



## GENDER INTEGRATION IN THE MILITARY: GENDER-NEUTRAL STANDARDS AND COED SPORTS

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### **Abstract:**

This paper focuses on the socio-cultural aspects of gender integration in the Armed Forces, arguing for gender-neutral standards. It begins with a detailed literature review relevant to women's integration in the military, subsequently focusing on Greece, and in the final analysis arguing that coed military sport participation and exercises serve as a means of bridging the gender-divide and eliminating gender harassment. Though coed sport (mixed-gender teams) as a tool for women's inclusion and integration in the military seems to be part of the solution, it is a topic on which research is scarce (Kefi Chatzichamperi, 2018, 2019). This study does not examine physiologic attributes: biological and anatomical differences or research on sex hormones and how they affect the nervous system and physical strength, and subsequently soldier performance (Tenan, 2017). Using a qualitative theoretical approach, it discusses the social dimensions of evidence-based research on why and how gender integration is relevant. It includes current and ongoing studies presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Research Group on Military and Society (ERGOMAS), hosted by the Hellenic Army Academy in Athens, indicating that a main challenge in the military today is to ensure a gender balance through women's inclusion, active engagement and retention. Research emphasizes the need for change in the military culture on all levels—legal and organizational—including gender-awareness and diversity training, especially on the complimentary skills that both genders bring to the table as opposed to the "wastage of talent" (Kamberidou, 2013). Certainly, establishing gender-neutral standards to eliminate sexism, and promote inclusion and integration is a complex and multifaceted process, the reason researchers in the social sciences use a variety of theoretical approaches (Patsantaros, 2015, 2013; Seagrave, 2016). The results indicate that the gender participation gap continues in all current military organizations: Hungary holding the highest female participation rate (19.3%) and Turkey the lowest (0.8%).

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**Keywords:** degendering, gender/sex distinction, gender harassment, armed forces, homophobia, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), mixed-gender sports

## 1. Introduction: The gender/sex distinction

In 2015 the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP) asked all NATO members and 27 partner nations (29 NATO countries today) to prepare a report describing the work undertaken on equal opportunity policies, women's recruitment and retention, including education and gender awareness training in the Armed Forces. The summary of all the national reports, updated annually, provides a unique collection of statistical information and policies in the military of each NATO and partner nation. The third edition includes a comparative analysis of quantitative data along with material on gender integration efforts and issues such as successful recruitment and diversity policies; retention practices and statistics; work-life balance initiatives; parental, maternity and paternity leave; sexual harassment; Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV); actions to prevent sexual abuse, and so forth (NATO, 2016).

NATO has acknowledged that the complementary skills of both male and female personnel are essential in their operations. In today's world, military operations require a diversity of qualifications and resources to ensure that peace and security are achieved and maintained. Nevertheless, it seems *we still have a long way to go*.

Despite extensive research and policy initiatives, many dimensions of gender harassment persist in the military. For example, sexual harassment continues in the U.S. military, as confirmed in a unique Defense Equality Opportunity Climate Survey (Harris, McDonald & Sparks 2017) which allows assessment of organizational climates and individual experiences with multilevel analyses.

In their study Richard J. Harris, Daniel P. McDonald and Corey S. Sparks (2017) discuss individual and organizational factors on the probability of reporting sexual harassment, a widespread phenomenon in organizations and institutions. They argue that the targets of sexual harassment experience loss of motivation, career interruptions, loss of commitment, and lowered productivity, while the organization experiences reduced productivity, loss of loyalty, health costs, legal damages, among other things.

*"Sexual Harassment and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) degrade operational effectiveness and readiness as well as recruitment and retention"*, argues the Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP) in its recommendations to the Military Committee (NATO, 2016: 37).

As regards the gender participation gap (women's underrepresentation), the data provided by Lt Col Magdalena Dvorakova (2018), the International Military Staff (IMS) Gender Advisor, NATO HQ shows that women represent an overall average of only 11,1% of the active duty military personnel in the Armed Forces of NATO member states. Hungary holds the highest female participation rate (19.3%) and Turkey the lowest (0.8%). More analytically, the top ten countries in 2017: Hungary (19.3%), Slovenia (16.5%), the United States (16.2%), Bulgaria (15.9%), Canada (15.7%), Greece (15.5%), Latvia (15.3%), France (15.2%), Albania (13.1%), Czech Republic (12.7%).

The prevalence of anachronistic gender stereotyping in the military, emphasizing the need to raise awareness and respect for diversity is confirmed in the in-depth literature review that follows. Studies repeatedly spotlight the treatment of women and the LGBTQ community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning), various abuses, sexual offences, sexual harassment and soldier suicides in the Defense Forces. In fact, integrating the gender dimension in the military also means eliminating homophobia in addition to supporting non-traditional family structures: same-sex couples and transgender military personnel (Georgiou, Patsantaras & Kamberidou, 2018).

At this point, for the sake of analysis, we need briefly refer to the gender/sex distinction in the social sciences and feminist theory to facilitate our understanding of the military's hegemonic masculinity—which includes dichotomous attitudes and definitions of masculinity and femininity—leading to a series of *degendering* efforts today.

