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Bennike, Kathrine Bjerg; Stoltz, Pauline

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# **Peacekeeping Masculinities, Intersectionality, and Gender Equality**

*-Negotiations of military life and civilian life by Danish Soldier/Veteran-Parents*

Kathrine Bjerg Bennike <sup>a\*</sup> and Pauline Stoltz <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Aalborg University Library, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark, [orcid.org/0000-0002-3498-2677](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3498-2677);* <sup>b</sup>*Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark [orcid.org/0000-0002-5382-6776](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5382-6776)*

\*corresponding author: Kathrine Bjerg Bennike, Kroghstræde 3, 9220 Aalborg East, Phone: 28116468, e-mail [kbb@aub.aau.dk](mailto:kbb@aub.aau.dk)

***Abstract:***

Combining the work of peacekeeping and parenting can lead to dilemmas in the work/life balance of individual soldier/parents. Simultaneously, ideals of ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ can potentially be used in struggles for gender equality in peacekeeping. Our aim is to discuss whether and how ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ is a useful concept and tool to increase our thinking on what it means to be both a ‘good soldier’ and a ‘good parent’. We ask two questions: 1. (How) can the notion of ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ help us analyze the relation between bodies and binaries in peacekeeping and parenting? 2. (How) can an intersectional approach to ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ help us analyze dilemmas in gendered negotiations between peacekeeping and parenting? We argue that peacekeeping masculinities and intersectionality often are used as buzzwords, instead of directly related to clearly identified struggles for gender equality. This provides limits to their usefulness. Since military life and civilian life are both separate and related fields, it is useful to combine a focus on peacekeeping and parenting to make better use of the notion of peacekeeping masculinities. We illustrate the argument with interviews with male and female soldier/veteran-parents from the Royal Danish Air Force (RDAF), who have been on international peacekeeping missions.

***Keywords:***

Identity, intersectionality, military masculinities, military work, peacekeeping masculinities, parenting

*He was a teen at the time. So, it was difficult for him. Down there [at the base], we had these boxes – like phone booth. There were eight of them, and then you stand there and call home. It was really hot. In the building, it was about 55 degrees and then you are also standing inside a box. You are sweating like a pig, but you have to wear your protection gear. If the alarm goes, you just have to let go of the phone and out. Outside is your gear and this is when our training becomes essential. Fast and down. But, it was not every time that you managed to put the phone handle properly back on. One time, I didn't manage to put the phone handle properly back on. Three minutes pass, if the alarm is not back on after three minutes then you run as fast as you can to the shelters. There you are safe and you wait until the alarm stops. After six minutes, the All-clear sounds, the danger was over, and I go back and realize that my phone handle was not on. My son was still on the line. He heard everything. It was awful! He didn't want to talk about it. He thought I was stupid for leaving [for deployment]. A mom should not be put in a dangerous situation like this. He was so angry. (Interviewee: Alice non-commissioned officer in her 50s-60s).*

In 2017, during the time of the interview above, Alice was an active soldier in the Royal Danish Air Force (RDAF), where she worked as a non-commissioned officer. She was also a veteran in her 50s-60s, who had been on a number of international peacekeeping missions and the mother of a now adult man, who also served in the RDAF. Alice is thus part of the group of soldiers who balance soldiering and parenting. As the excerpt from the interview shows, soldiers and veterans who are parents encounter dilemmas that result from conflicting expectations about what it means to be a good soldier *and* a good parent.

These soldiers face a number of questions and dilemmas such as, should they keep soldiering and parenting separate from each other? What should they do if this is not possible? What are the long-term consequences of active short-term and long-term choices to solve such dilemmas, for example by withdrawing from international missions? What is the role of gender in all of this? Does it matter

that Alice is a woman, or would a male soldier/veteran-parent encounter the same dilemma in a similar way?

At the heart of militaries is the focus on protection, at times, through violent means. Critical military studies and feminist security studies researchers often relate this focus to particular forms of masculinities, such as ‘military masculinities’ (Higate 2003; Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins 2015; Woodward and Duncanson 2017). One version of a military masculinity concerns ‘peacekeeping masculinities’. Here, violence and protection are displaced by a focus on dialogical peacekeeping and being a ‘force for good’ (Duncanson 2009; 2013). Sometimes this framing of peacekeeping relates to normative ideas and discourses about a feminization of peacekeeping relations, given stereotypical ideas about the connections between women, peace and care. Critics have questioned these stereotypes in the context of unequal gender relations in the military and elsewhere (Tickner and Sjoberg 2011; El Bushra 2007).

