

# The Becoming of Good Soldiers

## An Ethnographic Exploration of Gender and Other Obstacles in the Military Borderland

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### *Document Version*

Final published version

### *Publication date:*

2018

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### *Citation for published version (APA):*

Sløk-Andersen, B. (2018). *The Becoming of Good Soldiers: An Ethnographic Exploration of Gender and Other Obstacles in the Military Borderland*. SAXO-Institute, Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen.

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**An Ethnographic Exploration of Gender and Other  
Obstacles in the Military Borderland**

**Beate Sløk-Andersen**



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## **An Ethnographic Exploration of Gender and Other Obstacles in the Military Borderland**

**Beate Sløk-Andersen**

PhD dissertation, December, 2018

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Cover photo: Author

## ***Acknowledgements***

“Why don’t you do a PhD about women in the military? We need insight into that subject.”

At a conference about quality assurance in higher education in 2010, a friendly and well-dressed man sitting next to me struck up a polite conversation while we waited for the opening speaker to start. Being the first to arrive and settle in at the table, I sensed a shared attention to being on time; this trait would later become a reason that I would appreciate the military profession. The man sitting next to me that morning turned out to be the research director of the Royal Danish Defence College – and the person who ignited in me a year-long process of developing ideas and applying for PhD positions in Denmark and abroad. I must acknowledge the many kind souls who supported me in this process, but the one who initially suggested that I do a PhD about the military was the catalyst for the becoming of this dissertation. So thank you, Flemming Splidsboel Hansen.

Through the process of developing and describing ideas for PhD applications, the initial focus on women in the military took a backseat, as I wanted to cast a broader view on what it means to be a soldier in this day and age. Many established researchers have contributed to my realization of this ambition, and I greatly appreciate these efforts. Once the PhD project became a reality, numerous members of the military professions have offered their experiences, thoughts, and time to my research endeavor – thank you all.

I would also like to thank my principal supervisor Tine Damsholt for her encouragement, support, and comments throughout the past three years. Tine, thank you for never saying no and for keeping me on track – it has been greatly appreciated. And thank you, Karen Lee Ashcraft, for taking me under your wing and making me feel both welcome and inspired during my research stay in Boulder.

The scholarly process of turning initial ideas into a dissertation has also required the perspectives and comments from other peers, not least of all the journal editors and reviewers who contributed to the improvement of three of the articles in this dissertation. Thanks to you all for reading, listening, and commenting with enthusiasm and curiosity.

Supporting my steps into this quite unfamiliar empirical setting, the network *Cross Field: Military Anthropology* has played a key role, especially the comments and discussion brought about by Birgitte Refslund Sørensen, Thomas Refslund Pedersen, Sara la Cour, Sebastian Mohr, Matti Weisdorf, Lærke Cecilie Anbert, Thomas Brønd, and Maj Hedegaard

Heiselberg. In a Nordic setting, this has been equally supported by an insightful group of peers working with gender issues in military organizations. I was fortunate enough to encounter Fia Sundevall, who introduced me to Alma Persson, Anders Ahlbäck, Ulla-Britt Lilleaas, and Dag Ellingsen. I have enjoyed exchanging ideas with all of you, and I look forward to continuing to do so as part of the NordForsk project “Gender Equality, Diversity and Societal Security”.

I have been fortunate enough to travel a great deal during my time as a PhD; particularly, as a visiting scholar at Linköping University and the University of Colorado, Boulder. Fortunate because I have been able to return back home with both new ideas and new friendships. For that, I would like to thank all of the inspiring scholars who welcomed me with open hearts and minds. Here, I must also extend a thank you to everyone in the network “Transformations in European Societies”. I am certain that I will be enjoying a laugh and a glass of wine with many of you in the future.

Making all of this possible by funding my position and travels, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Copenhagen as well as the external funding agencies that have supported my desire to take my research abroad: The Fulbright Commission, Christian & Ottilia Brorsons Rejselegat, Augustinus Fonden, Knud Højgaards Fond, and Fondet for Dansk-Svensk Samarbejde.

As I have grown as a scholar, I have received unparalleled support and inspiration from my excellent colleagues at the Saxo Institute, not least of all my PhD “partners in crime”. Thank you for offering hugs, listening to stories from my fieldwork, and engaging in my work with the utmost of interest. The Ethnology Section has been like a home to me during my six years as a student and three years as a PhD Fellow. But now I must fly off into the world and see what else it has to offer – and taking the knowledge I have gained from all of you, I feel able to develop new collaborations and perspectives.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Martin and Nurgle for assisting my attempts to understand and translate military lingo, and all the kind souls who have helped me through the final weeks, days, and hours: Marlene, Trine, Amy, Nanna, Charlotte, and Troels – you guys are the best. Best of all, I know that my amazing friends and family will keep supporting my academic and research efforts in future – just as they have done so brilliantly so far. Thank you for never letting me dance on my own!

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# Prelude

## Beards and the becoming of good soldiers

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We are awakened just after 05:00 in the morning – an hour earlier than we had been told to get up. It is impossible *not* to wake up due to the shouting in the hallway, banging on the doors, the sergeant barging into our dorm room, giving orders and turning on the florescent lights in the ceiling. We are told to line up in the hallway right away. We tumble out of our bunk beds, woozy and only partially awake, and we move out into the hallway where the whole platoon is lining up in a row up against the opposite wall. We are ordered to stand “at ease” like we were taught yesterday. The strict sergeant who is yelling orders is walking back and forth in front of us. He has a full and well-trimmed beard and a deep voice. With this voice, he orders everyone to shower, put on a uniform and, specific to the men, shave. This can’t possibly be good news for those who take pride in their beards, but whether or not to shave does not really seem to be up for debate. It just has to be done. We are given half an hour to get ready and line up again in uniforms. It is dark outside; the brown linoleum floor is cold, and our warm feet leave prints on it as we hurry back into our dorm rooms five minutes later.

(Based on field notes, week 1)

This excerpt describes the first morning of my participatory fieldwork in the Danish army. Here, I joined a group of conscripted soldiers during four months of basic training at a military camp on the outskirts of a provincial Danish town. I was at the military camp from the first day of training until the conscripts were discharged, living in a 12-person dorm room, wearing the uniform, getting up at 05:00 every day to clean, learning to use a weapon, participating in drills, and sleeping in the woods. I was in the process of becoming a soldier, just like the rest of the platoon. However, there was one routine in which I did not take part: the continuous removal of facial hair. Initiated on this first morning, the act of shaving was performed daily as a ritual regulation of the male bodies that are predominant in a military setting. In the following, I will utilize this issue of beards to illuminate how I will approach military service through a material-discursive lens of *becoming* (Haraway 2008).

## Disciplining the body and the soldier

While many other countries have abolished conscription, Denmark still has an active system that requires military service from all male citizens the year they turn age 18 – at least on paper. In reality, however, the 4,200 conscripts needed each year are recruited by young male and female citizens who enlist themselves (*Conscripted soldiers*) thereby in practice cancelling the compulsory element of conscription. According to a sergeant with whom I spoke immediately before I started the four months of participatory fieldwork, the first unofficial intention of the conscription period is to “break down” and then “rebuild” the young soldiers (field notes, week 1).<sup>1</sup> Thus, signs of individuality are removed by making conscripts wear identical uniforms, banning the use of jewelry and makeup, ordering them to remove any facial hair, and assigning them a ‘military’ name; a process that removes a civilian individuality and puts military uniformity in its place. The second intention is to build a new self that is in line with ideals of hierarchy, strength, and discipline. In this way, the military has an opportunity to create the disciplined soldiers they want and need – at least in those cases where the young soldiers perform in a way that makes them *recognizable* as *military subjects* (Butler 2004; Foucault 2001). This, I will suggest, is a matter of performing within assumptions of what it means to be a *good soldier*.

Most days, the first contact we conscripts had with the sergeants was early in the morning when our dorm room – as well as each of us – was inspected. Prior to this inspection, all of us would go through the routine of making our beds, putting on our uniforms, getting our appearance in order, and locking any personal items in the small cabinet that each of us were assigned. Then we would line up and wait in silence until a sergeant entered the room to inspect the room’s cleanliness as well as our individual appearance. The latter would be inspected by the sergeant standing in front of us, only a few feet away, while we stood “at attention”, looking to the right. Standing like this, the sergeant would examine us up and down, making sure that our uniforms were in order and that no earrings, camouflage face-paint, or stubble was showing on our skin. If beard stubble was spotted, the person in question would immediately be sent to the bathroom to shave.

Our platoon commander explained routines such as this to me in an interview: “Things should look nice. Plus, this way we don’t look like a bunch of amateurs” (field notes, week 1). Together with all of the sergeants, the commander also continuously reminded the

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from fieldwork included in this dissertation have been translated from Danish to English.

platoon that we should inspect each other before the sergeants showed up in the morning. This should be considered as a way to help each other out; a way to avoid being corrected by the sergeants. As such, much of the discipline was enacted among the conscripts themselves, as opposed to sergeants giving orders or correcting errors. During these morning sessions, beards became a way to regulate and discipline the bodies of the conscripted soldiers while simultaneously inscribing military standards on the (male) body.

### **Beards in the military**

There appears to be a historical connection between the military and beards. In this setting, beards have been linked to questions of safety, prestige, willingness to fight, military abilities, and hygiene as well as discipline (Peterkin 2001; Horn 2004; Walton 2008; Dowd 2010; Pedersen 2017). For example, in his comprehensive book on the cultural history of beards, *Allan Peterkin notes that the underlying premise behind policies on facial hair in both the US and Canadian military* “seems to be the importance of maintaining morale, physical discipline, and overall conformity” (Peterkin 2001: 146). This connection between beards, discipline, and morale was reflected in my interview with our platoon commander. A question about discipline led to him to talk about beards – specifically, he mentioned a scenario from a TV series in which a sergeant keeps his platoon busy with the requirements for trimming their beards while awaiting orders to invade Iraq. Our platoon commander summed up the motivation behind this practice: “So he keeps them busy, or he directs their frustrations towards something else, thereby creating a united front so they can hate *him*, and things are kept in order within the platoon” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview with Lt. Petersen). Keeping the soldiers active and on their toes in the absence of combat becomes a way of making sure they are “ready to fight” even when boredom prevails. And indeed, a good soldier is always ready. As one of my fellow conscripts wrote on the first page of his notebook: “Be ready, all the time!” (field notes, week 1).

Another example of how the taming of facial hair is interpreted in a military context comes from colonel and military scholar Bernd Horn who has used beards as a specific example of what distinguishes Special Operation Forces (such as the US Navy SEALs or the Danish Frogman Corps) from the so-called “conventional military”. In his view, the appearance of these specialized troops with their often unshaved faces is an expression of a “lax

discipline” that is in no way in line with the standard of discipline for which the conventional military is known (Horn 2004: 9). Here, the beard becomes an expression of an internal boundary within the military, materializing a divide between “us and them”. In the Danish military, however, many well-groomed beards can be seen on the faces of soldiers in both the conventional military and the special-operation forces. Here, beards may in fact indicate that discipline and hierarchy take a different form once the conscription period is over. Especially among Danish soldiers who are deployed on international missions, there seems to be a well-established tradition of growing full beards while, for example, serving three to six months in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Mali. In this case, a full beard might be interpreted as a testimony to having become a *real soldier* who has been in close proximity to actual combat (Pedersen 2017). A testimony, however, that only some bodies are able to display.

Thus, the presence and removal of beards does not only function as a way to create visual uniformity; this repetitive process reaches far beyond the surface of the soldiers’ faces. Because, while shaving and trimming beards does not serve much of a practical purpose in and of itself, it appears to be entangled in the production of cohesion, discipline, morale, hierarchy, gender, and the becoming of real soldiers; matters that this study will address.

### **Connecting the beard to being ‘a good soldier’**

During my first week at the military camp, we were told that conscripts could apply for permission to grow a beard after the first month had passed. An application form should be filled out and given to the platoon commander, including a drawing of the beard one wished to grow. Only three conscripts were granted this permission during the four months of basic training; this surprised me, as I knew that several other men had expressed a desire to grow a beard. When I asked our platoon commander – who himself had a beard – about the low number of conscripts allowed to grow beards, he laughed and told me that one conscript had on numerous occasions asked for more application forms, as there were no more left in the drawer where we were told that they could be found. But because the platoon’s second-in-command did not refill the drawer with application forms, no more applications could be approved. So even if more conscripts had wanted to grow a beard, the lack of application forms kept them from even applying. In the eyes of the platoon commander, this was clearly a way to play an innocent joke on the conscript who kept asking for an application form; an expression of the humorous tone that he and

his colleagues frequently used. But the matter of gaining permission to grow a beard might also raise a question about how a conscript is recognized as a good soldier.

The three conscripts who were granted permission to grow beards had some traits in common: they each were given responsibility and fulfilled it; they were polite and assertive when interacting with the sergeants; they were given tasks to instruct or educate the rest of us, and we followed them; they expressed a certain level of sexual potency; and they showed interest in continuing a career within the military profession. They lived up to expectations and complied with the norms of the military setting. Conversely, the conscript who repeatedly asked for more application forms was often out with injuries; he did not lead by example but rather followed the crowd; he did not take part in conversations about sexual experiences; he did not have a history of doing physical exercise; he sometimes tried to show motivation for the tasks ahead but never expressed a desire to stay in the military. In short, he did not seem to be a very good soldier.

