (UK5) featuring women in need of protection. It shows a soldier and his sister sitting on a sofa; she tells us that "when we were small, he always looked out for his big sister." The other women in this advertisement are also in need of aid, with soldiers helping a woman and two girls out of a house in a combat situation. The soldier says "you have to grow up, to do the job – protecting people," but as Enloe argues, this term is not neutral: it means "womenandchildren" (Enloe, 1993: 167), creating a masculine/feminine binary.

Greater risk-taking in combat advertisements

That risk-taking is absent from UK1, and minor in UK2 is important because it underlines that this is not integral to the Corps of Royal Engineers, or the army in general. In UK3, UK4 and UK5, however, risk-taking features prominently, perhaps because these are adverts for infantry and army combat; several media techniques are used to good effect here, e.g. the breaking of the fourth wall on select occasions in UK3 and UK4 to make it feel as though the viewers themselves are in the action. This technique makes videos "more cognitively involving" (Auter and Davis, 1991: 165), with viewers rating clips involving such techniques as both more entertaining and more sophisticated (Auter and Davis, 1991: 169). UK3 shows soldiers carrying a stretcher, connoting urgency; they are running, compounding this. In one scene, soldiers are running directly at the camera, as though it is *you* they are running towards looking for help. Next, the camera, acting as *your* eyes as a soldier, emerges from a dirty pool of water, and a colleague shouts "one more!" This creates a sense of reality because the soldier shouts directly into the camera, as though he expects *you* to follow his commands. Again, this is immersive, placing viewers inside the advertisement as video games do.

This sense of risk-taking is also enhanced by editing to create a fast pace. UK2, for example makes use of the zoom (in and out, and a 360 degree camera pan) which disorients the viewer, constructing a sense of the chaos that recruits might encounter. UK3 and UK4 achieve this through the switching of camera angles within a scene (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2005: 167). For example, UK3 opens with a scene of tanks driving at speed along grass in a wood-like area; this four second scene sees three camera angle changes. This fast pace effect is also created by utilising fast cuts between scenes (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2005: 167) – a prominent technique in all but UK1 – for example, video UK4 is 32 seconds long, and features five scenes, making each an average of approximately six seconds long. This makes life in the army seem action-packed.

Non-diegetic sounds like voiceover or soundtrack are also important in creating a sense of risk, or linked concepts such as duty or adventure. The voiceover is used to good effect in creating a sense of adventure – and even fun – for example, in UK4, the first line of the narration is “For the action, for excitement, for adventure” over a scene of soldiers running out of a slowly moving plane. The camera turns around and suddenly they are storming a building, lining up along the wall so that the first man can throw a grenade. In a nightclub scene, the voiceover tells us that we should join the army “for the fun, for the friendships, for the Friday nights,” while a soldier makes a ‘call me’ sign with his hand, quickly grabbing a woman’s outstretched hand before leaving the club with colleagues. Likewise in UK3, soldiers run into an army tent, followed immediately by people exiting a tent on a beautiful beach, as though in an alternative universe. Several people (including the only identifiable women in the video, dressed in bikinis) carry a friend and throw him into the glittering ocean, laughing, accompanied by a voice-over saying “for the places, for the people, for the laughs,” implying that being a soldier is an adventure. The voiceover follows a similar pattern in these three videos, with short bursts of narrative, changing quickly, adding to a sense of pace. UK3 is typical: “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.”

A musical soundtrack shares the ability to build a sense of risk, adventure and duty; although this is present only in UK2, it should be investigated as the nature of the song seems intended to put the viewer in a certain mind-set. This video is set to the song Born to be Wasted by 009 Soundssystem, with ‘wasted’ having two different meanings: 1) to get extremely intoxicated or 2) to be killed. In the context of an army recruitment video, neither sends a particularly positive message, however, the former interpretation can be seen to encourage risk-taking behaviour for the sake of fun. This is reinforced by the lyrics “This gun's blowin up it's just a warning shot, this plane's takin' off on a terror run, this night's gonna end like a missile drop, we were born to be wasted” which make reference to

weapons and military transport which, as discussed below, can be seen as fun 'toys' to attract recruits. The final line of the song, "ain't worth livin' if you can't get your kicks," also suggests that being in the army is about having fun through taking risks.