The term gender (masculine/feminine) is "performative" (Butler, 1990; Kimmel, 2004). It is what one does (and not is), while the term sex (male/female) describes observable biological/anatomical differences and characteristics. Sex or the *biological gender* defines biological categories, while gender or the *social gender* defines social expectations: the social meaning of being born a female or a male. In short, gender is understood as a product of culture and socialization. For example, masculine behavior in many Western societies has been associated with heroism, strength, bravery, repressed emotions, and assertiveness whereas, feminine behavior with weakness, compassion, nurturing, and tenderness. These behaviors are what one does (the *social gender*), and not what one is (the *biological gender/sex*). On the other hand, females can also exhibit strong, dynamic and assertive behaviors, just as males can be nurturing, tender and compassionate. In other words, gender or the *social gender* refers to a set of culturally associated behaviors and norms that are not static.

The *social gender* refers to the social meaning of a person's *biological gender* (sex) in a specific society, time and place which is in a constant state of transformation since social expectations, social stereotypes, and social behaviors change as regards dominant patterns pertaining to what a man and a woman can or cannot do, including power structures (Kamberidou, 2007, 2009, 2011). Namely, the *social gender* is not static—as is the *biological gender* (sex), unless you have sex reassignment surgery or use performance-enhancing drugs (doping).

In brief, the gender concept or the *social gender* is an abstract meaning, an analytical tool, a theoretical approach used in the social sciences and the humanities to discuss the social construction and reconstruction of gender, which is an ongoing process. The social constructionist approach, in essence, is applied as a theoretical tool to eliminate the focus on *difference* (Kimmel, 2004), on the *Other*, or *Otherness* (Patsantaras, 2013) that produces social exclusions due to gender, race, sexual orientation, disability and age. Consequently, *degendering* means doing away with binary gender division perspectives that reproduce social exclusions or inequalities. In any event, it does not mean doing away with one's sex (biological gender).

In contrast, in the life sciences, the natural sciences, the biological sciences (i.e. medicine, pharmacology, physiology, sport biomechanics, ergophysiology) gender is not an abstract meaning but a static one (it defines sex, the *biological gender*). There is no need to differentiate between the terms sex and gender, since studies in these disciplines do not examine the social construction or reconstruction of gender: social behaviors; social expectations; socialization patterns, social meaning or impact of being born a male or a female. As regards the social construction and reconstruction of gender— which is always changing— at least in Western societies, such an example is clearly seen in the social space of sport.

To illustrate, there was no female participation in the first modern Olympics in 1896 due to anachronistic theories and gender stereotypes concerning the *weaker sex*, in short women's alleged physical inability/weakness to participate in competitive sports due to the 'scientific' theories and beliefs of the nineteenth century concerning women's physical and mental inferiority, in addition to 'studies' arguing that intense athletic activity could harm women mentally and physically. Women were considered more passive due to their need to conserve energy (Sandow, 1898; Moebius, 1908; Weininger, 1917; Webster 1930) which justified withholding them from participating in social and political life, which included Olympic sports.

Today, however, women's participation rate in the Olympics is nearly equal to that of men's (approximately 44% female athletes participated in the 2016 Olympics), and not because the *weaker sex* changed physiologically, anatomically, genetically or biologically since 1896, but due to the changes in social expectations, stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors, namely the social reconstruction of gender (the social gender). Obviously, biological determinist views, such as those of the nineteenth century arguing that the metabolic state creates or leads to our behavioral, social and psychological traits helped to institute the deep-rooted *gender order*. Even in the 1970s, arguments concerning women's hormonal instability (menstrual cycle) were used to keep them from entering certain professions, such as becoming airline pilots. Women confronted gender barriers in most social spheres that provided visibility and active participation, such as politics and sport, due to gender stereotypes and behaviors, many of which seem to continue today.

To reiterate, this is a result of the deep-rooted *gender order*, to wit, socio-cultural dynamics that are clearly reflected in the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report and Index (WEF, 2018), which on a global level shows fewer women are participating in the workforce, current trends indicating that the overall global gender gap could be closed in 108 years! The World Economic Forum's 2018 Global Gender Gap Report and Index<sup>1</sup>, using population-weighted group averages, benchmarks 149 countries on their progress towards gender parity across four thematic dimensions: (1) Economic Participation and Opportunity, (2) Educational Attainment, (3) Health and Survival, and (4) Political Empowerment. Undeniably gender integrations strategies are required in all social spheres, and not only in the Armed Forces.

As regards the deep-rooted *gender order* in the military, it is associated with the behaviors that lay behind the original exclusion of women from combat. This is

emphasized in a study, cleared for public release by the United States Special Operations Command as of January 2016, which examines the socio-cultural dynamics of the *Special Operations Forces Mixed-Gender Elite Teams* and the effects of gender integration on small team dynamics. Other than the literature review, the research team included interviews and a target opportunity survey. The study emphasizes that *military behavior*—which requires optimal performance in combat—is defined by most people as *masculine behavior* associated with males, while research directly addressing the impact of gender team performance is extremely rare, as is research on task cohesion and social cohesion related to mixed-gender teams. There were many variables that affect team dynamics, however three surfaced most frequently in the study: 1) the sex-gender distinctions, 2) cohesion, and 3) organizational/institutional pressures for change. The changes that occurred regarding the gender dimension (changes in gender stereotypes) prompted the recent opening of combat positions or units to women. Cohesion was also perceived as a relevant issue, necessary for preserving unit readiness and morale. It was included as a factor due to past attempts to integrate other ethnic or racial groups into the military. Finally, institutional and organizational pressures figured in as a significant variable showing the force and influence that collectivities can have in changing social expectations (gender stereotypes), such as the pressures exerted by Congress and individual military services on the behavior of small teams and individuals (SOFMET, 2014).