Struggles for gender equality have often been related to issues over work/life balance and parenthood. Historically, state-endorsed policies have framed parenting as a gendered practice and focused on the mother/child dyad and the meaning of ‘good mothers’ (Lawler 1999; Hays 1996). This has recently been supplemented with a focus on men’s parenting practices and what it means to be a ‘good father’. Particularly the Nordic countries have raised questions over how fathers manage to invest, physically and emotionally, in the upbringing of children (Kvande & Brandt 2019).

Alice's narrative raises questions about these links between gender, peacekeeping and parenting in the everyday lives of soldier/veteran-parents since such lives combine the gendered work of peacekeeping *and* parenting and the gendered identities of being a peacekeeper *and* a parent. In this article, our aim is to discuss whether and how 'peacekeeping masculinities' is a useful concept and tool to increase our thinking on what it means to be a 'good soldier' and a 'good parent'. We ask two research questions: 1) (How) can the notion of 'peacekeeping masculinities' help us analyze the relation between bodies and binaries in peacekeeping and parenting? 2) (How) can an intersectional approach to 'peacekeeping masculinities' help us analyze dilemmas in gendered negotiations between peacekeeping and parenting? We illustrate this with examples from interviews with RDAF soldier/veteran-parents who have been on international peacekeeping missions.

### **1. Masculinities, peacekeeping and parenting**

Marysia Zalewski discusses in a think piece from 2017 the value of the concept of 'military masculinities'. When concepts such as 'military masculinities' and 'intersectionality' become overly familiar and we use them as buzzwords, she argues, than perhaps they fall short of their intended ambitions. It does not seem to make a difference if, following an intersectional move, women or 'others' are added to the concept, since masculinized and militarized violence are rampant. This begs the question, Zalewski asks, how much work we imagine concepts can do and how much control we think we have over them (Zalewski, 2017). Here, we argue that we can ask the same questions about the usefulness of the concepts of 'peacekeeping masculinities' and intersectionality. Instead of using these as buzzwords, they should be directly related to clearly identified struggles for gender equality, such as relating to the work/life balance of soldier/parents.

We start by asking (how) the notion of ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ can help us analyze the relation between bodies and binaries in peacekeeping and parenting.

### **1.1 Gendered bodies and peacekeeping masculinities**

Historically, theories about the militarisation of masculinities tend to emphasize binaries between men and women’s roles in conflicts based on ideas about biologically gendered bodies. In these binaries, male bodies are expected to protect through at times violent means. Contrary, female bodies are expected to be peaceful and in need of protection (Elshtain 1982).

Military masculinity can be defined as a form of masculinity that is linked to masculine ideals of toughness, endurance and protection (including through violence). Hence, military masculinity is carried, possessed and produced by soldier bodies (traditionally male) (Higate 2003). Over the years, the scholarship has moved from military masculinity in singular to a plural form to encompass a wider palette of masculinities, acknowledging the fluidity of masculinities including different expressions depending on context and gendered bodies (Higate 2003). These changes have also been enforced by increasing numbers of female soldiers in military work, in Denmark as elsewhere, who challenge these binaries.

Peacekeeping military masculinities have been presented as challenging hegemonic military masculinities that relate military masculinities to violence (Henry 2017; Mäki-Rahkola and Myrttinen 2014; Belkin and Carver, 2012). Peacekeeping masculinities can be defined as military masculinities that emphasize compassion, dialogue, the use of peaceful means, and place less focus on physical strength and toughness (Duncanson 2013).



Potentially, the concept of peacekeeping masculinities can make room for a masculinity that relies on an understanding of being ‘a force for good’ (Duncanson 2013). A peacekeeping military masculinity may include a military character and a masculinity that is more reliant on being a good mediator, by a willingness to engage in dialogical peacekeeping and where the ability to be less aggressive and violent is emphasised (Duncanson 2009; 2013). We can recognise this change in ideas about desirable peacekeeping military masculinities in the general shift towards peacekeeping and peacebuilding in military work relating to missions under the auspice of UN and NATO. Here, we see an increased focus on the importance of the presence of female soldiers and attention to gendered dynamics in peace and conflict (Rones 2015; Persson 2013).