I would suggest that the permission to grow a beard – or even being able to apply for permission – can be seen as a subtle (and perhaps unconscious) way for the sergeants to assign praise, and for the conscripts to embody the role of the good soldier. That is, a step in the process of becoming a military subject. So, while meeting the requirement to have a shaved face initially expresses discipline and the ability to adhere to the military's demand for uniformity, the opportunity to grow a beard during the conscription period appears to be a visual expression of one's abilities as a good soldier.

### **Beards and the process of becoming**

While facial hair in the form of beards is not a phenomenon exclusively delimited to the male body, none of the female conscripts seemed to need the same regulation of their facial hair. Beards on women have never had a positive connotation; instead, throughout history, a beard has “generally transformed its female wearer into a witch, freak or damaged specimen” (Peterkin 2001: 98). Hence, beards – or at least the ability to grow them – seem to be linked to the division between and the perception of men and women. Adding to this, one could say that a beard also marks the difference between a boy and a man, as it is entangled in the performance of both masculinity and age (Dowd 2010; Petersen & Mackinney-Valentin 2016). Seen from this perspective, being allowed to grow a beard can be understood as a transition from childhood into manhood; a transformation that is testimony to having ‘become’.

However, the sergeants who were newly appointed in their role as superiors had to realize that it took more than just a higher rank to materialize this becoming by growing facial hair. Because most of them had only completed their own time as conscripts less than a year previously, they had not had an opportunity to grow a full beard like the ones visible on the faces of more experienced sergeants and officers. Thus, rather than viewing conscription as a transformation process with a stable endpoint in the categories of 'soldier' or 'man', I explore conscription as *a becoming*; a process that requires continuous work and embodied performance as a way to be recognized as a good soldier.

Beards entangle questions of power and gender in the everyday intersections of materiality and discourse. They have a particular connection to the male gender, but are not exclusively tied to the male body. If beards grow on women's faces, then their meaning changes, just as the symbolism and social function of the beard differs from one place to another – even within the military. The beard does not have a universal function in military settings, but perhaps they can still be used as a way to approach the question of how one becomes recognizable as a military subject. Acknowledging that this bodily materiality *does* something and is *done* differently, depending on the body to which it clings, can help us to unpack the complex entanglements that are involved in the becoming of good soldiers; a process in which razors, repetition, orders, body posture, control, and correction intertwine in ways that make some conscripts more recognizable than others.

With this short text about beards, I invite the reader to dive right into the empirical foundation of this dissertation, which revolves around everyday life in the military borderland in Denmark, primarily among conscripted soldiers. As I have attempted to illustrate with the issue of beards, my analysis explores the gendered body, discipline, affects, uniformity, and routines as they appear in the continuous becoming of the beard as a material-discursive phenomenon. This is the overall approach and some of the key concepts that appear in this dissertation, which is the result of three years' commitment to understanding the military from 'the inside' – a process that has been explored through ethnographic fieldwork and driven by curiosity. In the following introduction, I will present the motivation for such a research project and give a short introduction to the overall approach and academic setting for this work.

# Introduction

## Becoming good soldiers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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Becoming a good soldier is a difficult task. As I suggested with the example of beards in the prelude, meeting the expectations for what it means to be 'good' within a military setting might be both more appealing and challenging than scholars have thus far insinuated. Not least of all in light of claims that men "need to be dragged kicking and screaming into [war], constantly brainwashed and disciplined once there, and rewarded and honored afterwards" (Goldstein 2001: 253). While a great deal of research has attended to the difficulties of making men want to fight for their country, this dissertation turns the matter upside down – specifically, by inquiring into the difficulties of becoming part of the military profession; challenges that have become more pronounced as systems of forced military service have been downscaled or even abolished throughout most of the Western world.

While also 'just' another profession in which inclusion requires a certain performance and the acquisition of new knowledge and routines, the military profession is repeatedly positioned as out-of-the-ordinary.<sup>2</sup> As noted by international-relations scholar Cynthia Enloe: "In so many countries today the state's military has out-of-scale political influence and symbolic significance – so often being made to represent patriotism, citizenship, national identity, heroism, security, belonging, manliness" (2018: 29). Thus, an inquiry into the mechanisms 'making' the soldiers of tomorrow seems called for, not least in a Danish context where the involvement in coalition wars has recently turned the country into a "warring nation" (Daugbjerg & Sørensen 2017). However, while I acknowledge the potentially very deadly and harmful consequences of soldiers' work, I explore this

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<sup>2</sup> References to *the military profession* rely on an understanding of 'professions' as a form of social organization building on career hierarchies and specialization (Perkin 2002). Further, it is assumed that "professions due to their historical meaning tend to have developed subtle cultural codes for the way individuals are seen as suitable (or non-suitable) for the work performed" (Mühr & Sløk-Andersen 2017: 367), see also Ashcraft 2013; Ashcraft et al. 2012; Butler et al. 2012; Sullivan 2012). The 'professionalization' of military work is for instance reflected in the following quote from a publication on the changed reality for the Danish military in 2003: "The many new types of tasks will require better planning and organizing, better training and better education. It is not about being a representative share of the Danish population; it is simply about being the best" (Bonnén & Poul Dahl 2003: 101, my translation).

profession through the lens of everyday life, following the claim that “Mundane military processes, such as military training, have major impacts” (Hearn 2003: xiii). My aim with this dissertation is to analyze how being a good soldier is performed in the everyday lives of conscripted soldiers, and how particular understandings of ‘good’ affect the embodied becoming of soldiers.

## **A very short introduction to the conscription system**

In the aftermath of the Cold War and the emergence of the ‘war on terror’, military scholars seem to agree that the ways in which wars are waged have fundamentally changed (Kennedy-Pipe 2000; Bonnén & Dahl 2003; Spohr Readman 2004; Jørgensen & Breitenbauch 2008; Sjoberg & Via 2010). This has simultaneously affected the work of soldiers, as they now have to maneuver through combat situations that are less focused on the defense of territorial boundaries and more on peace-building and -keeping and the ‘winning of hearts and minds’ (Segal 1995; Kold 2006, Jørgensen & Breitenbauch 2008; Persson 2011). Thus, I have taken my point of departure in the premise that what it means to be a good soldier in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must thereby also have been redefined. Exploring the Danish case, this dissertation focuses empirically on military service; the main entry point to the military profession in Denmark.<sup>3</sup> Here, at the boundaries of the profession, it is possible to investigate how one becomes recognizable as a good soldier.<sup>4</sup>

The legal foundation for the conscription system can be found in the Danish Constitution which states, “Every man able to bear arms is obliged in person to contribute to the defense of the homeland” (*The Danish Constitution 1849*, my translation); this formulation has not changed since it was introduced with the first Constitution of 1849. Today, most

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<sup>3</sup> In a recent report on the possible future scenarios for the Danish conscription system, it was noted that 80% of those who applied to educational programs in the Danish Defence had decided to apply during or after their conscription period. Adding to this, more advanced members of the military also applied to some programs; it is highly likely that most of these soldiers went through conscription at one point, too. The few applicants with no prior military training tended to apply for more specialized educational programs, such as pilot or language officer (*Recruitment potential for the Danish Defence*).

<sup>4</sup> Both *borders* and *boundaries* may be used to refer to what I describe here. But, as the word borders has typically been used to refer to state borders, I use the term boundaries which is more often used to describe cultural or symbolic demarcations (Sandberg 2009: 20-21). However, it can be argued that even state borders may be symbolic: “Both ethnic and national collectivities are constructed around boundaries that separate the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’”. As such, they are both the Andersonian ‘imagined communities’ (Yuval-Davis & Støtzel 2002: 330). Boundaries is also the term used by MacLeish and most other scholars introduced in this chapter. The additional use of the term *borderland* is a way to stress the ambivalence inherent in defining this sphere.



young Danish citizens take their first steps towards joining the military 'inside' the year they turn 18, which is when they receive a letter telling them to appear for the draft examination (da: *session*). This is compulsory for male citizens, whereas female citizens are given the opportunity as a non-binding offer. Travelling to the nearest of six recruitment centers where the draft takes place – which have recently been relocated from a civilian setting to military camps – the young citizens take their (perhaps) first physical steps into the military. During the draft examination, military personnel determine whether or not these young citizens are eligible to do military service based on an intelligence test, a medical examination, and a screening for mental illnesses. Of the 4,200 young men and women who end up serving each year, most go through a military service made up by a four month basic training in the army (this branch of the Danish Defence trains 94 percent of all conscripts). After being discharged, the conscripts are obliged to assist in cases of national emergency for an additional five years; an obligation that has supposedly never been utilized and of which few seem to be aware when they enlist.

For centuries, conscripts have filled a majority of the ranks in the Danish military; a situation that is far from the case today where conscripts only receive a very basic military education. Indeed, the Danish conscription system seems to be ever-changing. Even within the relatively short timespan from when the idea for this study was formulated until it was written up in this dissertation, the outlook for the conscription system has changed. There was first a pattern of recurrent cutbacks and debates about its potential abolishment, which were, however, followed by increased financial support and intake of conscripts as a result of the recent political defense agreement.<sup>5</sup> This turn of events points to the relevance of a study such as mine, and it also reflects the opening remark from a text about conscription from 1839: "There are hardly any public constructions within the state more difficult to design or give the right shape than conscription" (Meydall 1839: 1, my translation).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See e.g., Jørgensen & Breitenbach 2008; *Danish Defence – Global Involvement 2009*; *Report on conscription 2012*; *Danish Defence Agreement 2010-2014*; *Danish Defence Agreement 2013-2018*; *Danish Defence Agreement 2018-2023*.

<sup>6</sup> As illustrated in the scarce literature that exists about the conscription system in particular, this is indeed a system that has had many different shapes and sizes in Denmark (Østergaard 1998; Bjerg 1991; Østergaard et al. 1999; Jørgensen & Breitenbach 2008). The scope, the length, and the purpose as well as political and civil support for the conscription system has changed – and will most likely keep changing.

Readers not familiar with Danish society or the Danish military setting might be puzzled by the lack of danger and lethality in this dissertation. I suggest that this is a consequence of both the absence of military action on Danish soil (such as civil wars, genocide, or invasions) since World War II as well as the absence of 'real' combat during the conscription period. This absence appears crucial for the great extent to which conscripts volunteer to serve. This is also indicated in how recruitment efforts do not explicitly address matters of serving or defending the nation but instead make use of statements such as, "Are you ready for a once-in-a-lifetime experience?" (*Career in the Danish Defence*, my translation).<sup>7</sup> So while the Danish Defence can account for around 75,000 deployments since 1991, particularly to the Balkans and Afghanistan (*Deployed Soldiers*), doing military service seems to be characterized by an absence of atrocities or 'real' combat.

### **Embodying the military borderland**

Deciding to make military service the focal point in a study on soldiers has been met with a great deal of surprise and skepticism throughout the research process. Told about my research project, military personnel often responded with questions such as, "But if you want to know something about soldiers, then why bother to engage conscripts?" These questions – often combined with a perplexed look of bewilderment – hinted at a perception held by many; that conscripts are not soldiers. At least not 'real' soldiers. I analyze this reluctance to see conscripted soldiers as insiders to the military profession as expressions of *boundary work*. Here, I expand on the work of military scholar Kenneth T. MacLeish, who argues that the divide between a military and civilian sphere is the product of a "constant policing, performing, and imagining of the boundaries between in and out" rather than an actual and tangible divide (2015: 17).

Finding themselves on the threshold of the military profession, conscripts are neither completely inside nor outside of the military – rather, they appear to be situated in a sort of *military borderland*. Analytically, I use this position to explore *the soldier* while this phenomenon is still open and contested. Therefore, the empirical foundation for this study was generated by an ethnographic exploration into this borderland; as such, I followed the

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<sup>7</sup> In a recent study on how conscription is presented on the homepages of the national militaries in Nordic countries, ethnologist Barbro Blehr (2018) found that the Danish Defence is the only one that presents conscription as something citizens might want to do to get a break from their everyday lives – in other words, they did not only focus on recruiting professional soldiers for the future.

process from the recruitment and drafting of citizens through the four months of military basic training ('conscription'). As I describe further in Chapter 3, *Setting the Scene*, I participated in a recruitment event targeted at women, conducted observations at one of the recruitment centers responsible for drafting citizens, interviewed conscripted soldiers, sergeants, and officers involved in military service, and even went through this military training myself, thus "performing the phenomenon" (Wacquant 2006).

Participating in the military service myself – albeit on different terms than the conscripted soldiers – was motivated by the perceived centrality of the body within the military profession, as suggested in the international state-of-the-art. Military scholar Kevin McSorley, for instance, argues that: "The reality of war is not just politics by other means but politics incarnate, politics written on and experienced through the thinking, feeling bodies of men and women" (2015: 1). And while war appeared quite absent during my fieldwork, critical scholars have over the previous decades challenged the delineate assumption that war only happens on the battlefield (Enloe 2000; Cohn 2013; MacLeish 2013; McSorley 2015). Thus, I approach the bodies of soldiers as the fleshy materiality on and through which the military profession is constituted; at once so distant from and embedded in war. As such, it made sense to apply an auto-ethnographic approach in which my own body was engaged in the process of becoming a soldier.