This valorisation of risk-taking is often reinforced through themes of duty and adventure, for example, in UK3, UK4 and UK5, these risky acts are accompanied by a voiceover creating a strong sense of duty. In UK3, when the soldiers carry the stretcher, the voiceover tells us that these actions are taken "to help, to protect, to serve;" taking the risk of slowing down in a combat situation to carry an injured colleague is part of your duty. Similarly in UK5, Elliot Hughes, the main 'character,' sits with his sister on a sofa, and she tells us that "when we were small, he always looked out for his big sister," demonstrating that Hughes feels a responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Older siblings might protect younger ones; that this is not the case in this video demonstrates that women require male protection. Later in the video, Hughes runs into a combat situation accompanied by tanks and rubble, and we are told that "You have to grow up, to do the job – protecting people," reinforcing this message of duty. Although discussing the US, Brown states that this type of military masculinity was sometimes present in television advertisements (2012: 47), providing support for this finding.

This sense of risk-taking as adventure is also present in US recruitment advertisements. Risk-taking appeared in all five videos, although it featured little in US2 and strongly in US5. In the generic army recruitment videos (US1, US3 and US4) and the advertisement for the Army Officers (US2), themes of risk-taking in a combat situation were utilised infrequently, with minor use of risky activities in training situations being more prominent though still not overwhelming. In training situations, parachuting out of helicopters (or sliding down a rope from one) was the most popular activity, appearing in US1, US3 and US4. More important in most advertisements, however, was the combination of a slower pace and sweeping scenery giving a sense of risk-taking as adventure. These videos showcase the scenery that soldiers can experience, with the camera lingering on these scenes. We see stunning panoramas of mountains, invoking a sense of the great outdoors in US1 and images of space exploration in US2. Joining the army is seen as a key to adventure, e.g. US1 uses on-screen text to inform the viewer that the army uniform is a 'key', and enlistment is 'a passport.'

In addition, US2 makes use of a voiceover to create a sense of adventure. We are told that Army Officers lead over 'frozen rivers,' 'over island to island,' 'to free a continent,' creating images of travel. This voiceover is almost more than just words, however, as it is narrated by actor Gary Sinise who has long been a supporter of the military. Sinise is perhaps most famous for his portrayal of Lieutenant Dan Taylor in the film *Forrest Gump*, lending his words an air of Hollywood authority.

US5 broke this pattern, perhaps because it advertises the Army Rangers branch, described on their website as the “Army's premier direct-action raid force” (US Army, undated B). This video used risk-taking behaviour throughout, usually in a combat setting, featuring a night scene lit with red flares, with soldiers being lowered to the ground into rising smoke, thereby giving the impression of a fire-fight, which is shown in greater detail later. Soldiers also blow up/kick down doors three times, cause/watch explosions four times and jump out of helicopters three times. This does not simply demonstrate what the army does on a daily basis (if that were the case, then where are the scenes of meal times, or soldiers standing watch?), but shows that the army is action-packed. Fast pace is used to good effect in this video, enhancing the sense of risk. This technique was utilised most in this video, which is unsurprising given that it is recruiting for a combat branch. Throughout this advertisement, cuts between scenes were short and the camera was constantly moving, thereby quickening the pace, disorienting the viewer (Pramaggiore and Wallis, 2005: 167), as in the UK advertisements.

Boys and toys

Although not explicitly outlined in Barrett's typology, it became apparent that military transport, equipment and weapons were a type of military masculinity in their own right, although congruent with an aggressive, hegemonic military masculinity. Technology has the power to remove soldiers from the binary gender dynamic by allowing women greater ability to participate in a 'male' world like the military, as strength becomes less relevant (Masters, 2010: 176), although as mentioned above, this has not been the case in these advertisement. These technologies are referred to as 'toys' because they feature so prominently in selling the idea of recruitment, with different toys for different roles.