The *advantage* with these developments is that the concept raises issues about gender and gender equality in the context of military work and military identity. Idea(l)s of peacekeeping masculinities open the possibility for female bodies to be included in idea(l)s about military identities and to be included in what it means to be a good soldier. The *disadvantage* is that reality does not necessarily catch up with these idea(l)s. Researchers within critical military studies and feminist security studies argue that binary ideals and gendered normative expectations about the gendered bodies of soldiers are still part of understandings of conflict and peacebuilding (Zalewski 2017).

However, just as there are gendered expectations about what practitioners and researchers consider a good soldier, societal expectations exist about what is considered a good parent. Usually, these expectations are gendered and differ between expectations about mothers and fathers. They can also differ over time and place. States can regulate such expectations in gender equality policies about (often primarily female) unpaid household and care work, which can look different in different parts of the world. This brings us, again, to the notion of gender equality.

We argue that soldier/veteran-parents negotiate peacekeeping and parenting as formal employees in public organizations such as the military (combining paid and unpaid work) and informally, in their everyday lives. The notion of ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ can be useful in analyzing the relation between bodies and binaries in peacekeeping by emphasizing an ethics of care (compassion, dialogue, and the use of peaceful means). However, there are potential limits to the use of ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ in analyzing the dilemmas that soldier/veteran parents encounter in their gendered negotiations between peacekeeping and parenting. These limits can be linked to how researchers and practitioners relate or not relate peacekeeping masculinities with its focus on care to intersectional inequalities and to struggles for gender equality.

## **1.2 Intersectionality**

Our second question concerns (how) an intersectional approach to ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ can help us analyze dilemmas in gendered negotiations between peacekeeping and parenting. Feminist scholars have suggested intersectional approaches to bring nuance to simplistic binary discussions in relation to the concept of ‘military masculinities’ (Myrntinen et al. 2017; Henry 2017). An intersectional approach can help to explain tensions between individual and collective identities, since we can investigate how forms of social inequality other than gender can influence, shape and construct masculinities, as well as point at relations between genders. This means that it is the dynamics of the power relations that are in focus, rather than the fixation of categories of bodies and power relations (Stoltz, 2019; Henry 2017). Although this has brought important findings to the study of military masculinities, both ‘military masculinities’ and intersectionality have been used as buzzwords (Zalewski, 2017; Hancock, 2016).

In order to overcome definitional problems, Hill Collins (2015) stresses two broader aspects of an intersectional approach: (1) intersectionality as an analytical approach to analyse social inequalities, emphasizing contexts of time, place and space in the analyses of power relations. (2)

Intersectionality as critical praxis, to react to social inequalities in the pursuit of equality and social justice. The differences and social inequalities that should be studied can depend on opinion, position and politics. Henry argues in the context of peacekeeping masculinities, that intersectionality can sensitize us to differences between and amongst male and female military personnel. However, it does not provide sufficient tools to challenge the hegemonic position of men in national military contexts across the world. Instead, she asks where the poor black women are in the US military (Henry 2017). She suggests that feminist critical military studies again need to pay attention to privileges, benefits, and power gains that the military or patriarchy maintain and crystallize (Henry 2017). By doing so, we can link thinking on peacekeeping masculinities and intersectionality to struggles for gender equality. We argue that intersectional analyses should be applied to all people. Moreover, a multilevel approach to intersectionality can help take issue with structures at the macro-level as well as identities and practices at the micro level (Yuval-Davis 2015; Christensen & Qvortrup Jensen, 2014). We argue that situating the intersectionality of social inequalities in peacekeeping and parenting and asking how these are produced and reproduced is important if we want to relate the analysis of intersecting inequalities to normative political pursuits for social justice and equality.

### **1.3 Personal narratives by Danish soldier/veteran parents**

To illustrate the argument, we use examples from interviews with male and female soldier-veteran-parents from RDAF. We have identified these in the dataset for a broader study, consisting of 24 qualitative interviews with male and female soldiers and veterans serving in the RDAF (XXX,

2021). The interviewed soldiers rank from Private first class to Officers and have been deployed to international missions. The soldiers were interviewed during the spring of 2017 at Air Transport Wing (ATW) and Air Control Wing (ACW). ATW and ACW undertake assignments specific to each of the wings. However, a commonality for both wings is that much of the work is remote and/or inside the security of the bases and can be characterized as low-risk missions. The missions can include surveillance of air space, aid and airdrops in e.g. peacekeeping/peacebuilding missions (The Danish Defense 2018; 2015).