Although the need for well-functioning and disciplined bodies as the foundation for any military has been asserted numerous times (see e.g., Arkin & Dobrofsky 1978; Lande 2007; Carreiras & Kümmel 2008; Maninger 2008; Kold 2011), only a few scholars have explored the embodied experience of soldiers 'from within' (Ben-Ari 1998; Jaffe 1995; Lande 2007). In this dissertation, the centrality of the body and my own embodied auto-ethnographic experiences are described in order to unpack how subtle processes constitute some as insiders while prompting others to leave the military borderland – never to return again.

### **The everyday life of a profession**

Shaping how we speak about the phenomenon of war, MacLeish (2015) argues that *unshakeable doxa* cast some statements as obligatory and others as unspeakable. Examples of obligatory statements might be "It is hell, it is a tragedy, it is unavoidable" while unspeakable statements could be that "It might be sexy or fun, that it might be a good way to get rich or at least avoid being poor" (2015: 14). Adding to this, I suggest that

this does not only apply to war but also to the military profession at large: when it comes to soldiers, some statements may appear illegitimate or unwanted.

An ethnographic approach focused on the repetitiveness of everyday routines within the military profession may seem to challenge such *unshakeable doxa*, which typically present service in the military as anything but ordinary.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the military is enrolled in what I refer to as a *narrative of exceptionalism*; here, life-or-death scenarios are set as the backdrop of rationales and decisions. Inscribing the potential for ending up in *the line of fire*<sup>9</sup> hereby becomes a point of reference for the entire profession. So although the ways in which wars are waged and the competences needed in the military profession have changed, the perception of war as an extraordinary situation still appears to constitute the military setting as out-of-the-ordinary. Cultural-studies scholar Rita Felski addresses this as she outlines the ways in which everyday life has been conceptualized by scholars. She notes that:

“... everyday life is typically distinguished from the exceptional moment: the battle, the catastrophe, the extraordinary deed. The distinctiveness of the everyday lies in its lack of distinction and differentiation; it is the air one breathes, the taken-for-granted backdrop, the commonsensical basis of all human activities. ‘The heroic life’, writes Mike Featherstone, ‘is the sphere of danger, violence and the courting of risk whereas everyday life is the sphere of women, reproduction and care’.” (2000: 80)

From a perspective such as the one presented here through the words of sociologist Mike Featherstone, it is clear that the military setting should be seen as anything but ordinary; it is heroic, dangerous, extraordinary, and oriented towards combat as its *raison d'être*. It represents everything that the repetitiveness and comfort of everyday life does not. Thus, my attention to *everyday life* in this dissertation is in direct contrast to this framing of the military profession. However, I do this in order to access the silent and silenced mechanisms involved in the becoming of good soldiers.

Approaching the elusive phenomenon of everyday life, I focus on the *routines* of which it is arguably comprised; the repetitive tasks and actions that create patterns in our daily lives (Ehn & Löfgren 2010; Ehn et al. 2015). It has been argued that routines enable an

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<sup>8</sup> Related to this, another example of an unspeakable doxa may be how many Danish soldiers are frustrated with the boredom that they experience during their deployment on international missions; boredom caused by the continuous repetition of daily routines rather than involvement in “real action” (Pedersen 2017), as “only” 38% of Danish soldiers who return home from their first deployment have been in a combat situation (Lyk-Jensen et al. 2012: 94).

<sup>9</sup> The Danish term “den skarpe situation” is translated to *the line of fire*.

economization of decisions, thoughts, and time because, once decisions and actions have turned into routines, “everyday life takes care of itself” (Ehn & Löfgren 2010: 67). Following this argument, I focus on the routines of everyday life in the military borderland as a way to access shared assumptions and *silent knowledge* about the military profession before they become routines and thus “sink into the body and turn into reflexes” (Ehn et al. 2015: 6). This again supports my empirical and analytical attention to the embodied process of becoming, not least of all through the conscription period.

### **Engaging with gender in a military setting**

Due to the differentiation between men and women that is used to define whether or not a citizen is required to perform military service, the conscription system itself calls attention to gender.<sup>10</sup> Before assessing the eligibility of prospective soldiers at the draft examination, the category of gender is already inscribed as the most fundamental dimension of who is assumed to become (good) soldiers.

In a Swedish context, historian Fia Sundevall (2011) argues that, as long as such a system is in place, a male-only conscription system continues to create an intrinsic bond between the male gender and the military. Although women in Denmark have an opportunity to serve on terms (almost) equal to men, the male foundation of the conscription system becomes clear in an array of websites, information flyers, and recruitment events targeted at women. These are often part of an attempt to recruit more women, yet they simultaneously mark women as being outside the norm. For example, only the websites targeting women present frequently-asked questions such as, “Can I have long hair?” and “What if I become pregnant?” while stressing that military service requires a good amount of physical strength (*Women’s Career in the Danish Defence*, my translation). Similarly, the questionnaire regarding health conditions that a citizen must fill out prior to the draft examination is gender-specific, but the only difference is that women are asked whether they are experiencing any recurrent problems in their reproductive organs (*Health Questionnaire* p. 4, see Appendix 1); a question that might also be relevant to ask the young men. However, all of these instances in which gender is inscribed in the recruitment

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<sup>10</sup> The sex/gender categories operationalized in the determination of which citizens are required to enter military service are mutually exclusive and biologically-determined. As I argue elsewhere (Sløk-Andersen 2011a), this classification of citizens reproduces cultural assumptions about men and women, and reinforces the factors upon which a system like gendered conscription is based.

process are supposed to fade into the background once the young men and women enter the military setting, as “there is usually no difference between the sexes” (*Women’s Career in the Danish Defence*, my translation).

While there is a prevalent belief that “a soldier is a soldier first and foremost” (Fiala 2008: 49), as also expressed in the last quotation, military scholars such as Helena Carreiras note that conscription is also depicted as a process that turns boys into men as well as “a ritual of differentiation between men and women, or better, between socially constructed categories of masculine and feminine” (Carreiras 2006: 41). Indeed, the concept of *masculinity* in particular has taken center-stage in research about gender in the military setting, with some scholars arguing that militaries are inherently defined through ideals of *masculinity* (e.g., Carreiras 2006; Baaz & Stern 2010).

In my study, I go beyond these positions, as I approach the military with a wider analytical scope in order to unfold how and where gender might come to matter in the everyday life of conscripted soldiers. Instead of foregrounding gender categories, I attempt to let gender emerge in the midst of other meaning-making categories that appeared in my empirical material. Approaching gender this way, I draw on a background in not only ethnology but also gender studies (Sløk-Andersen 2011a; 2011b; 2014). The ambition in this dissertation is to let the ethnography define the relevance of gender.

## **Studying the becoming of good soldiers**

The expression “a good soldier” appeared as an emic term during my ethnographic fieldwork, after which it has transformed into an analytical figure that enables recognition as an insider to the military profession. Because the conscripted soldiers I met during my fieldwork were not considered to be ‘real’ soldiers – either by they themselves or other soldiers – the figure of *the good soldier* is a prerequisite for *military subjectivity* in which one must live up to *recognizable* patterns and norms, I will suggest. Here, I draw on Judith Butler’s discursive understanding of subjectivity (1990; 1993; 2004), however, developing on this by constructing the figure of the good soldier as a multiple phenomenon. This understanding of good as multiple is based on a claim that “valuing does not just have to do with the question of how to appreciate reality as it is, but also with the question of what is appropriate to do to improve things” (Heuts & Mol 2013: 137); a question that may imply multiple answers. Reflecting a performative approach, this implies that good is practiced between actors; i.e., the valuing of soldiers happens among inhabitants in the

military borderland. Thus, military subjectivity is constructed analytically as a continuous and collective process of becoming as good.

The conceptualization of *becoming* as it is operationalized in this dissertation is inspired by Donna Haraway (2008), who argues that subjectivity is a continuous process of *becoming-with*; this specifically refers to the entangled process of how phenomena come to matter in ensemble with each other. Implied here is an understanding that, rather than a phenomenon having an inherent meaning, this is constituted through continuous processes of entanglement that also involve non-human actors. Thus, I also address the materiality of the military profession in order to explore how this takes part in the becoming of soldiers. Combining this with my inspiration from Butler, *the good soldier* is presented as a material-discursive figure.

Through my ethnographic fieldwork as well as my own experience of embodiment, the matter of *affects* have appeared to be a mechanism that participates in the performing and policing of good soldiers. By engaging with the laughter, anger, and frustration that indicate when performances are either inside or outside the accepted understandings of 'good,' the power of affects are included qua their ability to constitute collective *moods*; according to Sarah Ahmed (2014a; 2014c), these render some recognizable as subjects while discarding others.

### **An ethnological contribution to (critical) military studies**

Within ethnology, previous studies have examined national militaries (Damsholt 2000; Wollinger 2000; Højrup 2002; Engman 2013; 2014). Here, a nation-state's struggle for territorial recognition has, for instance, been related to the emergence of the welfare state and the development of a patriotic discourse. My intention with this dissertation is to contribute to this field of research by exploring *the good soldier* as a material-discursive figure that can illuminate how military subjectivity is constituted through a process of continuous becoming. Because, although war veterans have appeared as a new field of research within Danish military studies since the country's first veteran policy was implemented in 2010 (see, e.g., Sørensen & Pedersen 2012; Sørensen 2015), little ethnographic research has focused on what comes *before* one's status as a veteran;

namely, the process of being or becoming a soldier.<sup>11</sup> While it seems as though doing ethnography in a military setting has begun to gain a bit of momentum in Scandinavia, it is still in contrast to the matter-of-fact strategic analysis of military threats and foreign-policy strategies in which this field is enmeshed (Baker et al. 2016). When it comes to the military setting, the somewhat provocative title of Silvia Gherardi and Barry Turner's 1987 publication, "Real men don't collect soft data", might still apply.

My ambition with this study is twofold in relation to its intended audience. First, to the field of ethnology and related disciplines that are attentive to societal and cultural issues, I hope to contribute insights into an empirical setting that is argued to be of crucial importance to society at large (Enloe 2000; Engman 2013). Second, to the cross-disciplinary field of military studies, I hope to challenge well-established assumptions about what it means to be a soldier as well as the military profession's regulation of who gets to become one; perhaps my work will lead to new ways of thinking about conscription and the military profession. Not least of all, I question long-held beliefs that the recruitment of soldiers is based solely on an objective, non-gendered assessment of a soldier's performance.

This multiple aim has influenced the communicative strategy for this dissertation; specifically, I have attempted to write in a tone that accommodates a wide (and diverse) range of potential readers. Introductions and explanations of theoretical concepts or arguments that may seem obvious to like-minded ethnologists or anthropologists familiar with, e.g., concepts related to performativity or ethnographic fieldwork are included to make the analysis accessible to military scholars from other disciplines. Similarly, scholars or professionals who are familiar with military terminology will have to bear with simplified descriptions and generalized terms related to military work; e.g., I refer to most soldiers involved in the training of conscripts as "sergeants" rather than mentioning their specific ranks (of which there are four or five). I have done this 'translation' to accommodate academic readers who may have no prior knowledge of the military setting and its terminology.

However, those who are familiar with the military profession and the organizational structure of the Danish Defence may have already questioned *very* loosely defined and

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<sup>11</sup> Military anthropologist Thomas Randrup Pedersen (2017) has with great ethnographic attentiveness explored the becoming of Danish 'warriors', coining the term *soldierly becomings* to describe this process of becoming as a soldier and as a human. I shall return to his work in the research review presented in the next chapter.



broadly applied terms, such as ‘the military setting’ and ‘the military’.<sup>12</sup> The argument for using these terms relates to my interest in the military profession as a profession that cannot be unanimously or unambiguously defined empirically due to the boundary work that continuously negotiates and polices its boundaries. Rather than referring to ‘the armed forces,’ which would be more in line with the European state-of-the-art research that addresses this empirical field, vague terms such as ‘the military’ and ‘the military setting’ are used precisely in order to avoid referring to a specific organization or institution of which readers might have preexisting and empirically-specific knowledge or familiarity.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the vagueness is intentional in this case, although it is based on a recognition that the military profession is primarily tied to the Danish Defence and often unfolds within the physical space of military camps – although not *only* here.<sup>14</sup>

The most extensive part of my ethnographic fieldwork was conducted with the Danish army; specifically, in a company that trains conscripted soldiers. However, as my material also includes political defense agreements, recruitment materials, fieldwork at recruitment centers, and more, the empirical foundation of the dissertation extends beyond the army. Thus, following my intention to unfold the military profession, the analysis addresses a context that is broader than ‘merely’ conscription or the army. I recognize, however, that this is an analysis of the military profession as seen *from* the borderland with a particular connection to the army.

## Structure of the dissertation

The analytical core of this dissertation is comprised by four articles within which I explore the material, discursive, affective, and embodied aspects involved in the performative

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<sup>12</sup> If I were writing this dissertation in Danish, I would most likely refer to either “*militæret*” or “*forsvaret*” as the field within which the military profession is established – and not “*Forsvaret*” (the Danish Defence), which refers to the organizational institution/authority.

<sup>13</sup> As this argument has developed during the research process, the two first articles written as part of this dissertation refer to the “Danish Armed Forces” and the armed force.