The Corps of Royal Engineers is tasked with building a variety of things in a variety of circumstances. Their advertisement (UK1) shows recruits undertaking carpentry, plastering, using electrical equipment with a radio, and a computer screen with many dials and settings. As their website explains, their role includes “bridging rivers, clearing routes through minefields or using explosives to destroy bridges ... improving transport routes, constructing camps, building runways and carrying out the vital task of bomb disposal ... water production, electrical supply and infrastructure” (Corps of Royal Engineers, 2012). UK1 also utilise a more traditional toy: a large army vehicle, pictured driving through a large puddle. This vehicle, however, only features once in this advertisement, indicating that the other, more technical toys are have greater value in this part of the army.

The other four UK videos focused more greatly on these traditional toys, and were more likely to be transport-based, although weapons were seen in three out of five videos. In UK2, recruits use guns at both a firing range and in full camouflage gear, firing weapons outside, but still not in a real combat setting. This places toys in a safe environment, much like a real-life version of a video game, where recruits may play with guns without harm. Modern combat technology strongly resembles video

games, giving soldiers an emotional advantage as it feels less real, making it possible for them to kill – large numbers of – people with ease (Masters, 2010: 184). There is also a strong parallel between games and being a soldier in UK5, where the protagonist, Elliot Hughes, is seen wrestling with his sister over a bow and arrow, in a game of cowboys and Indians. This game has a clear demarcation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and shows how children are introduced to conflict and weapons at a young age. The voiceover continues throughout and, after the scenes of cowboys and Indians, we are told “You definitely have to grow up fast. You have to grow up, to do the job – protecting people.” Therefore joining the army and making use of adult versions of toys, like real guns and tanks, becomes a responsible thing to do.

In UK4 and UK5 – combat roles – however, the guns are clearly being used in a combat setting. The second scene in UK4 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: 210); here the sound of gunfire outside the building it is used to heighten the sense of real-life pressure. In UK5, soldiers extricate people from houses damaged by bombs, with reality being reinforced through the presence of civilians. The techniques used to give a sense of realism in these scenes underscore the narrative of risk-taking in these adverts, thereby linking toy-based military masculinity with risk-taking military masculinity. Guns and grenades also underscore the army’s destructive abilities, in stark contrast with the Corps of Royal Engineers, who show recruits making things.

More prominent, however, are army vehicles, with planes, helicopters and tanks featuring frequently. These vehicles often begin the advertisement; in UK3 tanks speed through the countryside, in UK4 soldiers run out of a plane moving slowly along the ground, and in the opening second of UK5, both a tank and a helicopter are visible. Again, three out of five videos show these in combat situations; in these videos (UK3, UK4 and UK5) tanks are shown a total of six times, boats once, helicopters four times. Only in UK1 and UK2 are vehicles shown briefly. As Masters suggests, these vehicles can minimise soldiers’ vulnerability (Masters, 2010: 184), but they can also act as weapons platforms themselves, especially with the addition of guns.

Much like the British army recruitment adverts, most US videos also had a love of toys dependent on the role being advertised. For example, the video for Army Officers (US2) focused on leadership skills instead, and therefore featured no toys, except for one brief scene featuring guns, reflecting the role that army officers will be performing: they will have less to do with guns and tanks than those in combat roles, and therefore advertising is not required to focus on these things.

Toys had greater prominence in the generic army recruitment videos. Guns featured heavily in two out

of the three of advertisements, appearing frequently, largely as accessories. Transport, however, was the main toy. In all of these advertisements, army vehicles are shown within the first quarter; helicopters were the favourite mode of transport, with tanks featuring in a more minor role. For example, in US3, fifteen helicopters, three boats and two tanks are clearly visible (typical in this type of video). While guns and transport featured strongly, they were not shown in combat, but training situations, reinforcing the video games idea of guns without harm (Masters, 2010: 184), as in the UK case.

In contrast, the video for Army Rangers (US5) – a combat division – featured toys the most, with weapons and/or transport appearing in almost every scene. In this video, unlike the generic recruitment adverts, weapons were more prominent than transport, and are frequently seen being fired, demonstrating use in combat settings, and producing five large explosions. This effect is further enhanced by the use of night vision cameras in filming the scenes because the pictures are less crisp, giving the footage a home-made feel. The type of weapon shown is much more varied in this video than others, with different types of gun and rocket launchers being used. In US5, transport was of lesser – but not minor – importance, being used to demonstrate risk-taking behaviour, such as parachuting out of helicopters. In this sense, then, there is a link between risk-taking masculinity and a boys and toys masculinity, both of which are congruent with hegemonic military masculinity.

