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‘Just Play the Game’; Exploring how Masculinities shape Emotionality within Male Dominated Organisations

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Seminar Structure

1. Previous research
2. Why the Military?
3. Aims and Method
4. Analysis
5. Conclusions
6. Future /Current Research



Previous Research: Construction of Emotion Within Society

- ***Emotions as dysfunctional***, preventing reasonable judgements being made₁
- Being emotional, being a woman₂
- ***Competency*** measured by ***ability to control emotion***

Previous Research: Masculinities, Work and Emotion

- **‘Work’** provides this space men said to **secure their identities**₃
- ***Male behaviours normalised*** and ‘appropriatised’ as ***professional/competent*** behaviour₄
- Must **prove ‘maleness’** i.e. ‘rite de passage’ _{6,7}
- ***Relegates ‘unmasculine’ /feminine practices***, such as being emotional, showing feeling₂
- ***What about Male dominated organisations, where emotion work is implicit within the job role?***

Previous Research: The Military

- **Dominant discourses of masculinity** within the military explicitly endorse stoicism and other ‘masculine’ traits associated with task effectiveness⁸
- **Femininities function as a foil** to this construction - antithetical to military masculinities
 - derogatory comments from instructors:
 - *“girls can do better”* or *“you bunch of girls are always at the back”*⁹
 - Emotional expression as ‘feminine’ and therefore *unmilitary*:
 - *‘water drops remain women’s weapons’*¹⁰
 - *‘real men’* do not show feminine emotions⁶

Why the Military?

Two common discourses, providing this circular argument:

1. Traditional masculine competency embedded within public understanding

*“I think teh [the] record of women doing anything in combat situations apart from nursing behind the lines is questionable. As to them walking into combat zones carrying **60lbs of kit**, I think we all know the answer to that one. **Unless they are Fatima Whitbread lookalijkes [lookalikes], they will be sharing their weight around on all the unfortunate male team members. Not sure I'd give a weapon to a hormonal woman either...**”*

(Thread comment from The Standard, 2013)

Why the Military?

2. Women (and associated characteristics) put other recruits at risk:

‘the nature of the activities in question and the context in which they are carried out... such exclusion...were proportionate, appropriate and necessary for the purpose of guaranteeing public security.’

(MoD, 2010)

*“The UK looked at this same issue some years ago and decided this was not a good idea, in 2002 and 2008. **Thirty years of studies, reports and actual experience** have shown that in **direct ground combat units**, the infantry, **women do not have an equal opportunity to survive or to help fellow soldiers to survive.** The physical aspects of it are only part of the reason.”*

(The Express, 2013)

Aims and Method



- Military Masculinities –
 - High levels of psychological vulnerability
 - Resistance to emotional expression
 - Acceptance of/resistance to psychological help
- Masculinity as contributor to this nexus
- ***Six Interviews*** with servicemen (RAF, Army, and Marines) about their experiences of emotional life in the military
- Explore **HOW** hegemonic masculinities might be implicated and resisted in these accounts

Analysis:

- The Military Masculine Identity
- **The Brotherhood: Supportive or Regulatory?**
- **The Emotional Dichotomy:**
Inappropriate/Appropriate Emotionality
 1. *Humour*
 2. *Concretisation*



The Brotherhood:

- Clear **tension** between historical construction of masculinity, and nature of working environment:
‘Masculine’ absence of Emotion
Vs
Emotion implicit within environment
- ***Brotherhood*** provides this ***space where emotions can be discussed*** (in the appropriate format).

Supportive?

- *equips its members to deal effectively with **emotional experiences, unpack emotional issues** within a ‘**masculine**’ form.*
- **Profound emotional bond**, and an emphasis on looking out for one another’s wellbeing:

*‘That’s the greatest part of the military, that **brotherhood** that **you’d die for each other.**’*

(Peter, Royal Marines)

..or Regulatory?(1)

Although, this sense of belongingness has its boundaries:

*[if he had **'problems with stress'** he would] 'keep it to myself as it's a **sign of weakness** because **they obviously write your report'***

(Ron, RAF).

- The notion of weakness as 'inappropriate' is built into the military community from day 1 of recruitment
- Suspicion that support offered is seen purely as purposeful and task driven – there to **'weed out the weak'**

...or Regulatory?(2)

Brotherhood is conditional support based on military masculine ideology:

*‘It’s my little theory about it, you show any sign of weakness, Erm, **we are a family but it’s very competitive at the same time and you show weakness you’re gonna get shit for it.**’*

(Mark, Royal Marines)

- Emotional expression within the military ‘family’ is mediated by the construct of **“accountability” and “weakness”**

Inappropriate / appropriate emotional expression (1)

*'If you're a **little bit upset** because **you're missing your family you tend to keep that to yourself** because end that's perceived as **weak** or, y'no, **'stop being a girl'** sort of thing, or 'missing your wife arh your with the lads come on'. I suppose **if something stressful happened on operation** like your involved in when somebody got hurt, injured or killed or whatever then erh, then I suppose **yeah they do look after you quite well.***

(Patt, Army)

*'And **he was still cracking on with his job** and again it was **really a case of your letting down your opo's if you don't**. I think the way that your trained that your looking after one another, so that even the people under the greatest stress you get on with it because of that.'*

(Peter, Royal Marines)

*'**If you're at work doing what your meant to be doing and you stop to have a cry your seen as letting the side down** so you create **a weakness in that group that is not necessarily necessary.***

(Patt, Army)

Inappropriate/ appropriate Emotional Expression (2)

Emotions as a floodgate that the **military cannot afford to allow to be opened:**

*‘personally **I can see why it’s stigmatised** I think if it wasn’t **lots of young lads would be crying their eyes out...** It seems to me if you **tell someone they are strong they are**, if you say (in a small voice) **“oh you alright mate do you wanna cry?”** then **they will.**’ (Patt, Army)*

- *Permission to be emotional will cripple the military*
- You must be tough

Strategy#1: Humour

‘The whole thing really is just a game; I mean that’s what it’s really. We use the phrase a lot just play the game, just play the game, because that’s what it is. It just one big fuckin game.’ // *it’s just an expression we use, play the game and get on with it. I think that’s what people do on operations it’s just one big joke. I know that sounds like we’re not taking it seriously but we are it’s just **in their head it’s a good way for them to make a shit situation a bit more bearable’.***

(Mark, Royal Marines)

Strategy#2: Concretisation

*‘people break, they do, you just watch them, go’
(Mark, Royal Marines)*

‘Falling to bits’

*‘I don’t think he was there’
(Ron, Royal Air Force)*



Conclusions

- *It is not a simple case of 'no emotions' in military life*
- Supportive yet regulative network
- Strategies used to 'appropriatise' distress:

You can feel intensely, but you have to do so in the 'right' way

Current/future Work

Emotionality within the Fire Service

Why? Similarly structured, male dominated environment

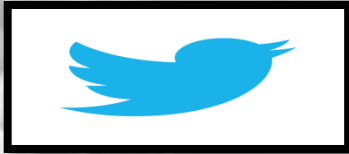
How? Interviews with 30 fire fighters, male and female

Preliminary Findings? Neutrality as embodied, emotion as regulated.

Other interested populations for expansion of findings: Paramedics, Nursing, Police.

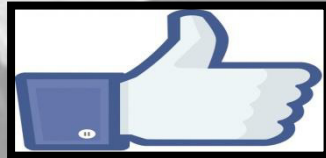
Thank you very much for coming.

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Interested?



Join the *'Social Sciences Postgraduate Reading Group'*

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