<sup>14</sup> I have translated the Danish term “*kaserne*” to *military camp*. It is challenging to find one term that works as an unambiguous reference, and which a range of English-reading audiences would understand; possible alternatives could also be barracks, garrison, and military base. To Danish military scholars and soldiers, a military camp typically indicates a temporary construction in a mission area, whereas a garrison might be the most correct translation of “*kaserne*”. However, I chose military camp in an attempt to ensure that anyone reading this dissertation would easily understand that I am referring to a fenced, physical setting that is restricted to military personnel only, and which is made up of a variety of buildings (barracks, training facilities, garages, offices, etc.) where soldiers work and may also live.

becoming of a military insider. These articles each focus on one material-discursive phenomenon that, during my fieldwork, presented itself as essential to the military profession: the disciplined body, will, uniforms, and humor. By examining the matter of recognition across all four articles, this dissertation challenges the assumption that the uniform erases all social categories potentially inscribing difference between human beings outside the military. Rather, my analysis suggests that being recognized as a 'military insider' requires continuous work and contains multiple obstacles, which makes it more difficult for some to become recognizable than others. Engaging with these matters, the overall research questions of this study are: *How is the figure of 'the good soldier' performed in everyday life among conscripts, and how does this figure affect the embodied becoming of military subjects?*

Unfolding these questions, the dissertation presents four chapters and four articles. In chapter 1, *Setting the scene*, I explore the concept of boundary work in order to establish and delimit the empirical field of my study. This is followed by a review of the state-of-the-art within the relevant research fields, presenting the work with which the dissertation is in dialogue and on which it builds. Based on this setting of the empirical and scholarly fields within which the dissertation moves, I then present the research object of the dissertation.

In chapter 2, *Analyzing the good soldier*, I unfold the ontological and epistemological framework for my approach. This includes a detailed description of my analytical figure, *the good soldier*, and the concept of recognition on which it is built. Following this, I present the three analytical strategies I use to explore recognition; i.e., affects, valuing, and routines.

In chapter 3, *Openings and closings*, I reflect on some of the most significant methodological considerations and decisions that were involved in my research process. Here, I address the steps I took in the ethnographic process, and I discuss how these affected the analytical potential of the dissertation; not least of all, the bodily dimensions of my fieldwork. Following this, I present some of the essential ethical issues that are necessary to consider when studying a field that can be closely related to questions of life-and-death. Finally, I discuss how I chose the topics of the four analytical articles.

With regards to the analytical core of the dissertation, the four articles included are:

1. Researching the body – the body in research. Reflections on participatory fieldwork in the Danish army

2. Vomit over tears. The performance of will among conscripted soldiers
3. How good soldiers become-with their uniforms: an exploration of uniformity in practice
4. The butt of the joke? Laughter and potency in the becoming of good soldiers.

The concluding chapter 4, *The difficulties of becoming of good soldiers*, summarizes the overall work I have presented in the dissertation. Here, I discuss the main findings and insights from the four articles, followed by some closing remarks and reflections about potential areas for future research that may be suggested by my work in this dissertation.



**Illustration 1. The courtyard between the barracks where conscripts live in dorm rooms**

## Figure 1: Military structure

*The following outline of the Danish military's structure is presented from the perspective of conscripted soldiers, for whom the squad, the platoon, and the company were the most obvious and tangible contexts. Conscripts' knowledge and understanding of the hierarchal levels above them were thereby limited.*

### **Squad/unit**

A small group of soldiers led by a squad sergeant (Sergeant Wilson). The squad sergeant appointed a second-in-command, an *alpha*, from among the conscripts in the squad. The context of the squad was most significant during drills. Within the squad, everyone had a specific function and a fixed position when lined up.

### **Platoon**

The platoon consisted of four squads; it was led by a platoon commander (Lieutenant Petersen) and a second-in-command (Sergeant Bolt). The platoon was the most significant structural unit in the everyday life of a conscripted soldier, mostly because this was where they received daily instructions.

### **Company**

The company consisted of three platoons: it was led by a company commander (Captain Schmidt) and a second-in-command (Lieutenant Olsen). Each company gathered almost every day to receive feedback and information at the company level, including announcements about which platoon won *Platoon of the Week* and which conscript was honored as *Soldier of the Month*. Parts of the training and drills were carried out at the company level.

### **Regiment**

The regiment consisted of a number of companies and was led by a regiment commander (Colonel Johnsen). Only some of the companies in this regiment were made up by conscripts; the other(s) were part of the operational efforts of the Danish Defence and, as such, they were populated with professional soldiers. This context was only visible on a few occasions when parades took place.

### **Battalion**

This context was so absent from the everyday life of a conscripted soldier that I doubt that it was ever relevant to them.

# Setting the scene

## Boundary work and the military setting

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Throughout the research process for this study, I was frequently met with confusion when I explained that I was conducting fieldwork among conscripts as a way to study soldiers. As already mentioned, the problem seems to be that conscripted soldiers are not necessarily acknowledged as members of the category *soldier*. This is supported institutionally; for instance, the Danish Defence produces separate statistics for “military personnel” and “conscripts”, which means that the latter is thus not part of the category “military personnel” (*HR in Numbers*). And, while such a statistical division is most likely due to political, economic, and strategic considerations, it contributes to establishing a distinction between the categories of *conscripts* and *soldiers*. Thus, the decision to focus most of my ethnographic efforts on the conscription system as it unfolds in the Danish army in order to explore the becoming of soldiers has required much reflection. Why focus on this concept of mandatory military service for male citizens when I could focus on the professional soldiers who account for most of the uniformed personnel deployed in international missions?

This matter relates to how, through many of my encounters with the military setting, I have had a recurrent feeling of being tested and noticing references to a distinct ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the military. This maneuvering of boundaries has even influenced the empirical foundation of this dissertation, as the idea to do a participatory fieldwork came from a couple of military scholars who have a background in the Danish Defence. Specifically, in response to a presentation I did about my project idea, they responded that if I wanted anyone from the military to pay attention to the results, I needed to go through military training myself. So I did. My decision was not only due to this comment, but it did indeed affect my methodological approach to this study.

I explore these different inquiries into who gets to ‘count’ as a soldier and who gets to ‘say something’ about the military as expressions of what I refer to as *boundary work*. Here, I draw on the work of military scholar Kenneth T. MacLeish (2013; 2015) who has argued that, rather than boundaries between military and civilian being an organizational or

educational given, they are policed and performed through continuous processes closely tied to the bodies that war affects.

Studying the US Army, MacLeish's agenda has been to reveal the ways in which warfare and violence stretch far beyond what we refer to as "war." In the introduction to *Making War at Fort Hood* (2013), he notes: "Attending closely to soldiers' experiences reveals the ways that war is not at all an exceptional condition, that soldiers – and we as civilians – are always already in the middle of it and its unfinished present" (2013: 2). With this viewpoint, MacLeish is able to illustrate how work around the boundaries of the military profession constitutes insiders and outsiders. On this basis, he argues for the existence of a "constant policing, performing, and imagining of the boundaries between in and out" rather than an actual and tangible divide when it comes to the military (2015: 17); i.e., a continual boundary work.

While my questioning of whether conscripts 'count' as soldiers has at times made me doubt the empirical foundation for this study, approaching this skepticism as an expression of a policing of boundaries around the military profession opens up a matter that is recurrent through this dissertation; namely, *boundary work*. In this chapter, I present how the field and the research object of this study have been established in relation to these continuous efforts to uphold the boundaries around the military profession. I do this by first attending to how boundary work can be empirically explored, what knowledge such an approach might produce, and how I as a researcher have navigated through the policing of these military boundaries. Next, I unfold the state-of-the-art in the research fields with which I have decided to engage. Having set the scene by first narrowing the field of the study and then lining up partners for discussion, I conclude the chapter by presenting the research object of the study.

## **Researching the boundaries**

As I began this study, I did not put an analytical label on what I experienced as boundary work. However, I was keen to focus my research on the boundaries of the military profession, as I was curious to know who is 'let into' the military. To me, conscription appeared to be part of the borderland around this profession – an unexplored one, even – since it works as the main entry point to the military profession in a Danish context.

My attention to boundaries has been inspired by scholars such as Michel Foucault (2006), Susan Leigh Star (1990), and Dorte Marie Søndergaard (2000; 2006), who have each illuminated the usefulness of an analytical approach that starts at the edge of a phenomenon. And indeed, many scholars in the social sciences and humanities have argued for analytical attention to boundaries rather than an imagined core or inside. Within ethnology, the work of social anthropologist Frederik Barth was a landmark for such an approach, particularly due to his insights in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). For Barth, paying attention to the continuous work that goes into establishing boundaries around ethnic groups was in direct opposition to the assumption that these groups have an *a priori* core or essence. Instead of viewing culture as a bound entity, it becomes a matter of negotiation through Barth's concept of boundaries. This is because what is 'inside' might not be as radically different from one group to the other, as phrased here by anthropologist Ulf Hannerz:

"Ethnic boundaries, most basically group/group, would be signaled culturally by whatever diacritica people on either side chose to recognize, but this would say nothing about the sheer amount of culture that could actually be shared across those boundaries, or the amount of cultural variation that might be contained within the boundaries, within groups."  
(Hannerz 1997: 539)

Nevertheless – or exactly because the cultural variation within boundaries and the shared culture across them might be extensive – boundary work becomes crucial as a means to hold the group together. Specifically, a lack of inner substance requires continuous work to uphold the boundaries. Here, the recognition of *diacritica* – accents or marks ascribed to a group to emphasize difference – are crucial, as they constitute a differentiation or *othering* that establishes an identity felt inwards.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, the dynamics at the boundaries take on greater analytical relevance, whereas attention to the core or inside would merely contribute to essentializing an illusory inside.

Approaching boundary work from a contemporary perspective, the concept has been thoroughly investigated within ethnology by Marie Sandberg (2005). Based on her ethnographic fieldwork at the border between Germany and Poland, she describes the ambivalent and multiple character of borders. Based on interviews, cartographies, and 'walking conversations' with inhabitants of the cities adjacent to each side of the border,

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<sup>15</sup> Referring to the work of physical borders, Grassiani and Swinkels argue – in a sort of merging of both Barth and MacLeish's ideas – that "differences are constructed, policed and experienced both symbolically and materially" (2014: 11).

Sandberg unfolds the everyday practices that go into constituting the boundary between the two countries. While the empirical foundation of her work could appear to be an unambiguous physical boundary between two countries (and the outer border of the European Union), Sandberg illustrates how the border is constituted through the heterogeneous practices of inhabitants, museums, politicians, and so forth. Following a similar performative approach to the constitution of boundaries – as also seen in the work of MacLeish – my aim here is to explore what boundary work might look like in the heterogeneous everyday practices of the military setting.

By indicating how the boundaries of the military profession are policed, performed, and imagined, as MacLeish suggests, and how this is done through heterogeneous everyday practices, as Sandberg illustrated with the German-Polish border, I start by presenting two examples of how this appeared during my ethnographic fieldwork.

### ***Example 1: The narrative of exceptionalism***

From a performative perspective, it seems as though a lot of work goes into the constitution of boundaries around the military. This first example of boundary work relates to what I refer to as *the narrative of exceptionalism* that surrounds the military. This narrative is not only found among members of the Danish Defence, but stretches far beyond and into, for example, the scholarly field of military studies.

As mentioned, the idea to go through military training myself was suggested by former soldiers who claimed that no one in the military would take my results seriously if I had not been tried and tested through the conscription period myself. I would slowly realize, though, that the rationale behind such a statement is that the military profession is so radically different from anything else that only insiders can really understand it. But also, this exceptionalism legitimizes different prioritizations than those otherwise expected outside of the military. As gender scholar Alma Persson concluded in her PhD dissertation on recent gender-integration initiatives in the Swedish Armed Forces, “The military tends to be regarded as an organization out of the ordinary” (2011: 72).

To a large degree, viewing the military as radically different from any other profession is tied to notions about life-or-death as the ultimate cost of being a soldier. In writing about the historic duty of citizens, two military scholars suggest that conscription was a way for citizens to “contribute to the protection of their country or city-state and – in extremis – to



die for them” (Jørgensen & Breitenbauch 2008: 6, my translation). And, while the risk of finding oneself in life-threatening situations may not be exclusive to the military profession – just think of police officers, firefighters, prison guards, or even psychiatric staff – this is embedded in a narrative that builds boundaries between this ‘inside’ and society outside. A divide that is often referred to as military vs. civil society.

I was presented with an example of this narrative at an event in Oslo that focused on the ongoing efforts to integrate women in the Norwegian Armed Forces. Here, philosopher and military scholar Harald Høiback drew upon and reproduced this narrative about exceptionalism as he discussed the lack of academic freedom on the matter of gender integration efforts in military research. Critiquing this lack of freedom, Høiback argued that there were no military arguments to support the integration efforts, only ideology. In an article that followed the event, Høiback was quoted as saying:

“There is no doubt that in most areas of society it is an advantage to draw on competences from the entire population, not just half of it. But the values that are reasonable in civil society are not equally reasonable in a military setting.” (Jakobsen 2017, my translation)

In an opinion piece written by Høiback a few days later, he further emphasized the uniqueness of the armed forces. According to him, the performance of soldiers – as opposed to the physical performance of athletes, for instance – is a question of “whether you live or die” as well as the safety of the nation (Høiback 2017, my translation). This matter of danger and death seems to be the key argument; it is a narrative about the exceptionalism of the military setting – as opposed to the civil society outside – that is based on the close proximity of death.