We use a narrative approach to situate the interviews in the national context of Denmark and the military organization of the RDAF. The personal narratives about peacekeeping and parenting that we identified in the interviews can be performed differently in different social contexts (see Shenhav, 2015, Chapter 1). This means that they result in multiple and changeable storylines in interpersonal contacts, such as, in an interview situation or when stories are told to partners, friends or colleagues and that we need to consider broader social and cultural contexts to understand them. In relation to the levels of analysis, interpersonal contexts are situated at the micro level of analysis (Shenhav 2015).

Personal narratives in interpersonal contexts lead us to group, collective or social narratives (Shenhav 2015). Social narratives become relevant when thinking about the narratives about gender equality in Danish or UN policies about peacekeeping or parenting, which we can find on the meso-level of analysis. These policies influence how the soldiers and veterans combine being a soldier and a parent during and after deployment. Shenhav assumes that narratives in the social domain are not only aggregations of stories, but also the product of a process of repetition and variation (Shenhav, 2015, pp. 17–19). Social narratives are according to Shenhav's definition, narratives that

are embraced by a group and that tell, in one way or another, something about that group (Shenhav, 2015, pp. 17–18; Caddick 2018). It means that there can be struggles between the narratives at the different levels of analysis in open-ended reformulations of social narratives (Shenhav 2015; Squire, 2021).

## **2. Negotiating gendered work**

Before we answer the first question on ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ and the relation between bodies and binaries in the gendered work of peacekeeping and parenting, we would like to address the context of gender equality in the Danish Armed Forces (DAF) and Denmark.

### **2.1 Gender equality in peacekeeping and parenting: the Danish Armed Forces**

The RDAF is a military service that belongs to a geographical region known for their strong gender equality policies, state feminism, and the ‘Nordic welfare model’ (Siim and Stoltz 2015; Hernes 1987; Borchorst and Siim 2002). A regional branding of being cosmopolitan-minded, with a human rights agenda as the cornerstone of international humanitarian and military work including in peacekeeping is also recognizable as part of Danish self-identification (Bergman-Rosamond and Kronsell 2018; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2016). However, scholars have critically examined such branding and self-images as ‘Nordic exceptionalism’ and questioned the reality behind the ideas (e.g. Dahlerup 2018; Stoltz 2020).

As the first country in the world, Denmark adopted United Nations Resolution 1325 in 2005 and by doing so displayed an international and national commitment to include gender perspectives in military work on peace and security. It further demonstrates a commitment to the alliances and memberships of UN, NATO and the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO). Consequently,

the DAF and soldiers need to comply with the gender codex of these organisations when they work under their auspice. This includes i.e. a focus on operational effectiveness, where female soldiers and presumed inherent qualities of i.e. being caring and dialogically oriented is part of the argumentation. Nonetheless, albeit being a front-runner in terms of adopting the resolution, Denmark has since received criticism for a lack of concrete actions towards achieving an intensified focus on gender in military operations especially in a national context (Rosamond Bergman 2014). Consequently, within the DAF, focus on gender equality through i.e. increased attention to recruiting women has caused conflicting elements and frustrations in terms of how to be a good soldier, which qualities (and subsequent bodies) are important, and discussions of gender discrimination (Bennike 2021; Sløk-Andersen 2018).

We also need to understand gender equality within the DAF in the wider context of Danish society. The Danish state has public policies regarding work-life balance, such as parental leave regulations, which include fathers, as well as regulations concerning discrimination on the labour market and in the workplace (Bloksgaard 2012; Borchorst & Siim 2002). These policies also concern the DAF. However, there is a discrepancy between the ideals of these regulations and the practice of for example the division of parental leave between parents in Denmark. Based on the most recent numbers from 2019, for parents who live together, mothers take an average of 280 days of parental leave, whereas fathers take an average of 34 days. At the time of writing in 2021, fathers can obtain 14 days of leave following birth and mothers 14 weeks, followed by 32 weeks that the parents can divide. Despite this potential to divide parental leave and equally distribute the care-work, women take about 90% of the leave and men 10% (Denmark's Statistics 2021). Political and labour market actors, as well as interest groups and scholars, have long discussed attempts to change this dynamic, but without result (Bloksgaard 2012). In 2021, a new model of parental leave now earmarks 11

weeks parental leave for fathers (Wenande, 2021). This has received positive political and public reactions, but also critique for forcing mothers to go back to work too early. Nonetheless, practice in division of parental leave suggests that women continue to be the primary carers and normative ideal remains, where women are primary carers for children especially in their early years.

Recent studies by the Danish Veterans' Centre (2021) and by Heidelberg (2017) confirm this in relation to military families. In both studies, deployments enhance traditional stereotypes, not only during deployments but also after the military parent – identified as the soldier-father - returns.