The US army as ‘the greatest team on earth’

Hegemonic masculinity is predicated on exclusion because it sets a standard that few will be able to meet, creating a hierarchy (Barrett, 1996: 130); US army recruitment videos present the institution as an elite team, marking out its soldiers as both special within the US population, but also special among the world’s militaries. This effect is created in several ways, for example, the use of short phrases flashing on the screen (or the voiceover) tell us that being a soldier means ‘a secret handshake,’ wearing ‘the jersey of the greatest team on earth:’ ‘it can make you more respected’ (US1). It is “Not just strength in numbers, the strength of brothers” (US4). These statements make it clear that the US army is an elite team.

This is reinforced by scenes of groups: we are shown many sequences of soldiers together, often jogging (US3) or stood together (US4). They are also shown helping each other or expressing kindness, for example helping each other over obstacles (US1 and US3), putting up a tent (video US 4) or giving high-fives (US5). Furthermore, the US flag is important throughout the data set, serving to remind us that they are not just a team, but an American team. The flag appears four times in US2, and five times in US1, where the final scene is that of soldiers sat in a room in front of a giant US flag, supporting Brown’s assertion that US Army recruitment adverts sometimes valorise patriotism (2012: 47).

Although the US army seeks to present itself as an elite team in comparison with everyone else, within the institution, there was no sense that one role was more important than another and no sense of exclusion. Far from embodying the hegemonic, masculine sense of exclusivity, the adverts had a very inclusive feel, featuring ethnic minorities and women in abundance, as in the scene where soldiers – including a black man – are embracing (US1), or the clip where a female soldier is helped over a wall by two colleagues (US3). Furthermore, no role is marked out as being of greater importance than others, creating a sense of equality. Equality and inclusivity are in fact traditionally associated with some types of feminism, thereby sending mixed messages in gender terms. Interestingly, in contrast, there was an almost complete absence of the theme of networks or patriotism in the UK army recruitment video advertisements, the only sign of teamwork were two phrases said by the voiceover in videos UK2, UK3 and UK4: “through it all, together” and “forward as one.”

Physical strength as less important

Although risk-taking and toy-based masculinity played a larger role in British army recruitment videos, physical strength was nonetheless important to varying degrees in most advertisements (UK5 was the exception, where the most physical thing the soldier does is wrestle with his sister). Strength is most prominent in UK1, where the Corps of Royal Engineers seek to remind viewers of their physical abilities by stating that they require the same level of fitness as every other part of the army; recruits must attend an army development and selection centre, where their health and fitness (as well as leadership skills) are tested.

All advertisements showed soldiers or potential recruits undertaking physical tests of some kind, for example, all feature soldiers or potential recruits jogging/running, whether in a training capacity (UK1 and UK2) or a combat situation (UK3, UK4 and UK5). The physical tests differ depending on whether the advertisement focuses on training, or what the role is really like on the ground. The two videos examining training show recruits on an assault course (UK1), doing pull ups, climbing over a rope wall, jumping over hurdles or swinging through the air (UK2). The other videos show physical capabilities like carrying a stretcher, lifting a child out of a flood situation or carrying a large weapon. This scene is given a greater sense of reality through framing, as the only visible part of the soldier passing the weapon down is his arm, making it appear that the audience is looking at their own hand passing this weapon to a colleague.

Similarly, US advertisements focus less on physical strength, but, surprisingly, emphasise emotional strength. In generic advertisements, messages of physical strength are reinforced through clichéd images, such as climbing monkey bars; in this scene, the image lingers, showing the audience the soldiers’ muscles as they grasp the bars. The camera then zooms in to show their faces, detailing the effort expended. In these videos, images of recruits climbing over rope walls, lifting weights or jogging

were also common. We are also told, by writing on the screen, that being a soldier “can make you stronger” (US1), and that being in the army requires “physical strength” (US3).