This narrative can also be found in critiques of Danish politicians who, as members of the parliament or as the Minister of Defence, make the overall strategic and economic decisions about the Danish Defence (for examples, see Lorenzen 2018 or Kroll 2018). This narrative is also found in the critique of external consultants hired to provide advice on potential future organization or cost savings, as in the case of the following opinion piece:

“When a soldier on the ground in Helmand, Al Anbar, or Africa is caught in a difficult situation, it should not be an academic with five years at the University of Copenhagen who gives the order. It has to be an officer who [him]self has once lived off of field rations, slept on a field bed, and not least of all, experienced the complexity of the operations we carry out nationally as well as internationally.” (Kroll 2018, my translation)

This quote also shows that a recurrent theme seems to be an obvious lack of military experience; as outsiders, politicians and other ‘civilians’ make decisions due to “the values that are reasonable in civil society” and not those “reasonable in a military setting”, to use Høiback’s words.<sup>16</sup> And, while members of parliament and ministers are rarely insiders of the fields about which they make decisions, it is presented as more crucial within the military setting due to this proximity to death.

While much of this criticism comes from military ‘insiders’ – i.e., soldiers or scholars with a military background – the narrative of exceptionalism is supported through research on military subjects, including the field of military history. Specific to the conscription system, the narrative of exceptionalism has, for instance, been supported through scholarly attempts to present the conscription system as almost ahistorical. Although this is a quite underdeveloped research topic, the few scholars who have dealt more closely with the history of conscription in Denmark have made great efforts to argue that conscription has a history that goes far back in time. While some have argued that the concept has “in various shapes existed in many Antique societies,” others have argued that conscription in Denmark can be traced all the way back to Middle Ages or the Viking era (Jørgensen & Breitenbach 2008: 6, my translation; Bjerg 1991; Bjerg 1999; Møller 1999; Sørensen 2000; Jørgensen 2004), thus making it appear as almost an inherent part of the Danish state itself or even preceding it.<sup>17</sup>

Although the matter of protecting the country “in extremis” as a conscripted soldier can appear alien in a contemporary setting in which conscripts are nowhere near combat, conscripts may not be unaffected by the narrative of exceptionalism. Being in the borderland of an organization with a slogan that uses a double-meaning wordplay that refers to both being clever and being armed with a loaded weapon (da: “*Forsvaret. Danmarks skarpeste team*”), how does this narrative of exceptionalism permeate the becoming of good soldiers?

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<sup>16</sup> Throughout history, there has been a greater tendency to appoint Ministers of War who have been experienced and educated within the military field (Rosenløv 1980).

<sup>17</sup> Defining exactly when conscription was introduced in Denmark can be a difficult task, as this is a question of how we define “conscription”. However, its inclusion in the country’s first constitution in 1849 is the main point of reference in the history of conscription in Denmark, referred to as the time where a ‘universal’ or ‘general’ military service was adopted since social background and economic abilities from hereon – at least in principle – did not affect whether or not one was subjected to this duty (see, e.g., Nielsen 1949: 20; Jespersen 1991: 827). It should, however, be noted that adjectives like ‘universal’ or ‘general’ here refer to a conscription system only subjecting male citizens to serve in the military.

The narrative tied to matters of life and death is not only reiterated inside the military organization or military studies. Adding to the narrative of exceptionality, it has been argued that the loss of life among deployed soldiers is marked by emotions rather than by democratic debate and deliberation in public discourse (Wendt & Åsa 2016). This contributes to a boundary work that makes it difficult to formulate critical perspectives on military casualties and military engagement abroad. With reference to the concept of *unshakeable doxa* (MacLeish 2015) that I presented in the introduction, the framing of how we can even speak about war is also connected to the life-and-death scenario, albeit here in its very real consequences.

The narrative of exceptionality roughly described here is involved in the constitution of a divide between a military inside and a civilian outside. This is a divide that has been dealt with in the subfield of civil-military relation theory (e.g., Huntington 1957) as well as in critical military studies and feminist international-relations studies. These fields of study are further addressed in the research review later in this chapter. In the next section, I present another ethnographic example to illustrate what I interpret to be expressions of boundary work.

### ***Example 2: The military language***

The subtle work that goes into constituting a distinct ‘inside’ initially became visible to me in the form of acronyms and nicknames for gear, units, and people; this made it very clear that I was not on familiar ground. While the first part of my fieldwork took place at recruitment centers, where the primary job of employees is to address and attract citizens not already associated with the military, the participatory fieldwork that I did next made the boundary work quite visible. For example, when I received an email from a company commander prior to visiting a military camp, it said:

“Do we need to pick you up? If that is the case, you will be transported to the right place. If not, show up at ADMIN, bldg X at X Barracks. Then ZiC, myself, or CSM will make sure to greet you there.”

(Email correspondence, January 2016, *X used to conceal location*)

Besides emphasizing the directness of much communication in the military (this was the entire content of the email), this correspondence also made me highly aware that the learning curve would be steep. In this specific example, as well as in my earlier encounters with the Danish military profession, I pushed aside the feeling of unfamiliarity as a

symptom of my ignorance with regards to the military. But as I worked more analytically with this matter, I began to see traces of boundary work. All of these practices – using acronyms, communicating in a very direct tone, etc. – can also be read as expressions of the policing and performance of boundaries. Comments and questions were used as a means to decode whether I ‘got it’ or not; if I was an insider or outsider; and, when it was obvious that I was an outsider, comments and questions that reinforced this position.

While I started out feeling very much like an outsider, the boundaries and my position in relation to them became less obvious during my fieldwork, as I was cast as an insider at one moment and an outsider at others. Interviewing the commanders of two different conscription platoons provided me with two very different experiences. In the first interview, my somewhat messy attempt to ask questions about the so-called “humanitarian turn” within national militaries about which I had read prior to my fieldwork (Nørgaard 2004; Kronsell 2012) left the company commander looking confused:

“But I don’t see soldiers as humanitarian workers [he explains how soldiers ensure peace while *others* do humanitarian work]. I see that as being easier to complete as supplementary training than everything else. It’s more difficult to create peace than to look at peace [...] It’s soldiers we’re creating, basically. Everything else has to come second.”

(Interview with Captain Schmidt)

After having been part of his company for almost four months at the time of this interview, Captain Schmidt must have been disappointed that I expressed what he seemed to interpret as an incorrect assumption about what it means to be a soldier. My question about peacekeeping, as well as a few other questions posed during this interview, did not improve the relation between the two of us but rather solidified my position as an outsider who lacked the correct understanding of what it means to be a soldier. A feeling of awkwardness lingered in the office where the interview took place and stuck with me.

When I interviewed another company commander six months later, the situation played out very differently. After the interview ended, the company commander told me about a group of university students who had contacted him in the hope of interviewing him. Telling me about this incident, he laughed and said that they clearly knew nothing about the subject and had no idea to whom they actually needed to speak. Minutes later, he presented me with his private contact information to ensure that I could forward my dissertation to him, knowing that he would most likely be in a new position with a new email address by the time I was done. I left that encounter feeling like an insider; someone

who could laugh at others approaching this setting without really “getting it”, and someone who was in a position to participate in the boundary work. This boundary work primarily seems to happen from what MacLeish refers to as the “imagined inside” (MacLeish 2015: 17).

Exploring the use of language among defense analysts in the U.S., feminist military scholar Carol Cohn (1987) concluded that there are indeed limits as to which questions can be asked within this setting; some questions are simply illegitimate. An example from Cohn’s fieldwork was how “human death” was never mentioned among the defense analysts who work with strategies to develop and acquire nuclear weapons, despite this being a quite crucial and realistic consequence of their work. Instead, technostrategic language has transformed “death” into “collateral damage”, thereby creating distance to “the graphic reality behind the words” (Cohn 1987: 690).



**Illustration 2. The weapons conscripted soldiers learn to use**

In my case, the use of language appeared to have two different effects in the performance of boundaries. First, the development of a specific military language simply limits any understanding of what is being discussed if you are not familiar with military acronyms and nicknames. For instance, when I received the email cited above in the early days of this study, I pondered: What or who is “2iC” and “CSM”? This understanding marks a

specific differentiation between those who “speak military” and those who do not. Second, as I experienced in my interview with the first company commander, the boundary work becomes visible through the issue of which questions are legitimate or relevant to ask. Asking about peacekeeping indicated that I had not really understood what it meant to be a soldier nor had I picked up on the implied assumptions of what might be (il)legitimate questions to pose. Although doing participatory fieldwork prior to the interviews did somewhat counter this pitfall, it was still possible to fall through. Thus, the use of language both becomes an analytical observation about boundary work and a methodological consideration with regards to the type of questions I have been able to ask.

Perhaps not surprisingly, many academic publications on military matters open with a list of abbreviations, most likely in an attempt to accommodate both insiders and outsiders. In the communicative strategy for this dissertation, I have deliberately attempted to bridge an imagined inside and outside by walking the fine line between scholarly jargon and military language, hoping to be recognized as an insider in both settings – or at least someone worth paying attention to.

### **Studying ‘becoming’ through boundaries**

Other than being a fruitful analytical point of departure, how are boundaries and the work to uphold them connected to the *becoming* of soldiers? With Barth, we already have a sense of the productive effects of boundaries; they create something, but this is at a functionalistic, collective level that tells little about the continual performance of boundary work that is involved in the individual soldier’s process of becoming a military subject.

Coming from a quite different perspective than Barth, philosopher Michel Foucault has in his work illustrated the usefulness of paying analytical attention to the emergence of phenomena (Foucault 1977; 2006; 2008). At the stage before a phenomenon is naturalized, we can access it because it is still contested and being articulated. This is the stage of becoming; the sphere where a phenomenon is negotiated, its future still uncertain. For Foucault, this is equally true for the subject, as subjects come into being through their continuous relation to these boundaries. The subject is always becoming, its position never ensured. Thus, by not just starting but actually maintaining an analytical gaze on the boundaries, it is possible to explore the process of becoming and the way in which boundary work is embedded in this process. Thus, I have not only attempted to keep my

focus on the boundaries in the course of my fieldwork, but also during the analytical process. Throughout the dissertation, I explore how boundary work can be understood as central to the becoming of good soldiers.

Along with other ethnologists, Orvar Löfgren has argued for the analytical usefulness of using cultural history as a means to make the familiar strange (Löfgren & Wikdahl 1999; Ehn et al. 2015); for instance, by contrasting contemporary and historical descriptions. In the case of conscription, for instance, such a contrast can make vivid how the question of whether conscripts 'count' as soldiers might not be obvious – especially since conscripts throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> as well as in parts of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century actually comprised the majority of Danish military units, thereby constituting most of the category of *soldier*.<sup>18</sup> But, in line with Foucault's approach, cultural history can also make vivid what we take for granted if we return to the place in time when something was first introduced. Doing so takes us beyond that which is familiar, and gives us access to the emergence of new phenomena; a stage where the phenomenon is 'open' (Löfgren & Wikdahl 1999). Transferred to a military setting, conscription in its contemporary form can be seen as exactly a stage where the phenomenon of the soldier is open and in the process of becoming.

The process of becoming insiders to a specific profession has been unfolded in other ethnographic studies of professions and workplaces. For instance, Kirsten Hastrup et al. argue that the identity of a profession can be explored by "following the process through which similarity and continuity in knowledge, forms of action and collaboration emerge" and how these are distanced from those of other professions (2011: 177, my translation). My idea was that, by studying the processual becoming of soldiers – i.e., following them from their first meeting with the military profession through the completion of their conscription period – this would be exactly what I could unfold. That is, the process of crossing through the borderland and potentially becoming an insider to the military profession.

However, the military does not present itself as 'just any other profession' in which one can attempt to become an insider. Supporting the aforementioned narrative of exceptionality, conscription has often been described as a *rite of passage* (Wollinger 2000;

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<sup>18</sup> The scope of the system and the length of the conscription period has changed continuously since 1849, leading to a decrease in the number of conscripts since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sørensen 2000).

Carreiras 2006; Kronsell 2012) as the term has been conceptualized through the anthropological tradition often associated with Victor Turner (1967) and Arnold van Gennep (1960, orig. 1909). Used to describe various life events, such as marriage and death, rites of passage are perceived as universal in function, not least of all due to the recurrent pattern of these transitions. Described in relation to rituals and religion, such transitional passages for individuals or groups are defined in stages: first, there is (physical) separation from society, then a period of liminality and transition, followed by re-integration into society. Due to their transformative confinement in time and space, the individual or group returns as forever changed as a consequence of having crossed the threshold that is *the liminal phase*. Because conscription has been cast as a system that is able to transform boys into men and shape good citizen subjects (see, e.g., Arkin & Dobrofsky 1978; Damsholt 2000; Højrup 2002), it is easy to see the appeal of describing it as a rite of passage.