## **2.2 Peacekeeping masculinities, bodies and binaries**

Gendered expectations about bodies and binaries are part of the theoretical as well as practical discussions on peacekeeping masculinities. Wright (2016) argues that a binary understanding of the bodies that carry out military work prevails among military institutions and alliances such as NATO, the DAF, as well as at the UN level. Operation effectiveness exemplifies how military institutions connect gendered bodies with qualifications. Essentialist positions between female bodies and peace versus male bodies and violence continue to persist. This includes the continued connection between womanhood and motherhood including other caring- and nurturing roles (El Bushra 2007, 140-141).

Binary understandings of peacekeeping masculinities limit the ability to examine the complexities of gendered bodies and social constructions of masculinities and femininities in military life and, we argue, the way military life relates to civilian life. Differently gendered bodies that work within the military can perform, be subjected to, and experience militarisation including in their roles as parents, and these processes are sometimes - but not always - reliant on biological gender. For

soldiers/veterans this means that gendered expectations sometimes connect with their ideals of soldiering and parenting and sometimes they result in conflicting expectations. We can understand this in the context of ideals of gender equality in the DAF, politics and society.

Let us illustrate how gendered expectations about soldiering and parenting can result in a link between being a good soldier and being a good parent that is both compatible and incompatible. Gry, a Private First Class soldier, has two teenage daughters.

*They [local populations] are people that we hopefully help in some way or another to create peace in their country and help them rebuild it. And that makes a lot, a lot of sense to me. And I mean that is also what makes it more acceptable for our kids that we [Gry and her husband] have chosen military careers. That we are part of helping people in need. (Interviewee: Gry, Private first class, in her 30s-40s).*

Gry displays a vocation for helping vulnerable populations as a particular form of military work and she uses a peacekeeping narrative of ‘forces for good’ (Duncanson 2013) to legitimize the work of her husband and her to their children. In the quote, it seems that neither Gry nor her husband experienced any disconnect between their ambitions to be a ‘good parent’ and a ‘good soldier’.

However, as a background, Gry did not deploy before her children were of an age where she found that they would be able to cope with her absence, whereas her husband did go on deployments while their children were young. Moreover, in their traditional division of parental care, they lived up to Danish social expectations and norms for being ‘good parents’. They also represent the traditional division of care work in most DAF families. It means that although both Gry and her



husband can relate to the characteristics of care in their peacekeeping identity and that their gender does not seem to play a role in their military work, this is not the case in relation to the care work at home. There, traditional gender values prevail. Simultaneously, this example does *not* reflect the Danish national narrative about good parents, gender equality and exceptionalism.

### **2.3 Negotiating peacekeeping and parenting**

We can use a second example to develop the point that binaries and gendered expectations about being a soldier and a parent can be conflicting in practice. Officer Christian has been on several deployments and is a father to two young boys. He prefers using soldier ideals relating to ‘a force for good’ in negotiations between family life and military life.

*We also talk about this [deployment] not being dangerous. This is when you are in the air force. We are leaving to move aid by plane to hungry children and stuff like that. This is the type of work we do. We also flew with some other stuff, but I don't involve my children in this part. This first becomes a problem when you have teenagers.*  
*(Interviewee: Christian Officer in this 40s-50s).*

Christian conveys how he and his wife made an effort to make sure that he was in contact with their children while he was away and read stories for them. He would also create visual effects such as a LEGO tower to demonstrate how many days he would be gone.

Contrary to Gry, Christian's narrative demonstrates the effects of the militarisation of parenting where conflicting ambitions to be both a ‘good soldier’ and a ‘good parent’ become pronounced. Christian considers, plans, and acts according to the possible dangers of his work in relation to his

children and he uses a peacekeeping narrative, which stresses the limited dangers of deployments in the air force in the contact with his children. Hence, the challenges of parenthood and soldier life, especially the, at times, violent realities of missions, are part of Christian's negotiations between military life and family life, in which he wishes to limit the exposure of violence to his children, depending upon their age.

Both Gry's and Christian's narratives demonstrate gendered expectations about male and female bodies – father and mother soldiers. Christian did go on international deployments while his children were young, similar to Gry's husband, and stayed connected with his children via i.e. Facebook. Despite deployments, Christian was an active and present parent to his young children. Gry was also an active parent, but she did not go on deployment.