In fact, given these points, and seeing how the team dynamics of the *Special Operations Forces Mixed-Gender Elite Teams* facilitated gender integration, then another significant force and influential factor, I argue, could be achieving military *degendering* through sport, namely cultivating gender-neutral standards through gender-mixed military sport participation/activities.

## 2. Material and Methods

This study is based on interdisciplinary qualitative research and data: 44 publications/studies. Using a sociological approach, it begins with an in-depth literature review relevant to women's integration, to wit, establishing gender-neutral standards in the military to facilitate inclusion. It discusses the social dimensions of evidence-based research on why and how gender integration is relevant in the Armed Forces, which includes 17 current studies presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> conference of the European Research Group on Military and Society (ERGOMAS) in 2017, at the *Gender and the Military* sessions. Having personally participated in the conference and the discussions, my goal is to spotlight gender gaps in today's military world through an in-depth analysis of the contemporary research while documenting barriers confronted and strategies for success, such as coed sport activities, the latter not discussed at the 2017 conference in Athens, nor at the 15<sup>th</sup> ERGOMAS conference in Lisbon, June 17-21, 2019. The second part focuses on Greece and the initiatives/policies that promote gender integration in the Armed Forces, while referring to the impact of coed sports on gender integration and equality.

### 3. Results

Studies on gender integration in the Armed Forces indicate that gender harassment and gender discrimination persist in current military organizations. Research highlights two major gender gaps, the participation gap and the leadership gap (Lape, 2016), the latter repeatedly associated with concepts of empowerment. Developed and developing nations alike have come to understand that women's integration in the Armed Forces contributes to ensuring peace, security and development. Utilizing the full potential of all human resources—the entire talent pool—is essential for sustainable development and peace. NATO has acknowledged that the complementary skills of both male and female personnel are essential in today's world, and military operations require a diversity of qualifications, skills and resources to ensure success.

Few researchers have examined the impact of coed sport activities (mixed-gender sport participation/teams) in facilitating gender integration. Studies on coed sport's ability to encourage equality and inclusion are extremely rare (Cohen & Melton, 2014; Messner, 2002; Seagrave, 2016), but even scarcer is research on mixed-gender or coed sport activities and exercises in the military, although gender integration is enabled when both genders engage together in sport activities and games (Kefi Chatzichamperi, 2019).

It is important to add here that the hegemonic sport structure created an ideology of male superiority that has marginalized women and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals: GLBITs (Seagrave, 2016; Georgiou, Patsantaras, Kamberidou, 2018). Historically, a common trait and ground for both institutions—Sport and the Military (Armed Forces)—is hegemonic masculinity, associated with power relations and male-dominated environments.

### 4. Literature Review and Discussion: Gender harassment

*"De-gendering an occupation by establishing gender-neutral standards truly reflective of requirements for the success of missions is an important step towards removing incentives and opportunities for gender harassment"* (SOFME, 2014: vii).

Militaries around the world are going through profound transformations related to the role of gender, argues Stefanie von Hlatky (2017a), the Director of the Centre for International and Defense Policy at Queen's University, Ontario Canada. She addresses the controversies and recent developments related to the changes, such as the repeal of *Don't Ask Don't Tell* (DADT) in the United States.

The *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* Repeal Act of 2010 established the process for ending DADT policy, consequently allowing lesbian, gay, and bisexual people to serve openly—*out of the closet*—in the US Armed Forces. The DADT Repeal Act ended the policy in place since 1993 that allowed gay, lesbian, and bisexual people to serve only if they kept their sexual orientation secret from the military environment.

Hlatky (2017a) points out that the fighting forces of today's democracies are diversifying and military organizational culture conforming to civilian expectations of

gender equality. According to her argument, it was not possible for the Armed Forces to achieve change from within, but only after interventions and pressures from "outside actors, primarily courts, governments and international organizations", including pressures from NATO and the United Nations with regard to integrating women and members of the LGBTQ community. Her study challenges established beliefs about physical strength, military effectiveness, and gender relations in the Armed Forces in the United States, Canada and Norway.

The military institution's broader culture needs a gender perspective, argues Hlatky (2017b), adding that integrating a gender perspective in a UN peacekeeping context means understanding the differences related to the impact of conflict on women, men, girls and boys and subsequently designing policies, programs, operational plans and missions that take these differences into account. She observes that Global Affairs Canada has taken it a step further by noting that peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction is more long-lasting and effective when a gender analysis has taken place in the early stages. *"Let's take the example of increasing the number of female peacekeepers in UN operations, which has become an important goal for UN Women and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations"*, she attests, adding that this argument means increasing the number of women police and military personnel deployed in UN operations, which could lead to perceptible improvements in the way the missions are run and better service provision for women and girls.

Gender discrimination remains persistent in current military organizations, argues Delphine Resteigne (2017), the Chair of Sociology at the Royal Military Academy, Belgium. In her study, following an analysis of Bourdieu's reflections with regard to male domination in current Western societies, Resteigne (2017) examines quantitative studies and data of the Belgian Defense Headquarters (HQ) in Brussels, showing that although changes have been observed at the organizational and legal levels, indicators of male domination remain present in the mental structures of the military personnel, men and women alike. She argues that further changes could be encouraged to change mindsets during socialization processes, along with initiatives that embrace all kinds of diversity.