This can be seen in the work of ethnologist Susanne Wollinger, for instance, who followed a group of Swedish conscripts for seven months in the mid-1990s.<sup>19</sup> Based on this fieldwork, Wollinger refers to this time in the military as “a gap” during which the conscripts are cut off from the continuity of time (2000: 13, my translation); something that may have been supported by the military camp in question being quite secluded. For me, there were certainly different norms to which I had to adapt and new rationales to understand in my everyday life as a conscript, especially compared to the academic working life I led prior to my fieldwork. But referring to the conscription period (as it is organized in Denmark today) as disassociated from what temporally lies before and after seems too categorical. For instance, during the first week, the conscripts are asked whether they are thinking about continuing a professional career in the military; thus, they are already required to consider what will happen after this gap in time is over. If they want to keep this possibility open, they must initiate the application process just halfway through the conscription period. Furthermore, almost all of the conscripts with whom I trained left our military camp every weekend to go home to their own or their parents’ houses, thereby blurring ‘the conscription gap’ in both space and time. The separation was also blurred spatially, as conscripts would sometimes drive to the nearest McDonald’s in the evenings, or go out for a night of drinking most Thursdays in the

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<sup>19</sup> Wollinger uses the term *rite of passage* when describing the transformation from civilian to soldier on the first day (Wollinger 2000: 55). I would however argue that the entire conscription period becomes a rite of passage in her framing of it, albeit this is also softened in contrast to the experiences of former conscripts who were even more delineated from ‘civilian’ society.



provincial town near where the military camp was located. A few conscripts who lived close by sometimes even slept in their own homes, and then returned to the barracks as the rest of us were getting up in the morning. Thus, while using the ritual separation in space and time can be a tempting way to frame conscription, it does not seem adequate for how conscription is practiced in a contemporary, Danish setting. The process of becoming a military subject appears to be more complex and nuanced than the strictly delimited before and after that defines a traditional rite of passage.

However, the ambiguity, anxiety, and disorientation that defines a liminal phase is analytically useful with regards to the becoming of good soldiers. This liminality – which, according to Turner, turns order upside down and stops time (1967) – offers a window into what Foucault and Löfgren also point to as a useful point of departure; i.e., a stage at which something new is emerging and open. Although the linear process of a clearly defined before-during-after via a spatial and temporal separation may not be applicable in this study, I utilize the ambiguity of *liminality* as an analytical tool to make vivid that which is negotiated, (re)categorized, and in the process of becoming. By conceptualizing conscription as a “betwixt and between” (Turner 1967: 93-111); as neither fully one thing nor the other – my analysis can still benefit from the tradition of studying rituals.

### **A liminal position in “the field”**

Resisting the temptation to define conscription as well as my fieldwork through the use of analogies that refer to gaps in time and space has been a continuous challenge. And, as a woman who did not even consider doing military service in the early years of my adulthood and having only a very few friends and colleagues who have experiences to offer, the military seemed perhaps more exotic to me than it would have to someone who had grown up surrounded by ‘war stories’ and anecdotes from uncles, fathers, and friends.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the participatory fieldwork I conducted felt exotic: physically travelling to the camp, feeling estranged from my family and friends, adapting to a new setting with unfamiliar norms and rules, having to learn a new “language”, and feeling like I was doing

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<sup>20</sup> Although more women today enlist as conscripts, this sort of sharing and curiously asking questions about the military still appears to primarily happen between men – as I would learn from the interviews I conducted with the conscripted soldiers.

ethnography every waking hour of the day produced a sense of doing ‘old-school’ fieldwork. I was reminded of the intense and immersive fieldwork described in intriguing ethnographies by Bronislaw Malinowski or E.E. Evans-Pritchard that I had read as a student in the Ethnology department. And, while I never left the secure and comforting setting of the welfare state that I call home, the conscription system still felt exotic. Unlike Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard, I traveled back to my own apartment most weekends – just as the other conscripts did, often leaving the barracks completely deserted. But I still felt like I was in a separate time and space during this four-month period. Train and bus rides back and forth were spent typing notes into my computer, and the time in between felt like it was devoted to sleeping and regaining energy for ‘another round’ of conscription the following week. And, like the anxiety caused by liminality, I was uncertain about what I would take away from this experience analytically as my sense of self switched between feeling like a researcher and feeling like a soldier.

The participatory nature of my fieldwork made it appealing to think of it in terms of an empirical *field* in contrast to a private or scholarly *home*.<sup>21</sup> But what was I a participant in? Based on academic debates on the nature of ethnographical methods, anthropologist Richard Wilk argues that the *field*, defined as “separate locations for particular and specialized activities, spaces where particular knowledge were extracted” is an arbitrary construction (2011: 15-16). It is no longer possible to separate home and field, even if the field of research is (physically) far from the place we call home, not least of all due to advances in technology. As ethnologists Tom O’Dell and Robert Willim summed up Wilk’s argument, the field is not just ‘out there’ or multi-sited but rather “ubiquitous” (2011: 9).

As a consequence of the erosion of this divide between home and field – if this divide ever really existed for ethnologists exploring their own society – the researcher’s position in relation to the empirical setting transforms. Strict boundaries between a before, during, and after of being “in the field” seem arbitrary, as we are always already in relation to the object of our research. As Wilk puts it: “Today, I cannot tell you where ethnography begins and my daily life ends” (2011: 18). Similarly, I was already in a relation with my field: I had

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<sup>21</sup> According to a recent Danish anthology on fieldwork and expeditions (Nielsen et al. 2012), the relation between *the field* and *the scholar* (fieldworker) can be described with a series of agricultural and military metaphors. The agricultural metaphor refers to the researcher’s recurrent visits to the same field and an intense knowledge of it (just as farmers know every inch of their fields), while also being active in the cultivation and transformation of it. The military metaphor is more focused on the relation between fieldworkers – they are seen as competitors battling over the taking or holding of a certain field, while simultaneously perhaps fighting for disciplinary boundaries. It is easy to associate the first metaphor with the ethnographic tradition, but – especially from my perspective as an ethnologist in the field of military studies – thinking in military metaphors may not be completely off-base, either.

opinions, expectations, stereotypical ideas, and insights regarding the object of my research before I even ventured out of my office at the university and traveled to a physical space marked as “military” for the first time. For instance, I remember that I had somehow picked up on the fact that conscripts from the Royal Life Guards have more prestige than other conscripts when my friends and I would meet them in Copenhagen as we were all out partying in our late-teenage years. Thus, before I even began to explore options for where I could do participatory fieldwork, this subdivision within the army had already been ascribed specific value and character in my mind. As such, just as conscription did not appear to be a temporally and spatially confined phenomenon to me, neither did “the field.”

Further indicating the blurry lines of a distinct “field” in which to do fieldwork, I had already made observations about the military profession – now more scholarly than those from my teenage years – before I formally started my doctoral research. This research took the form of an internship at the Royal Danish Defense College, where I conducted interviews with some of the first female officers appointed in Denmark, and I participated in seminars and conferences on military subjects while I was in the process of applying for PhD positions. However, approaching a subject ethnographically with a specific research question in mind does shape what we see (as Wilk also notes), which is why I differentiate between the fieldwork I conducted as part of this study and my earlier encounters with the military. While all of these previous empirical insights are part of what Ehn and Löfgren (2010) describe as a *bricolage*, I limit the term “fieldwork” in relation to my study. Specifically, it refers to the ethnography I produced during my PhD process, thereby stressing the existence of a research question and accounting for the reflexivity that steered my approach to the empirical setting.<sup>22</sup>

However, I am unable to differentiate between the boundary work and exoticism that came from being a woman entering a male-dominated profession, being a junior researcher with little prior knowledge of military studies, the military sphere being keen on distancing itself from civil society, and the conscription system’s intention to transform those who pass through it. All of these factors seemed to blur my position and self-perception; I embodied the liminality and also participated in the boundary work. This is evident, for example, in the way I switch from referring to ‘we’ or ‘the conscripts’ in my

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<sup>22</sup> Borrowing the term from Nigel Thrift (2008), Ehn & Löfgren (2010; see also Löfgren 2014; Ehn et al. 2015) use *bricolage* to describe how they include and draw upon various types of materials in their cultural analyses of everyday life. For example, movies, art, and other elements from popular culture that are not usually on equal terms with ethnographic interviews and observations.

writing; the research process has been a continuous (dis)association and entanglement of what I perceive to be my 'self' and the object of my study.

### **An embodied exploration of the boundaries**

After selecting the conscription system as the empirical frame for this study, the next question was how exactly to explore it. From my previous studies of the military setting (Sløk-Andersen 2014; Muhr & Sløk-Andersen 2017), I had a sense that physicality and bodily strength were the defining characteristics of being a soldier; possibly even the very core of the military profession. This had been illustrated in my interviews with some of the first female officers in Denmark, as well as some of the historical sources I had analyzed: here, physical performance and admission requirements have been recurrent topics of debate with regards to women's presence in the military, and they are implicated in the policing of boundaries around the military. This attention to physical strength is supported by scholars who have argued that the body – primarily, its abilities and size – is paramount to the work of soldiers or even constitutive of the entire military profession (Richman-Loo & Weber 1993; Carreiras 2006; Lande 2007; Carreiras & Kümmel 2008; Maninger 2008; Kold 2011; McSorley 2015).

It seemed that the embodied experience of becoming a soldier was important to include in my empirical work, which led me to conduct participatory fieldwork among conscripts doing military service. Combining this with observations of other events and practices that comprise the military borderland seemed appropriate because this would give me (and my body) the opportunity to 'snoop around' the boundaries. Furthermore, this would enable me to gain insight into the subtle practices that are part of constructing the boundaries, including the distancing of other professions that Hastrup et al. mention. Because, while the existence and effect of boundary work within the military setting has already been explored, for instance, by Persson (2011), I was curious as to how this might look if examined from a material-discursive perspective; something that would perhaps be more difficult to grasp if I used interviews as the primary method.

Understanding the usefulness of participatory fieldwork, I turned to James P. Spradley and his classic volume *Participant Observation* (1980). Here, Spradley uses his own entry to the U.S. Army as a way to exemplify how we all – not just researchers doing fieldwork – start by feeling like strangers in unfamiliar social situations but slowly gain insight into

“tacit rules for behavior” in the specific context, thereby becoming “an ordinary participant” (1980: 53). Doing participant observations means going through the same process, he argues, which enables insight into these tacit rules and knowledge of the field (see also Ehn 2011). As I discuss more thoroughly in the chapter *Openings and closings*, learning (and embodying) shared knowledge can be seen as the establishment of everyday *routines*; a process that makes tasks and actions almost invisible to us (Ehn & Löfgren 2010: 82; see also Ehn 2011; Löfgren 2014). Thus, my own embodied experience of learning the routines related to being a conscript are used as a means to explore “the process through which similarity and continuity in knowledge, forms of action and collaboration emerge” as Hastrup et al. called for (2011: 177, my translation).

In addition, in her recent study of pain, queer scholar Maria Mortensen (2017) highlights the participatory approach as a useful way for her to gain insight and find her place, even physically, when observing the performance of body suspension. And indeed, the process of where and how to position one’s body in a new physical setting can be fruitful from an ethnographic perspective. As I would experience, learning how and where to stand in a military setting revealed, among other things, matters of hierarchy, disciplining of the body, and notions about being a good soldier.

In order for the reader to get a sense of my ethnographic efforts and how I have attempted to grasp the military borderland, the main elements of my fieldwork are summarized below under simple headings and presented through short descriptions (see also Figure 2, page 50). As I shall return to the methodological and ethical considerations in a later chapter, *Openings and closings*, these are only scarcely addressed here. Further descriptions and reflections about the elements of my fieldwork appear throughout the dissertation, but this outline also serves as a way to reflect on my position in the military setting.

- ***Observations at the draft examination***

One of the first things I did in the autumn of 2015 was to arrange a week of observations at one of the recruitment centers that conduct draft examinations (da: *session*). Here, I observed all parts of the four-hour long events that are formally called “Defence Day” (da: *Forsvarets Dag*). This event combines a draft examination and more general recruitment efforts. I followed the flow of the event; from the waiting before it all began to the

classroom presentations, the individual medical examinations, and the final presentation of the 'verdict' of eligibility at the end of the day.<sup>23</sup> Somewhat accidentally, I even rode on the bus to the military camp with some of the young people attending the events. For most of the day, many of these potential recruits seemed uneasy and insecure, moving around on their chairs and looking confused.

Two cohorts of draftees went through the process on most days for a total of about 200 that passed through the recruitment center each week, which made the employees quite established in their routines. I realized that arranging any informal interviews with these potential recruits would be difficult – due to the intensity of the program and the unease I sensed – but I did have several conversations with the four or five employees at the recruitment center who are responsible for the instruction and examination during the day.

- ***Participatory fieldwork***

Around the same time, I participated in a recruitment event called *Inspirational Day for Women*, which is targeted at young women who are considering doing military service. Here, I joined a large group of women, most of them in their late teenage years, as we were taken through obstacle courses, shooting simulators, and listened to presentations about what it was like to be a woman in the Danish military. Here, we had our first experience with the embodying of the military profession, as we were given short introductions to marching and standing in ranks.

A few months later, I conducted my four-month long participatory fieldwork in the Danish army, where I joined a platoon of conscripts in their basic training at a military camp. As mentioned in the prelude, I was there from day one and until the conscripted were discharged four months later, doing what conscripts do – including being yelled at by the sergeants, being annoyed at those with whom I shared close quarters, and feeling sorry for myself after exhausting or boring, long days. And without being aware it, I slowly established daily routines and gained tacit knowledge along with the rest of the platoon. Unlike everyone else, however, I had an agreement with the platoon commander that I was always allowed to stand on the sidelines and observe instead of participating if I so

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<sup>23</sup> Prior to each medical examination, I asked for permission from the citizen going into the doctor's office since they in this room would be wearing only underwear while potentially disclosing confidential information.

chose. I only took advantage of this perk one day during the first three months, as I was generally quite caught up in the process of becoming a soldier myself.