This suggests that gendered expectations about fathers and mothers as soldiers still rely on gendered stereotypes of parenthood and care in society in general (El Bushra 2007, 140-141). Perceptions of the importance of *physical* presence become apparent especially in relation to the age of the children. This is despite narratives of work-life balance and parenting for fathers as well as mothers in gender-equality policies i.e. Danish national narratives and RDAF narratives of being progressive in gender equality. The narrative struggle over gender equality in these examples illustrate the limits of binary understandings of peacekeeping masculinities since these do not enable us to address problematic links between masculinities and military work and femininities and parenting work.

### **3. Peacekeeping masculinities and intersectional inequalities**

This leads us to question 2, whether an intersectional approach to ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ can help us analyze dilemmas in gendered negotiations between peacekeeping and parenting. First a few words about the fields of military life and civilian life.

#### **3.1 Intimate relations, military life and civilian life**

We can view military life and civilian life as both separate and related fields since notions of place and space matter when we think about the relations between soldier/veteran parents and their children. As Enloe argues, processes of militarization are powerful and happen in large and small scale via everyday practices inside and outside of military bases (Enloe 1983; 1989). Military life influences the parenthood and intimate relations of the soldier/veterans through the realities of peacekeeping and violence. Simultaneously, we argue, civilian life influences soldiering and perspectives on soldier work and military obligations. Soldier/veteran-parents can potentially try to find a balance in the ways they negotiate the work of parenting and peacekeeping. This balance is also in play in negotiations over their military identity and their identity as a parent.

Critical military scholars have demonstrated how time, place and space influence, challenge, and shape ‘military masculinities’ (Higate 2003; Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins 2015). However, these studies rarely address the parenting of soldiers or veterans. Higate and Henry define a process of militarisation of parenthood as ‘social pervasiveness and preparedness for organised violence’ in the relations between parents and children (Higate and Henry 2011, p. 134). This is often less interesting or at least only in the background of the aim of ‘peacekeeping masculinities’. It is rather the other way around – the concern of ‘peacekeeping masculinities’ is with the ways in which

practitioners and researchers can use (gendered) ideals of care and implicitly parenting in peacekeeping.

For Danish soldiers working in Denmark, military life and civilian life are physically separated, since they are not stationed on a military base with their families such as i.e. some American soldiers (Enloe 1983, 1989). However, although the RDAF soldiers in the data set made an active effort to separate the two worlds by i.e. removing their uniform before returning home, they also admitted that their way of thinking, vocabulary and even their posture was influenced by their military work (Bennike 2021). From a broader perspective, rules and regulations for parental leave for sick children can for example influence the crossings of military and civilian lives, as this concerns work-life balance for parents in Denmark in general.

When peacekeepers are abroad on deployment, their civilian life can also influence their military work. We could see this in the beginning of the article when Alice talked about the phone call she had with her son when the alarm went off and her son listened to everything that happened. In other words, military and civilian lives always cross each other. Sometimes without problems, but sometimes it leads to dilemmas for the soldier parents.

Feminist critical military researchers have pointed out how there is less attention to how subjects understand, absorb or negotiate militarisation in everyday life, such as in military families (Hyde 2016). In this context, research on military families and the ways in which these encounter the militarisation of their intimate relationships, often focus on the way in which female partners of male soldiers deal with parenting, often in the absence of the soldier father (Heiselberg 2017; Hyde

2016; Harris, 2011; Lutz 2001). We argue that this also should cover questions about female soldiers and their male partners and include lesbian and gay couples.

In addition, it is possible to understand the crossing of military life and civilian life the other way around, as the way in which parenting influences peacekeeping. Notions of care during peacekeeping work are not (only) about dialogues with actors within peacekeeping, but as we could see above, also with the soldier's children. These crossings of military and civilian lives matter for our thinking on the ways in which dilemmas relating to the intimate relations between soldier/veteran parents and their children are gendered.

### **3.2 Intersectionality, gender equality and assumptions about violence and care**

Intersectional approaches to 'peacekeeping masculinities' can help us analyze dilemmas in gendered negotiations between peacekeeping and parenting. Zalewski asks if it matters whether soldiers are men or women and rhetorically answers no, not necessarily in the context of the pursuance of military work. Nevertheless, she argues, that it is of great importance to how we think about the existence of military violence as well as how we think we can suffocate its violent energies (Zalewski, 2017). Peacekeeping *masculinity* concerns structural ideas about the links between masculinities and violence which are recognizable from 'military masculinities' in general and the ways in which peacekeeping masculinities can open up to embrace female bodies, femininities and care. Henry argues that an intersectional approach to peacekeeping masculinities can sensitize us to differences between and amongst male and female military personnel and urges scholars to pay attention to privileges, benefits, and power gains that the military or patriarchy maintain and crystallize (Henry 2017).