Addressing the issue of institutional abuse in the Australian Military, Pauline Collins (2017) discusses the treatment of women in the Defense Force, including allegations of sexual offences and soldier suicides. The recent Defense Abuse Response Taskforce Final Report (DART)—spanning seven decades—considers all possible types of abuse. The Taskforce was established on 26 November 2012 to assist complainants who had suffered sexual abuse, sexual harassment, workplace harassment, physical abuse, and bullying. Collins (2017) provides an overview of the findings, revealing that the Chain of Command and the military environment in general avoided or was discouraged from reporting abuses. She also refers to lack of consequences; an environment fueled by drug and alcohol consumption; and child sexual abuse. On the other hand, she observes that the Australian military personnel report "poor treatment through dishonorable discharge, resulting in their re-victimization"; career loss; poor reintegration processes; lack of appropriate counselling and support. The military

culture, she observes, is unable or unwilling to address the problem to avoid public outcry and loss of respect.

Inequalities persist in the Finnish Defense Forces (FDF) due to gender, age and position affecting the personnel, argues Minna Leinonen (2017) from the University of Tampere, Finland. Despite military training being open to women since 1995, gender inequalities continue to exist, she claims, adding that most of the female employees are civilians. Her primary data consists of a personnel survey (2015–2016) that examines work environment, leadership, work-family balance, development needs, gender equality, and discrimination. Leinonen (2017) compares this data to that of a similar survey conducted in 2011, just before the structural-organizational changes in the Finnish Defense Forces (FDF). Her results show that significant structural changes have taken place, the result of which is downsizing, shutting down units and reducing the number of civilian personnel.

Heli Hayrynen's (2017) study discusses women in military leadership training in the Finnish Armed Forces. The aim of her qualitative empirical study is to explore the meaning of "*military leadership training to young women from a leadership competency point of view*." She approaches military leadership training as a process that develops leadership and training competency and skills. In following a social constructionist approach and a narrative methodology, Hayrynen (2017) collects data from one military class, holding three consecutive interviews with all the women that had been selected to undergo leadership training. The data consists of biographical narrative interviews (N=45), the results of which showed military leadership training is a multidimensional process where women construct and develop their competencies from the experiences they acquired in the beginning of their military careers, specifically before entering the leadership program.

Nina Ronnes (2017) argues that no woman has ever succeeded in being selected to participate in the Norwegian Armed Forces Special Command (FSK) regular basic training program for the Parachute Ranger Platoon. Although the training program has been open to women since 1985, women never succeeded due to the physically demanding admission test competition, designed exclusively for the physically fittest men. Subsequently, when in 2014, a critical operational need arose to add female soldiers, the Norwegian Armed Forces Special Command (FSK) established an all-female Special Reconnaissance Platoon (SR), allowing women to compete for admission. As a result the debate began: some considering this program a new form of gender segregation and affirmative action, while other describing it as a success since it attracts the best women, the physically fittest women.

Rones (2017) focuses her study on the experiences of these women participating in the FSK gender-segregated training program. She conducts a comparison with a previous ethnographic study of a gender-mixed selection and training program in the Norwegian Army, in addition to 28 days of participant observation and 64 qualitative interviews with FSK leaders, special operation instructors, platoon commanders, the female SR operators themselves, and their male peers in the regular FSK training program (the Parachute Ranger platoon).

According to her results, when gender is perceived as secondary, and women expected to become one of the guys, they assimilate masculine norms. This attracts women who prefer to be the only woman in a male-dominated environment such as the Norwegian Armed Forces. These women, Rones (2017) points out, tend to develop the "*queen bee syndrome*", viz. distancing themselves from other women, talking negatively about them, and opposing the recruitment of more women in the military.

On the other hand, the results show that "*women are needed in service because they are women*". The FSK needs more women in special operations where gender matters: i.e. interrogations and body search in gender-segregated countries (like Iran and Afghanistan). These women are not expected to become one of the boys or to assimilate masculine norms. This approach has resulted in attracting highly fit women to the FSK who would otherwise not have joined the military. "*The women in FSK SR Platoon were not interested in joining a male-dominated environment*", Rones (2017) points out, adding "*they were interested in the military and wanted to join [...] together with other women and be part of a women's team.*" Accordingly, these women, as opposed to the "*queen bees*", have positive attitudes towards other women in the military.

With regard to leadership positions, women may be less likely than men to be perceived as effective leaders, argue Captain David G. Smith, Judith E. Rosenstein, and Nargaret Nikolov of the United States Naval Academy. They examine peer evaluations of the U.S. Naval Academy students, who annually, at the end of the semester rank their peers and select three leadership attributes (from a list of 89). These rankings are used to allocate leadership positions and eventually assign post-graduation jobs, which seem to usually go to the men. According to the results "*men are more likely to ever receive prescriptive masculine attributes and a greater variety compared to women, and less likely to receive proscriptive (feminine) attributes. Women are more likely to ever receive proscriptive attributes and a greater variety of them related to the masculine-typed field of the military*" (Smith, Rosenstein & Nikolov, 2017).

These findings suggest a backlash against women in the masculine-hegemonic military organization as regards leadership roles. It seems women are penalized for their gender, and not promoted, despite their contributions, as is the case in the workplace. When junior women enter the workforce, Smith, Rosenstein and Nikolov (2017) argue, they encounter gender stereotypes that reinforce the status quo, such as the gender hierarchy that seem to obstruct advancement to higher levels of leadership, thus hindering career aspirations and retention.