However, during the final month, I participated less during one week because I conducted interviews with conscripts and sergeants, and during a second week because I observed the platoon from the sidelines, writing field notes and wearing my own clothes instead of the uniform.



**Illustration 3.** The authors feet "on the ground" of the military field

- ***Interviews***

Between November 2015 and May 2017, I conducted a total of 39 interviews – most of these were carried out at the end of my participatory fieldwork, just before the platoon was discharged. I conducted 26 interviews with conscripts, 6 with sergeants involved in the training of conscripts, and 7 with officers who have overall responsibility for a platoon, company, or regiment. Most of these interviewees were part of or associated with the platoon that I was in myself, while a few were from other parts of the army or the Danish Defence. The intention with the interviews was to first go beyond my own feelings and experiences by encouraging other conscripts to reflect on what we had experienced, and

second to get insight into how they were navigating this borderland; what made them decide to apply to military programs – or not – and what did they think it would take for them to become a ‘real’ soldier. In the case of the sergeants and officers, my interviews were a way of accessing perspectives from someone who had already crossed the boundaries; a perspective that could be difficult to access as a ‘conscript participant’ because the distancing between conscripts and anyone of a higher rank was difficult to transgress. Interviewing the sergeants and officers one-on-one enabled me to maneuver around this boundary work.

All interviews were semi-structured (Kvale 1997) in nature but took place in very different settings; e.g., in offices, forests, fields, dorm rooms, recreational rooms. However, they were all situated within a military setting, taking place at military camps or in drill areas. Except for three, all interviews were recorded and then either transcribed or indexed.<sup>24</sup> All interviews were conducted after having acquired an informed consent. As the themes addressed in the interviews as well as observations were highly influenced by the state-of-the art presented later on in this chapter, I shall return to this matter in the chapter *Openings and Closings*.

On the less structured end of the scale, I also gained insights through several informal discussions and meetings with, for example, the Head of Recruitment at the Danish Ministry of Defence Personnel Agency, and when two conscripts showed me around a military camp while I asked them questions about their experiences in the army.

- ***Observations***

In the spring of 2017, a year after completing the four months of participatory fieldwork, I conducted two days of observations in a different conscription company in the army as a way to contrast my findings from the longer fieldwork, and to assess the generalizability of my insights. Here, I followed a company during the end of their training, which was intentionally planned to correlate with the stage of the conscription period that I had observed at the other military camp a year before. Unlike my longer participatory fieldwork, these days of observations contained much greater access to informal conversations with sergeants in between exercises, and I was able to take part in meetings in the company commander’s office; this is something that would have, the year before,

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<sup>24</sup> The interviews not recorded were conducted in situations where the interview was not planned on forehand, and thus, I did not have my recorder with me.



tampered with my attempts to fit in as a conscript as well as the sergeants' attempts to constitute a boundary between us (conscripts) and them.

- ***Additional material***

In addition to the empirical material that has been generated at various military camps across Denmark, I analyzed reports and other written materials from and about the Danish Defence. For example, the defense agreements that are drafted by a given political majority in the Danish parliament every 4-5 years, and which set the strategic and economic framework for the Danish Defence. Equally, websites, flyers, and other types of recruitment material that are meant to inform and intrigue potential recruits were collected and analyzed before I conducted my first observations at the recruitment center.

During parts of the observations, I have also taken photographs; material that has also been drawn on in the analysis. Due to the tense mood at the recruitment center, only photographs without humans on them were taken. During the participatory parts of the fieldwork, photographs were primarily taken during less participatory periods. Some of them are included in this dissertation to visualize the empirical setting, but due to considerations of anonymity, many photographs are not enclosed.

In addition to the ethnographic efforts that I initiated myself, I gained other valuable experience during the PhD process; for example, the opportunity to teach groups of officers from across the Danish Defence in issues of gender and diversity – an experience that indicates my own liminal position in this field. Having the chance to field questions and comments from military scholars and 'insiders' from various parts of the Danish military in connection with presentations at conferences and seminars has also given me useful food for thought.

## **Dealing with boundary work**

While my research started out with an interest in initiatives that reach across the military, most of my fieldwork has focused on the army rather than the navy, the air force, or the Danish Emergency Management Agency, where conscripts can also serve. I decided this focus early on, based on two considerations. First, my knowledge of the central role the army plays in the Danish military. As much research has implied, the army – or rather, combat units and infantry within the army – is considered to be the core of any military

organization (Ben-Ari 1998; Sasson-Levy 2003; Carreiras 2006; Carreiras & Kümmel 2008; Persson 2011; Tidy 2016); quite simply, the rest of the military is organized around the army. The consequence of this is, as one of the first women to achieve the rank of officer in the Danish army told me in an interview, “If you really want to achieve something in the army, you need to join the combat troops” (informant B, quoted in Sløk-Andersen 2014: 23). Looking back, I realize that my decision to focus on the army has been influenced by this perception of combat units in the army as the ‘core’ of the military profession.<sup>25</sup> As a result, my work also takes part in supporting this perception.

However, the army is qualitatively far greater than any other branch in the Danish Defence, which means that 94 percent of all conscripts currently serve in the army (*Conscripted soldiers*). This led to my second consideration; specifically, that the privileged attention to combat troops has been modified by the existence of a standardized basic-training program for conscripts across the army (da: *Hærens Basisuddannelse*), which was introduced in 2006. This standardization means that – at least in principle – no specific conscription companies can be considered to count as “combat troops” or “infantry” as such.

That being said, I must emphasize a central point: the need to present or defend my decision regarding where to do fieldwork is to a large degree a consequence of the boundary work I have encountered. Because boundary work does not only appear to constitute boundaries around the military profession, but equally around branches of the military, regiments, military camps, units, areas of expertise, etc. Efforts are often made to stress the difference between ‘us’ and ‘the others’, and the boundary work thereby also shows itself to be a process of *othering*, as suggested by Barth. This became quite evident when I was teaching a group of officers from across the Danish military about gender and diversity in the fall of 2015: Arguing that the presence of a female soldier causes a stir among deployed (male) soldiers due to the sexual tension she will inevitably cause, a member of the Frogman Corps (da: *Frømandskorpset*) remarked that this tension only ends once someone has sex with her. The members of the Air Force in the class reacted strongly to this, stating that they “did not recognize this scenario at all”, which sounded to them like something from an old black-and-white movie (notes from November 3, 2015).

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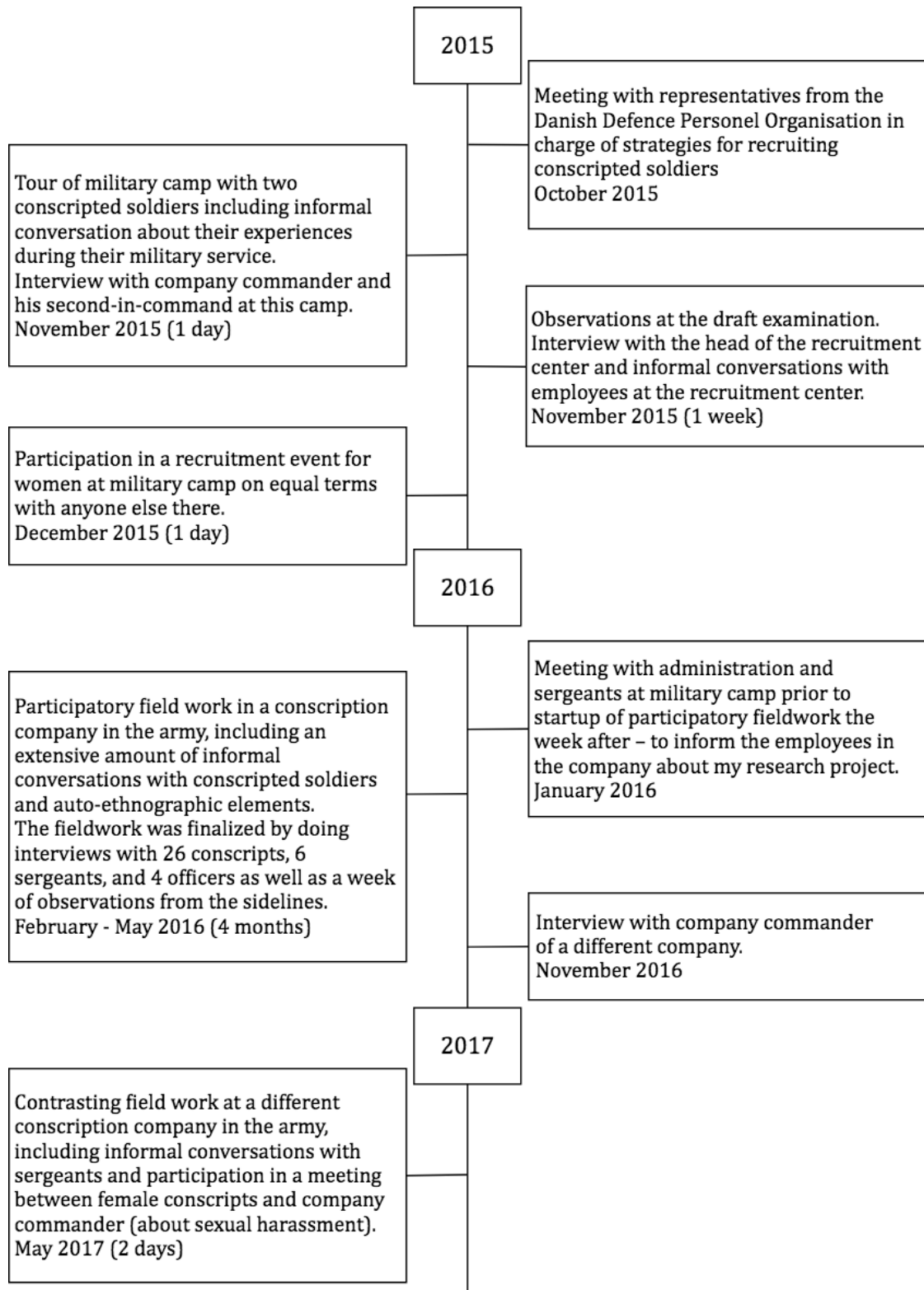
<sup>25</sup> Indicating the gendered tone of this core-periphery differentiation, the inclusion of women in for example the British military during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was, for instance, initiated because “too many fit soldiers were doing “soft’ jobs”; i.e., administration, cooking, and other non-combat tasks (Mitchell 1966: 222).

Concurrently, the relevance and representativeness of this project has often been questioned when I have presented my work to scholars and practitioners embedded in a military setting because it is primarily based on fieldwork within one specific company in the army. What am I able to say about any other part of the army, let alone the rest of the Danish Defence based on this fieldwork?

As I noted in the introduction, I do not consider these criticisms to be an obstacle to presenting arguments about the broader analytical object of soldiers and the military profession, although I do so with an awareness that these come from an empirical foundation in the army. The acts of distancing and demarcation that I have observed are mentioned here to give a sense of the many layers of boundaries that are policed and performed at the same time; a boundary work in which I have continuously been caught up, and that will no doubt appear occasionally during this dissertation. At the same time, my field has emerged through a complicated process in which boundary work has played a key role.

In the next part of the chapter, I address how the research object has been shaped in the entanglement of this field, and the state-of-the-art within military studies.

**Figure 2: Outline of ethnographic process**



## State-of-the-art: Lining up discussion partners

As I discussed in the first part of this chapter, the field within which I have attempted to situate my research ambitions has been infused with boundary work as well as knowledge about existing research on military matters. In this part of the chapter, I outline my intentions in relation to the scholarly debates and subfields within military studies with which I attempt to have a dialogue. Thus, this chapter presents the existing research from which I draw upon and take my point of departure; all of this is involved in shaping my research object as I formulate it at the end of this chapter.

Within ethnology, “[t]he military world is surprisingly enough pretty scarcely studied,” as ethnologist Jonas Engman observed (2013: 114, my translation). That such scarcity within ethnology can appear surprising is, according to Engman, because “modern society is fundamentally marked by the armed forces, economically, socially, and politically” (ibid.: 115, my translation). And indeed, within many other academic disciplines, the military has received greater attention or even constituted a specific subfield altogether. Hence, there are plenty of research fields and subfields to draw from when studying the military. Getting an overview of this terrain of more-or-less demarcated communities is an overwhelming task, and it indicates the degree of boundary work that also takes place in and through research; something that is, for instance, materialized through the numerous journals in this field.<sup>26</sup>

The scarcity of studies on military matters is implied in the absence of a *military ethnology* subfield – as opposed to the quite well-established fields of military anthropology and military sociology. While this is undoubtedly related to the greater number of scholars within these two disciplines, as well as a greater tradition of creating subfields, the scarcity that Engman mentions is nonetheless quite clear. Adding to the two subfields that are closely related to my own approach, research on military training and soldiers’ bodies also constitutes subfields within disciplines like medicine and psychology. On top of these subfields within traditional disciplines, several cross-disciplinary fields – such as security studies, peace studies, war studies, conflict studies, international relations, and critical

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<sup>26</sup> Relevant journals for someone with a combined military and cultural/ethnographic interest alone account for a wide range; e.g., *Critical Military Studies*, *Armed Forces & Society*, *Conflict and Society: Advances in Research*, *Res Militaris*, *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Security Dialogue*.

military studies – also engage with issues related to military socialization and organization, armed conflict, processes of peace-building and -keeping, and national security. Some of these fields and subfields are more well-established or contested than others. For instance, a recent publication on military anthropology is subtitled *Beyond Expectation and Traditional Boundaries* (Rubinstein et al. 2013), which indicates that an anthropological interest in the military might challenge assumptions about the anthropological discipline. Finally, and not least of all, there is a whole branch of military studies being done within military organizations. Such studies are often anchored at military academies, and the research tends to engage many former service members; the ‘retired officer gone military historian’ is a stereotype of those who make up these research environments. From this position within the military, scholars primarily work with practice-oriented and applied research questions in adherence with the strategy of the organization and educational requirements within the military profession.