In practice, there often seems to be limitations to an embracing of women and femininities in peacekeeping work. As the illustrations in this article testify, inequalities prevail in the RDAF as well as in Danish society, which leads to dilemmas in the gendered negotiations that soldier/veteran parents meet when combining peacekeeping and parenting. For many reasons, we would have liked to say more about for example the intersectionality of gender with race and sexuality, but unfortunately, there is little information about the composition of the DAF to fall back on. What we found in our data pointed at how the homogeneous composition of the RDAF as mainly male and white leaves room for reflections on how the category of gender through female bodies becomes alienated in peacekeeping work and identities. Nevertheless, further studies on other categories or a more thorough discussion on whiteness could be interesting.

Still, we can illustrate a focus on privileges by means of the considerations of Officer Jan about the future career choice of his son. These considerations perhaps relate to a dominant form of ‘military masculinity’ in Denmark. Jan wishes for his son what he has experienced, namely a unique soldier collectiveness.

*Yes, I would like that. I have a hope that my son will sign-up for conscription. It is not like I am telling him “you have to have a career like your dad, you have to become an officer”. Not at all. But I just have some good experiences from my conscription period, which I think he would also get through that [experience]. [...] it is that total, close collectiveness that you have. [...] This experience where you are together with people whom you for sure will become friends with, because you are together all the time, right. So, in that sense there are some things, which I would like [him to experience]. And it provides you with a certain foundation to join the armed forces. It*

*gives you something in terms of the ability to listen to other people and do stuff and the like. (Interviewee: Officer Jan in his 50s-60s).*

Jan's description of the collective identity of the unit illustrates a narrative of normative ideals about 'militarised masculinities'. He mentions friendship, closeness, a foundation, as well as learning to listen as central elements, which he believes military training provides and he wants his son to experience. Albeit Jan does not mention particular gendered bodies, similarities to a close-knit group of soldiers that rely on each other bears similarities to Mackenzie's discussion of the myth of the 'band of brothers' in which an all-male unit creates a camaraderie that is vital for the bonding and survival of soldiers (Mackenzie 2015). This narrative is hegemonic in many of the international peacekeeping missions that gather soldiers from different parts of the world. Another interesting element relates to the composition of the DAF personnel, where the majority are male, and in addition white (heterosexual) males. This leaves open discussions on how uninformative elements of the RDAF group collective, as described by i.e. Jens also reflects a lack of diversity within the group (Schaub et al 2012; Bennike 2021)

Although Jan was deployed to a number of international missions, including violent ones, he does not mention any memories of these here. In the quote, Jan links military skills to a 'peacekeeping masculinity' and being a good listener rather than skills relating to violence. His choices of memories may relate to a dominant form of 'peacekeeping masculinity' among RDAF soldiers and influence his selection process of memories of a military career. A process, where at least these soldiers' most violent experiences can take a background position when they discuss their wishes for their children to join the armed forces and obtain the privileges of being a peacekeeping soldier.

Interesting, in the context of intersectional approaches to peacekeeping masculinities and structural gender inequalities in the RDAF and Denmark is the question how *female* soldiers relate to peacekeeping and parenting in their considerations for any military futures of their children. Unlike Gry, not all female soldiers said they were able to combine active peacekeeping soldiering with parenting or for that matter find military work and motherhood compatible. Some mentioned that they had made an active choice *not* to have children because they found it impossible to combine being a good soldier and a good mother. These reflections related especially to the toll of deployments and absence, which make it difficult to form relationships and in this create a family. What these interviews did not mention was how their decisions might relate to external pressure or discrimination in the organization. Such discrimination is difficult to assess, since there are hardly any mappings of the state of gender discrimination in the DAF (but see Øhrstrøm, Eriksen, and Knudsen 2003; “Kvindelige Veteraner – Danmarks Veteraner” n.d.).

Somebody who did go on deployment was Kirsten, a First-Class officer. She is adamant that *her* children should not join the military because she had seen what deployments could do to young people.