On the contrary, greatly appreciated are women's military contributions in socially accepted complementary roles that do not disrupt the *gender order* or the military's hegemonic masculinity. Historically, women have been playing vital roles in conflict situations as war nurses, volunteers, messengers, peacemakers, philanthropists, and educators. Irene Kamberidou (2017) examines the nineteenth-century first-hand accounts of European and American women travelers who provided their services, raised funds, food supplies and clothing to support the Greek Revolution. Along with the relief activities of the 1820's and 1830's, the great interest in Greece produced a strong desire to send teachers and missionaries to *Greece in Bondage*: Ottoman occupied

territories. Her study presents female accounts that focus on women war volunteers and specifically their social contribution during the Crimean War (1853-1856), when the English and French colonial experience encouraged female volunteerism.

Kamberidou (2017) spotlights the service provided by English, French and German war nurses, volunteers and philanthropists—as agents of social change—who cared for the soldiers in the hospitals of Constantinople and its environs, concluding with their invaluable recommendations. The female accounts describe the British military and naval hospitals, hospital huts, nurses duties and difficulties confronted (1,500 patients per 3 women volunteers); the Women’s Hospital; the French hospitals; the French military system; the Sisters of Mercy; the Sisters of Charity; the women who followed their husbands to war, including the destitute wives and babies of the English soldiers. Astonishing are the accounts concerning the degrading social status of the English soldier’s wife as opposed to the respect and protection enjoyed by the French soldier’s wife.

Undeniably, women have a variety of roles in conflict situations, such as "*source, message and receiver*", political activists or advocates argues Ashu Pasricha (2017) in her study on women as "*bridge builders and peacemakers*". She emphasizes that women experience conflict differently from men, a higher number dying from human rights abuses (rape, sexual violence), infectious diseases, malnutrition, illness, disability, starvation, the collapse of the social order, and economic devastation.

Many studies examine the psychological repercussions of the female and male victims of war, as it affects combatants and non-combatants alike, both physically and emotionally. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety are some of the emotional effects. War disrupts lives, dissolves families and leaves communities and individuals emotionally distressed (Snoubar, 2016).

Returning to today’s military gender gaps, one need point out here that in Brazil, over thirty years after women’s admission in military institutions, reluctance to fully include women as combatants persists, argues Cristina Rodrigues Da Silva (2017) in her anthropological analysis on the construction of masculinity and femininity in the Brazilian military profession. Women are underrepresented in the Armed Forces and discussions on gender or gender integration are problematic in a society that associates women with peace and femininity, and men with masculinity and war (Da Silva, 2017).

In the Finnish Defense Forces (FDF) only 2% of the officers are women, although women have been serving as volunteers (as conscripts) since 1995. Choosing a career as an officer in the FDF is still unusual for women, argues Suvi Kouri (2017), a Military Chaplain in the FDF Guard Jaeger Regiment, Helsinki. In her master’s thesis she investigates: 1) Why female officers chose a career in the military, 2) how they found their place in this "*masculine community*" and 3) how they balanced their femininity with the traditional construction of masculinity of the soldier. The results of her interview with female officers working in the FDF show that: the women who decided to become soldiers were influenced to do so by their family environment and family values; they experienced gender discrimination in the military community; they had to be better

than the men-had to prove themselves; they had to "*fade out*", that is hide their feminine features in order to be taken seriously or be considered professional.

Other than women having to "*fade out*", meaning conceal their feminine/female characteristics, another obstacle is motherhood, which has also been identified as incompatible with the requirements of a military career, limiting women's active participation. Limor Pomerantz-Zorins's (2017) case study with women officers serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) focuses on the relations between "*two greedy institutions: the family and the military.*"

In her study on family-military relations in Israel, she argues that women constitute a special case, since in choosing such a demanding career, which is perceived as inconsistent with the norms and expectations of the Israeli patriarchal model, they are challenging traditional notions. In Israeli society, Pomerantz-Zorins (2017) observes, women belong to the private sphere and being a female officer challenges notions of the "*ideal type*" of officer who is expected to devote "*himself*" totally to military duties. Her qualitative study focuses on the narratives, perceptions and insights of women officers in several technological units, their accounts revealing ambivalent experiences in the gendered structure of the military organization. Conversely, the military system allows women officers to belong and obtain professional and management experiences—which they seem to appreciate and cherish—but they are also constantly reminded that they are *different*, primarily because motherhood is tagged as incompatible with the demands of a military career (Pomerantz-Zorins, 2017).

René Moelker (2017) of the Netherlands Defense Academy examines new family models within the Armed Forces that are challenging gender approaches in theory and practice. The most challenging development regards transgender individuals in the Armed Forces who confront gender barriers of a biological, psychological, relational and organizational character. Transgender individuals, she argues, go through the physical transformation process that implies psychological changes, a long recovery and readjustment period, along with changes in personal relations, which could be a shift from a heterosexual relationship to a same sex relationship (or vice versa), tremendous changes in work relationships, among others. Consequently, gender awareness and diversity training is required, and military superiors have to be supportive so the transgender individual successfully achieves work integration, along with the support of his/her colleagues (Moelker, 2017).

It is important to add here that the hegemonic structure of the Armed Forces is similar to that of the Sport system's, the latter having created an ideology of hegemonic masculinity—male superiority—that marginalized women and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals: GLBITs (Seagrave, 2016). The military, regardless of country, is a microcosmos of a society, and military leaders have to address the same issues that dominate in civilian society with regard to gender, new family patterns, equality issues, and so forth. For example, David Smith and Karin De Angelis (2017) of the United States Air Force Academy conducted a historical review of changes and policies in order to address the well-being and experiences of diverse non-traditional family models, such as same-sex couples, single parents, dual earner, and dual military

and transgender families. They compare non-traditional military families with traditional-married heterosexual ones. During the last few decades, they argue, families have experienced major shifts, mainly in cultural norms and demographic trends in the United States, as is the case internationally. Smith and De Angelis (2017) examine how these socio-cultural changes and trends affect the military family, career paths, support resources, care-givers and service members.