It is not just physical strength that is shown in these videos, but emotional strength, too: US4 informs us that “It’s more than physical strength, it is emotional strength.” This phrase, ‘emotional strength,’ is repeated in US3. Again, these words are accompanied by pictures with the same message, for example, in US4, the camera quickly pans around to show a large group of soldiers coming home. A soldier hugs a woman tightly, indicating that she is the source of his emotional strength. US3 shows a scene of a man dressed in a suit, looking out of the window in an office; this cuts to a scene of the man fishing with a young boy, perhaps his son, demonstrating the importance of family.

Notably, however, the adverts for Army Officers (US2) and Army Rangers (US5) do not feature themes of strength in any form, physical or emotional. This indicates that in these roles, other types of military masculinity – such as a boys and toys masculinity – may be more important.

Conclusion

Gendered articulations as largely masculine but not hegemonic

In this data set, these articulations of the military are highly gendered throughout, with each video featuring strong themes of masculinity in both the ‘plot’ (what happens in the video) and the media techniques used to enhance what the viewer sees. For example, the masculine sense of risk-taking was reinforced through breaking the fourth wall to increase engagement, the use of fast cuts between scenes to quicken the pace, and through themes of risk-taking as duty and adventure. Other masculine themes emergent in these videos include a love of military toys and equipment, the portrayal of the army as an elite team and the limited promotion of physical strength.

The extent to which a hegemonic masculinity was present was, however, limited, producing little support for claims that army recruitment literature strongly features the warrior model (Brown, 2012: 41). The hegemonic military ideal of masculinity thinks of itself as elite, team-based, aggressive and anti-feminine, and only a part of this mindset was present in these videos. In both the British and American batches, there was a limited promotion of physical strength, which goes a small way towards aggression, however, this was countered in US advertisements by a demand for traditionally feminine “emotional strength.” Perhaps where this came closest to the hegemonic model of military masculinity was the promotion of the armies as elite teams. This was almost non-existent in the British recruitment videos but was prominent in American advertisements. In US videos, there was a strong sense of brotherhood and patriotism, frequently displaying the US flag. Again, this hegemonic masculinity was balanced by the fact that the videos were highly inclusive. They featured a good number of women and men from all ethnic backgrounds, did not seek to stereotype these groups, and did not send the

message that any one army role is more important than the others, fostering a sense of equality more often associated with certain types of feminism than hegemonic masculinity. In this research, then, American advertisements subverted the hegemonic military masculinity more than their British counterparts. For reasons discussed below, however, this may be less of a comment on US army recruitment videos than it is a comment on generic army recruitment adverts as opposed to combat adverts, for example.

Multiple masculinities: importance of the role advertised

The evidence above suggests that Barrett was correct in asserting that there is no single military masculinity, but multiple ones. Within this dataset, the most important variable appeared to be the type of job that the advertisement was recruiting for; although country of origin was of lesser importance, it was still relevant, with some subtle differences. It should be remembered, though, that the countries being compared here are two western, English speaking ones, and if two less culturally similar countries were being explored, this difference may be more pronounced.

In both batches, combat videos conveyed the same types of masculine themes, while the generic army videos contained similar themes. For example, on the surface, it may appear that in this data set, American recruitment videos feature more women in less stereotypical roles than the British adverts. However, generic recruitment videos had a greater representation in the US data set (three videos) while the UK dataset featured more (three) combat adverts; with women unable to serve in army combat roles (in both the US and UK), it is unsurprising that women are less visible. This can also be demonstrated by comparing the variable portrayals of toys in the different British Army videos. The Corps of Royal Engineers, for example, features a different array of equipment compared with the combat units, focussing on carpentry, plastering and electrical equipment, all things that are designed to aid in building, which the Engineers are tasked with. In contrast, British combat roles feature guns in their adverts, while making it appear that they are being used in a combat situation through the use of cues such as storming a building and throwing a grenade. Therefore, although all part of the British Army, each role appropriated the boys and toys military masculinity identified and utilised it in its own way. This example also demonstrates that it may not be as simple as attaching a type of military masculinity to a single role, as each type of military masculinity examined is likely to be adopted by more than one role, albeit to varying extents.

Data sources

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British Army (UK3) found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lfp-jqJB81U> accessed 1/9/2012.

British Army (UK4) found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weudbL9tXCQ> accessed 1/9/2012.

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