*No. My children are all grown-up now. The youngest is 30. The youngest at one time wanted to join; she wanted to join the army. We said to her “well, if that is what you want, then that is what you want”, but we would rather that she didn’t, because I had been to Kandahar, and I had seen some of the young people, how they were empty eyed after deployment. And I told her “we really wouldn’t like that”, but if that was what she wanted, then [we] would just have to support her, right. But, I had this plan in my mind that if she continued, then by hell I would show her some horrifying pictures. Because I don’t think...it is difficult right because somebody has to join the armed forces. And somebody has to go on deployments [...] But my children should rather not. She didn’t make the cut, she failed the medical examination, thankfully. I would feel*



*horrible if they joined and then came home and there was something wrong.*  
(Interviewee: Kirsten Private First Class, in her 50s-60s)

Narratives of weakness and problems with how to deal with traumatic events are not often mentioned in the context of ideals of ‘peacekeeping masculinities’. However, the quote demonstrates how peacekeeping work and military can take its emotional toll. Although Kirsten stresses a soldier identity relating to being a ‘force for good’ when she reflects on her military work, as a mother she emphasizes the violence that is part of military work and how she wants her children to avoid these experiences.

Yuval-Davis emphasizes the importance of situating the intersectionality of social inequalities in social, economic and political contexts in which some social divisions have more saliency and effect. Nevertheless, she argues, this only provides a snapshot of differential positionings along different axes of power and it does not explain how these are produced and reproduced (Yuval-Davis 2015). Using a multilevel approach to intersectionality and understanding the personal narratives of the soldier/veteran parents in our examples as part of narrative struggles about peacekeeping, parenting and gender equality can help take issue with structures at the macro-level as well as identities and practices at the micro level (Yuval-Davis 2015; Christensen & Qvortrup Jensen, 2014).

#### **4. The usefulness of peacekeeping masculinities**

What can the above tell us about the usefulness of peacekeeping masculinities in thinking about what it means to be a ‘good soldier’ and a ‘good parent’?

Ideals of peacekeeping masculinities could potentially enable a greater presence of female soldiers, either since women are considered more caring or since it does not matter what gender one belongs to when doing care work. In Denmark, there are few women in the military, making them marginal to the armed forces, so neither reason seems to work in obtaining this ideal.

Ideals about the caring qualities of parents regardless of gender could potentially enable a greater experience of care work by fathers, military as well as other, which could solve dilemmas in intimate relations between parents and children and address inequalities relating to work-life balance. Such ideals could challenge stereotypical assumptions about men as violent and women as caring.

Starting in an ideal of gender equality as structural (and solving problems with structural inequality as a form of injustice), peacekeeping masculinities can problematize structural inequalities in peacekeeping as this relates to other military work, which is for example more violent. This takes issue with the peacekeeping work of the notion of peacekeeping masculinities, emphasizing care over violence. The focus on masculinity emphasizes the hegemonic place of masculinities in the military. Potentially, it could be possible to discuss peacekeeping work and peacekeeping identities from a gender perspective, instead of a masculinity perspective and, even better, from an intersectional perspective, leaving open the categories that could be most relevant. Following Hill Collins, we can still consider how such an analysis of what it means to be a ‘good peacekeeping soldier’ could link to aims of equality and social justice.

The aim of the notion of peacekeeping masculinities is originally not to discuss what it means to be a good parent. However, the complex ways in which gendered notions of care emerge in narratives

about the intimate lives of soldier/veteran parents and in the practices relating to their work-life balance, raises questions about the ways in which military life and civilian life intersect. This is not only a matter of the militarizing of intimate relations, but also the other way around, how the care of children influences peacekeeping work (as it probably does in other military work). We can of course study parenting work and parenting identities from gender, masculinity as well as intersectional approaches, but this would not necessarily do justice to the relevance of peacekeeping work. Here, the notion of peacekeeping masculinities can be useful. Nonetheless, also here, limits exist, since an analysis of peacekeeping work and gender just as well can help us address problems with inequalities relating to what it means to be a good parent in the context of the intimate relations of soldier/veteran parents.

Summarizing, there are limits to the use of the concept of peacekeeping masculinities, which we could reveal when we considered how the concept relates to struggles for gender equality (in peacekeeping as well as in parenting), as an aim for its use. An intersectional approach can offer nuances to the potentials of peacekeeping masculinities, but also here it is important to consider the link to struggles for gender equality.

### **Declaration of interest statement**

There are no conflicts of interest in this article in terms of neither funding nor use of the interview material.

### **Notes**

The interviews that inform this paper were part of a broader study. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. All names and other identifying features were removed from the research

material and pseudonyms have been used. Translations of the anonymous original Danish transcripts can be obtained upon request.

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