#### **4.1 The role of Gender in the Greek Armed Forces: Gender integration efforts**

Women remain largely underrepresented in the Hellenic Armed Forces (15.5% women and 88.9% men) though Greece is in the top ten countries with the highest female participation rate after Canada (15.7%). One need reiterate here that women active duty military personnel in the Armed Forces of NATO member states represent an overall average of 11.1%, with Hungary holding the highest female participation rate (19.3%) and Turkey the lowest (0.8%).

Women's enlistment in the Greek military was introduced in 1977 and established in 1978 with presidential decree 636/1978. Women entering the military academies in the 1990s were initially in non-combat disciplines and by 2002 in battle specialties without any quota compared to their male counterparts. It was not until 2001 (law 2936/2001) that women's participation in the Greek military increased substantially due to the institution of the soldier's profession (Theodorakoudis 2017). It is important to also point out here that the gender mainstreaming policies and political actions of the 1990s obliged the Hellenic Air Force to increase the number of women pilots, and as a result, the first women pilots graduated from the Hellenic Air Force Academy (HAFA) in 2006 (Tzogani, 2017).

Gender Equality Offices have been established in the Hellenic Armed Forces: Army, Navy and Air Force. Personnel Welfare Offices are operating to deal with diverse gender issues, and provide advice, guidelines and assistance. Additionally, a training program before deployment in Peace Support Operations is offered to all ranks in the military academies and schools. Moreover, all training centers include the following subjects: Gender psychology; Human relationships and conditions; Army sociology (the Army as a social group); Consequences of prejudice and racism; Social exclusion and minorities (Theodorakoudis, 2017). Six Support Centers for Gender Equality have also been set up—with enlisted women as members of the staff/personnel—as part of the European project: *Action 6 "Artemis–Equal: Equality in the Armed Forces"* (Pazarzi & Vilara, 2017).

To support military families and facilitate a work-life balance, the following measures are in effect: five-month pregnancy leave for female personnel and nine months childcare leave, also granted to male military personnel; Women undergoing in-vitro fertilization are exempted from physical exercises and duties, and granted extra leave; Up to two years parental leave (not funded) for those with children aged up to six years old, including one more year for every additional child. The duration of this leave may not exceed five years; Military personnel with a disabled child or spouse are allowed a reduced workday, extra leave, and are exempt from exercises and 24-hour

duties; Parental leave (one day every two months) to monitor children's school progress. When both parents are members of the Armed Forces additional support is provided: Couples are assigned to the same location; Option not to participate in exercises at the same time; Single-parents with a disabled child, can be exempt from exercises and 24-hour duties, and so forth (Theodorakoudis, 2017).

Such efforts and policies are necessary—and more are needed—if we take into account that women continue to experience gender harassment, discrimination and sexism in many areas of the hegemonic (male-centric hierarchal) military structures.

In a study that includes personal interviews and the official statistics of the Hellenic Air Force, Hariklia Tzogani (2017), Sociology Instructor at the Hellenic Air Force Academy (HAFA), discusses the status of women pilots. In her interviews with women pilots, Tzogani (2017) poses the following questions: How easy is it for women to follow a profession still considered typically male? How feasible is it to overcome gender stereotypes? Are women pilots treated equally to their male colleagues? What specific roles/duties are they assigned in this military environment? Are women affected by the current economic crisis, more than their male counterparts? The leaky pipeline seems to be an alarming result of her study. Specifically, since 2006, when the first women pilots graduated from HAFA, only a small number of female cadets have been entering the Academy annually, indicating we need to change mindsets. Tzogani (2017) examines the reasons for this underrepresentation and also addresses the issue of what happens to the HAFA women graduates.

Tzogani (2017) argues for upgrading the status of women pilots in order to increase participation and improve the functionality of the Hellenic Air Force, as Greece has to face new challenges in the new defensive environment consisting of asymmetric threats. Consequently, she points out, more women are needed to maintain defense capacities at a high level, especially due to the country's geostrategic position.

Certainly, high unemployment rates, the Greek Army's turn to professionalism due to conscript reduction, accelerated technological developments (i.e. smart weapons), and the need for women's complementary skills, as is the case globally, have been attracting women into the military. Even so, it seems they are confronting a number of barriers and difficulties due to perpetuated notions of hegemonic masculinity—the male domain—as is the case in the social space of sport (Cohen & Melton, 2014; Georgiou, Patsantaras, Kamberidou, 2018; Messner, 2009; Seagrave, 2016), indicating the need for further gender integration efforts so as to achieve a gender balance.

Alexandros Theodorakoudis (2017) argues that in Greece professional women soldiers (EPOP), many reaching the rank of Sergeant Major, have been assigned "tough" combat specialization such as shot-gunners, tank crews, artillery and machine-gun operators, and they confront major difficulties. In a study based on both interviews and a questionnaire, he examines the perspectives of Greek women in the military—the female personnel in army units in a particular geographical district—concluding that the main challenge for the Greek military is to ensure a gender balance through gender integration.

As regards leadership, Theodorakoudis (2017), points out that in the higher military hierarchies, such as the officers' corps over 70% of the women officers serve in non-battle corps (Technical, War Material, and Shipping Supplies) and in Services, having reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. As regards the battle corps (Infantry, Tank, Artillery), he argues that there is a gender balance here, women officers reaching the rank of Major.

The results of his study confirm that women commissioned officers are usually well organized, have to work harder than their male counterparts and are extremely strict with themselves in order to be integrated into the military community and be accepted by their male peers, as is the case internationally. Additionally, he emphasizes that there are no legal regulations in Greece that specifically promote the recruitment of women in the military, and enlistment requirements for women are different than those for men. In the military academies or higher institutions for example, admission and recruitment requirements, including physical tests are adjusted according to gender (Theodorakoudis, 2017), as is the case in competitive sports.

He also points out that during the exercise periods, when both genders participate/exercise together, relations can be strengthened, a fact confirmed in Evangelia Kefi Chatzichamperi's (2019) ongoing research, on coed or gender-mixed military sport activities and exercises as a means of women's inclusion and integration in the Armed Forces.

Certainly, a plethora of research examines men's and women's sports, competitive sports, and in particular Olympic sports as a means of social inclusion and integration for diverse social groups and individuals in relation to gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation and so forth (Cohen & Melton, 2014; Hertting & Karlefors; Kamberidou & Chroni, 2016; Kamberidou, 2012; Lyras & Hums, 2009; Patsantaras, 2013; Patsantaras & Kamberidou, 2017; Patsantaras, et al., 2009; Walseth & Fasting, 2004; Walseth, 2008).

Additionally, current studies are now focusing on sport as a tool or means that contributes to refugee integration processes. For example, since refugees have joined over 3,000 sport clubs in Germany, Claudia Stura's (2019) study examines possible factors in sport clubs that may support or delay refugees' integration. She conducted semi-structured interviews with 35 refugees and 32 professional and voluntary staff members from 15 German sport clubs. Her results show that coaches, team members, and club leadership play a major role in helping refugees overcome challenges, facilitating integration.

However, studies on coed sport's ability to facilitate integration, and encourage equality and inclusion are extremely rare (Cohen & Melton, 2014), but even scarcer is research on mixed-gender or coed sport activities in the military (Kefi Chatzichamperi, 2019).

Few researchers have examined the benefits and impact of coed sport or the importance of gender-mixed integrated activities as opposed to the plethora of studies on the physical and social benefits of participation in team sport, such as social development, bonding, and fitness. Michael Messner (2002:166) stressed that coed sport

activities act as a means for "*leveling the playing field and simultaneously changing the rules of the game to make the world more just, equitable, and healthy for all.*"

Adam Cohen and Nicole Melton (2014) argue that due to the scarcity of research on coed sports their qualitative study focuses on the innovative and "*genuine sport of quidditch, based on the Harry Potter franchise*", since it offers an alternative to traditional sport and is growing in popularity. In using an exploratory qualitative approach, the purpose of their research was to examine the impact of the sport on its participants, and to determine how it influenced attitudes toward the opposite gender.

Their findings indicate that the coed structure of the sport of quidditch has led to shifts in gender attitudes, specifically positive coed experience for men and women, who in turn developed an increased desire for inclusivity and equality. Both genders also reported stereotype and attitude changes, while women also said they felt increased pride and self-confidence. On the other hand, despite these shifts in attitude, underlying prejudice toward women athletes was still observable among the men who participated in the sport. As Cohen & Melton (2014) point out, the norms and traditions of sport reinforce and perpetuate notions of hegemonic masculinity.

Gendered discourses, belief systems, and policies in sport typically disadvantage women and privilege men, making it seem natural to view as superior athletes those who possess super-masculine or super-competitive traits, casting sport as a male domain in which women should play supportive roles or limit themselves to the boundaries of women's sports. This has resulted in the leaky pipeline phenomenon in sports, in other words, as Cohen & Melton (2014) describe it, it has led to significant "*dropout rates*" among both male and female participants.

When a sport becomes too competitive, athletes lose the balance between health and social interaction, as opposed to mixed gender sports, as is the coed sport Quidditch, which has been having an impact on gender equality: "*As one of the only true coed sports, we believe quidditch teaches players to respect and value each other's abilities regardless of gender*" (International Quidditch Association (IQA), 2013 in: Cohen & Melton, 2014: 220).

#### **4.2 Coed sport activities as a gender integration tool: A case study in Greece**

Gender integration in the military through coed sport is discussed for the first time in Evangelia Kefi Chatzichamperi's (2019) doctoral dissertation, a work in progress. Her study focuses on gender integration through sport, and specifically coed sport activities in the five Hellenic Higher Education Military Training Institutions. She also examines women's integration in all three sectors of the Armed Forces in Greece—administrative and institutional posts—as opposed to women's past experiences and engagements in secondary, subordinate or unofficial roles, i.e. war nurses and volunteers (Kamberidou, 2017; Kefi Chatzichamperi, 2018).

Following a detailed literature review and discussion on: 1) Gender theory, 2) Gender and the military, 3) Gender and sport, 4) Coed sports, and 5) Coed sport activities in the military, Kefi Chatzichamperi (2019) discusses women's integration and retention in the military through sport. She combines a qualitative and quantitative

approach for a better understanding of how women and men identify or perceive the meaning of their mixed-gender military sport experience in the Hellenic Higher Military Training Institutions.

Initially, twelve Greek women, active officers in the Armed Forces, took part in semi-structured interviews. The twelve women, all high ranking military officers—between the ages of 25 to 49 years old—were randomly chosen. Subsequently, a total of 120 active officers of both genders responded to the Greek version of the "Group Environment Questionnaire" (Angelonidis, Kakkos, Zervas & Psychoudaki, 1993-94 in Kefi Chatzichamperi, 2019). From a total of 18 questions nine were selected to examine gender integration through sport. The main research question is whether sport in the military academies contributes to gender integration-inclusion as perceived and understood by the 120 participants (female and male officers). The findings showed that inclusion-integration is a process involving non-isolation, meaning acceptance of the gender subject (the officer cadet/military student) regardless of his/her gender into the team, as opposed to his/her exclusion, and as a result the union-unity-acceptance in a sport team of all the subjects (officer cadets of both genders). The results of her analysis show that there is a statistically significant interaction between the variables 'joint participation of men and women in sports' and the 'integration of women' in the Higher Military Training Institutions.

The results of this study indicate that mixed-gender military sport programs serve as channels, means, instruments or vehicles for gender integration, unity and cohesion. Other than strengthening physical capacity, fitness and performance, the findings confirm that coed military sport activities could prevent sexism; eliminate or reduce gender harassment, discrimination and stereotypes; strengthen interpersonal communication/relations, teamwork and cooperation skills.

## **5. Recommendations – Conclusions: Eliminating gender harassment**

*"Establishment of gender-neutral and mission defined standards [...] will define what it means to be an operator, to be mission-capable, not what it means to be a man or woman" (SOFME, 2014: viii).*

Today's Armed Forces are diversifying, and military organizational culture needs to eliminate *gender harassment* by integrating the gender dimension into the equation, in other words *degendering*, meaning applying gender-neutral standards and policies. This denotes challenging the "gender binary" (Seagrave, 2016) or eliminating binary gender divisions, increasing the number of women and reproducing participation by promoting women in leadership positions as role models, and not only!

Recommendations repeatedly cited in the studies include: Gender awareness and diversity training; focusing on changing hegemonic structures, gender stereotypes, mindsets, and sexist military cultures; emphasis on recruitment and retention practices; sharing lessons learnt; accountability, early cohort management; eliminating the gender leadership gap and other barriers to inclusion, such as work-family conflict, sexual harassment, sexual violence and bullying.

One could question or ask if efforts—like those of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives (NCGP) discussed in this paper—have been impacting change partially or only on the surface. I argue we are moving forward slowly but surely, as it takes time to change the deep-rooted *gender order*. Social stereotypes do not change overnight, as clearly shown in the Global Gender Gap Report and Index (WEF, 2018). Historically, both the Armed Forces and Sport have been male preserves, male-dominated environments, requiring time to change their hegemonic (male-centric hierarchal) structures. The military and competitive sport in particular, have been traditionally viewed as male domains where men and boys were encouraged to pursue a *masculine* gender role identity. These two institutions convey strong messages regarding the historically specific and socially constructed *gender order*.

Consequently, Sport's contribution could prove invaluable in enabling or facilitating gender sensitization and integration, and in particular through mixed-gender sport participation or coed sports (Cohen & Melton 2014; Messner, 2002; Seagrave, 2016). Socially engaging and inclusive activities teach players respect for diversity, especially if they begin at a young age, such as gender-mixed activities for children. We have to get them while they're young! Integrated sport activities can give boys the chance to experience girls in manners that build trust and respect for their abilities, before gender stereotypes are created or set in.

Accordingly, further research on coed sport participation is necessary, not only in the social space of sport, where the gender leadership gap persists today in all of its governing bodies and structures, but in the military environment as well. Undeniably, both institutions, the Military (Armed Forces) and Sport, share one common denominator or common ground which is defined as hegemonic masculinity—associated with male superiority, a culturally idealized type of manhood that was socially and hierarchically exclusive—that marginalized women, GLBITs and other social or racial groups.

### **Conflict of interest**

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

### **About the Author**

Irene Kamberidou (BA, MA, PhD) is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the School of Physical Education and Sport Science where she established the first *Gender Issues and Sports* course in 2006, taught every semester to this day. Irene teaches *Principles of Sociology*, *Gender Issues in Sport*, and *Sport Sociology* in both the graduate and undergraduate programs. She completed her BA and MA at Emmanuel College and Boston College, Boston and Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, USA respectively, and her junior year at the Sorbonne (Paris IV), Paris, France. Having repatriated to Greece, she completed her PhD at the Sociology Department of Panteios University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens, in 2002. Irene is a member of the *Hellenic Sociological Society* (HSS), the *European Association for Sociology of Sport* (EASS), the *International Association of Physical Education and Sport for*

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<sup>i</sup>Progress towards gender parity, since 2006, is proceeding at different rates across the eight geographic areas examined. In Western Europe, for example, current progress rates indicate that the overall global gender gap can be closed in 61 years. Western Europe—with an average overall gender gap of 24.2% is home to four of the top 10 countries in the Index with regard to global rankings for 2018: Iceland (1<sup>st</sup> rank/position), Norway (2<sup>nd</sup>), Sweden (3<sup>d</sup>), Finland (4<sup>th</sup>), Nicaragua (5<sup>th</sup>), Ruanda (6<sup>th</sup>), New Zealand (7<sup>th</sup>), the Philippines (8<sup>th</sup>), Ireland (9<sup>th</sup>) and Namibia (10<sup>th</sup>). The three countries at the bottom ranks of the region are Greece (78<sup>th</sup>), Malta (91<sup>st</sup>) and Cyprus (92<sup>nd</sup>), with a remaining gender gap of more than 30% (WEF, 2018).