Each and every one of these scholarly communities or fields is in one way or another interested in the becoming of soldiers; therefore, it could be relevant to engage with these fields in this dissertation. However, this has never been my intention. To specify how I position myself in this vast field of military studies, I present the state-of-the-art within five specific research areas and discussions, which I use as stepping stones in my analysis, and which I subsequently follow, contribute to, or challenge. Thus, the following research review addresses these five concepts and approaches: 1) *feminist conceptualizations of gender in a military setting*; 2) *the concept of military masculinities*; 3) *the military disciplining of bodies*; 4) *ethnographic approaches to the study of military settings*; and 5) *studies of military boundary work*.

Much of the research that I present here could be categorized under more than one of these headings. However, the structure of this research review is guided by my attempt to emphasize analytical concepts and approaches rather than, e.g., discipline-specific debates, which would have been necessary if I had structured this chapter in accordance with some of the many subfields mentioned above. However, focusing on analytical concepts and approaches supports the cross-disciplinary nature of this study.

Four of the five sections present the Euro-American state-of-the-art as a way to extract theoretical and analytical concepts upon which to build and discuss, whereas the fifth – on ethnographic explorations of the military – focuses on studies from Scandinavia, as this part is meant to outline more empirically-specific knowledge. While the military in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark each have different histories and are positioned somewhat

differently in their respective national and international contexts today, they have deeply entangled cultural histories, not least of all due to periods of alliance and common rule under the same monarch. Furthermore, all three countries are welfare states with somewhat similar active conscription systems that create certain bonds between citizens and the national military (see e.g. Østergaard 1998; Sørensen 2000; Sundevall 2011; Kronberg 2014; Eriksson 2014).

As suggested by two of the five sections having a focus on gender issues, this subject takes a great deal of space in this research review; a decision that is perhaps surprising because gender is not operationalized as an analytical category in my project. But after almost seven years of studying and discussing the military, I have gotten a strong sense that gender issues – or rather, the inclusion of women – can make clear where something is ‘at stake’ (as also illustrated in MacKenzie 2015). Heated debates and frustration seem to indicate what and when it really matters; what is of importance to ‘the field’ itself – and what is not. For instance, it has been argued that the positions and functions to which women have first been granted access are the least prestigious, thus indicating what might conversely be considered to be the prestigious ‘core’ of the profession (Enloe 2007; Sundevall 2011; Sløk-Andersen 2014; Persson & Sundevall 2016). These initial ‘hunches’ are substantiated in the first section of this research review, as I illustrate how previous studies on the intersection between the military and gender have enabled a location of that which ‘matters’, and how this is connected to boundary work. This is assumedly a consequence of the power and hierarchy that the gender categories are enmeshed in and produce (Scott 1999). So, while a study of gender does not headline this project, it might nevertheless appear quite present in some parts of the dissertation, including this chapter.

## **1. Feminist conceptualizations of gender in a military setting**

Scholarly attention to the issue of gender within a military setting has been quite slow to appear. Recent political emphasis at both the international and national levels on women’s involvement in military matters has no doubt spurred a greater interest in this matter – e.g., the recent annulment of the ban on women’s participation in combat in the U.S. – yet the discussion often revolves around *women* rather than *gender*; i.e., it does not address men nor gendered mechanisms and issues. The reluctance to address the issue of gender in military settings has equally been widespread within gender studies. Reflecting on the

up-until-recently absent interest in military matters, the journal editors of a special issue on “Masculinity, War & Violence” somewhat provocatively state:

“Too male to be of interest for most early women’s studies scholars, too obvious in its apparent adherence to square traditional masculinity to attract most early masculinity studies researchers, the military sphere and its complex and manifold relationships to civilian society has not been among hotspots of gender studies. That is, not until relatively recently.” (Ahlbäck et al. 2008: 83)

However, while gender scholars have begun to pay greater attention to military matters, the wider field of military studies has only begun to address the topic to a very limited degree. Referring to the existing body of literature on war and conflict, military scholar Laura Sjoberg claims that this field simply “does not talk about women – much less gender – at all” (Sjoberg 2014: 3). When it comes to the conscription system, for instance, this can be seen in the recurrent use of terms like ‘universal’ or ‘general’ conscription when referring to systems within which only male citizens are drafted<sup>27</sup> (see, e.g., Jespersen 1991; Kronberg 2014). In the conclusion to her doctoral work on women’s access to the military profession in Sweden, historian Fia Sundevall opposes the assumption of universality, stating that “Sweden has never had universal conscription – just *male* conscription” (2011: back cover, original italics, my translation). But why bother paying attention to gender? Suggesting the potential in a gender perspective, Sjoberg notes:

“Many if not most textbooks that teach students about war and conflict fail to deal with gender issues. Textbooks that do deal with gender issues frequently associate gender with, and reduce gender to, women and femininity – quietly implying that men do not have genders or matter to gender issues.” (2014: 3)

The concept of women as the marked and gendered ‘other’ in opposition to men as the non-gendered point of reference that Sjoberg describes within this research field is well-known in gender studies (see, e.g., de Beauvoir 1999). The examples of how gender has been operationalized as an analytical category in military research that I introduce here represent approaches which recognize that men “just as much as women have a gender” (Claus D. Hansen cited in Lentz 2016, my translation). With this approach, introducing a gender perspective in military research and policy unavoidably leads to a challenge of

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<sup>27</sup> The motivation for putting such adjectives in front of ‘conscription’ is due to the term having been used to define many configurations of military service and enlistment systems throughout history; some uses of the term applied to specific groups of men while others applied to all men in a particular country.



assumptions – specifically, that standards in the military are objective, neutral, and fair (Cohn 2000). To even argue for the relevance of a gender perspective within this empirical setting which is often associated with rationality and enmeshed in matter-of-fact strategic analyses has been – and still can be – perceived as quite provocative, if not altogether misguided. Nonetheless, scholarly efforts have been made to illustrate how routines and standards within the military setting – often argued to be neutral or objective – are more likely to be shaped around a male body and a masculine point of view (Richman-Loo & Weber 1996; Cohn 2000), which leads to the claim that the military profession is inherently gendered. In the case of my own study, such claims would suggest that what it means to be a ‘good’ soldier is most likely also gendered. While I discuss this more explicitly in my analysis, for now I want to emphasize how gender is relevant in matters of military boundary work.

As briefly mentioned already, the divide between an ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the military has attracted scholarly attention; a divide between what is typically referred to as *civil society* and the *military*. While much of this work reinforces military boundaries by contributing to the narrative of exceptionality, work has also been done to explore and challenge the boundaries within the ‘traditional’ scholarly fields for military studies, not least of all by scholars working with a gender perspective. These scholars have critically engaged with the *gendered* and *gendering* effects that the military/civil divide is argued to possess. From this critical stance, the divide is questioned in its presumption that “women are exclusively perceived as civilians in need of military – and male – protection” (Sjöberg 2008: 194), which casts women as passive, powerless, and lacking agency in contrast to active, powerful men. Illustrated through the case of warfare, one of the leading scholars in this field, Carol Cohn, whose ethnographic work was mentioned in one of the examples of boundary work (see page 35), has described this as the “old story about war”:

“In this story, women are sometimes present, but remain peripheral to the war itself. They raise sons they willingly sacrifice for their country, support their men, and mourn the dead. Sometimes they have to step in and take up the load their men put down when they went off to fight; they pick up the hoe, or work in a factory producing goods crucial to the war effort – but only as long as the men are away. To the men in battle, they symbolize the alternative – a place of love, caring, and domesticity, and indeed, all that is good about the nation which their heroic fighting protects.” (Cohn 2013: 1)

Although some scholars have challenged this *gendered* and *gendering* civil/military divide by setting out to show that women have indeed always been present in ranks, thereby

inscribing women in the protective and powerful military sphere, others have challenged the notion that militarism and warfare only involves militaries and uniformed combatants. The latter group, which I refer to as *feminist International Relations scholars* (feminist IR), is informed in particular by the work of Carol Cohn (1987; 2013) as well as Cynthia Enloe (1983; 2000; 2007).<sup>28</sup>

Taking a structuralist approach to the matter, Enloe argues that the gender dynamics of militaries and warfare are crucial, not only because they shape the phenomena themselves but because they take part in gendering society at large. In her groundbreaking work, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives* (Enloe 1983), Enloe refers to this process as *militarisation*; a term she uses to describe the process of disseminating military values and rationale to everyday life beyond the military – for example, through something as seemingly innocent as fashion based on the camouflage patterned design of military uniforms. While this process supports the existence of standing armies and warfare, it simultaneously legitimizes an unequal relation between men and women due to the “old story” Cohn describes. In simplified terms, Enloe and other feminist IR scholars argue that militaries rely on certain assumptions about men and women and femininity and masculinity; this works to establish these assumptions in both a military sphere as well as in societies at large. Thus, “the military is only one part of the story of militarization” (Enloe 2000: xi). With this, extensive steps have been initiated to unravel military boundary work through the lens of gender.

Such an expansion of the research object is exemplified by Cohn, who states that “feminists see war as neither beginning with the first gunfire, nor ending when the treaties are signed” (Cohn 2013: 21). This indicates how feminist IR scholars work to broaden the concept of war – and militaries – both spatially and temporally; for instance, by arguing that the political-economic support that national militaries need to engage in warfare is established via gender ideology long before what is considered the beginning of a war. Expanding the concepts of war and militaries has become more widely acknowledged, and is also found in the work of Joanna Tidy (2016). She argues that it is not only those who carry weapons and shoot at the enemy who are participants in war – equally, it is those who conduct deskwork in various corners of the military or cook for the soldiers. Further challenging the narrow definition of war as a sphere for male heroism, Enloe has provocatively suggested that “‘combat’ is for sissies” (2013: 260) because the soldiers that

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<sup>28</sup> For other examples of this approach, see, e.g., Tickner 1992; Zalewski & Parpart 1997; Cockburn 2010; Sjoberg & Via 2010; Tickner & Sjoberg 2011; Kronsell & Svedberg 2012; Hale 2012; and Tidy 2016.

take part in these violent acts between militaries have prepared for them and anticipate them – unlike the unarmed and non-uniformed men, women, and children exposed to multiple forms of violence during war.

A consequence of the boundary work involved in militarization is not seeing the connections between the militarization of women's lives – the lives of women soldiers, mothers of soldiers, feminist activists, nurses, and others – or highlighting only the efforts of men as soldiers. Questioning the divides between women's lives as well as the boundary between military and civil society thereby becomes a matter of challenging societal gender dynamics as well as the use of military power. For this reason, the ties between this scholarly approach and feminist peace movements and activism are very close. They have also been crucial to the adoption of *United Nations Resolution 1325*, which calls for special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence during conflicts and the inclusion of women in peace-building and -keeping processes (S/RES/1325).

The groundbreaking nature of feminist IR is due to the remarkable absence of any gender perspective in most studies of military matters within its typical fields (e.g., history, political science, sociology). However, the close ties between feminist IR scholars and the peace movement – and their critical stance towards warfare and militaries in general – includes a limited interest in the rights and histories of women in active duty.<sup>29</sup> Thus, telling women's stories from within the military has been initiated elsewhere, often by the female soldiers themselves. Volumes titled *It's Our Military, Too!* (Stiehm 1996) and *Hidden Women* (Moelker & Bosch 2008) emphasize the absence of women in military history and its current representations; an absence that has been somewhat corrected via volumes and research projects with the primary purpose of making explicit women's historic presence in the military (e.g., Mitchell 1966; Værnø & Sveri 1990; Addis et al. 1994; Larsen 1994; Godson 2001; Sjöberg 2008; Sundevall 2011; Sløk-Andersen 2014; Larsdotter 2016). Equally, memoirs of women's experiences in combat have been unfolded in the literary genre, not least of all Svetlana Alexievich's intense story of the one million Soviet women who fought in World War II and whose contribution had been more or less invisible prior to the publication of *The Unwomanly Face of War* (2017).

From a feminist IR perspective, efforts to emphasize or increase women's presence in militaries contribute to the militarization of women's lives, and thus should not be of

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<sup>29</sup> Recent studies have questioned whether a feminist perspective on military issues must inevitably also be anti-militaristic or pacifistic (see, e.g., Kronsell 2012).

interest to any feminist (Enloe 1983, 2007, 2000; Rosenberg 2015).<sup>30</sup> As with feminist IR, this gendered approach to military history can also challenge military boundary work; for example, as historian Maria Sjöberg has done very convincingly in *Kvinnor i fält* (2008, English: *Women in Campaigns*). Based on her study of historical sources from four centuries, Sjöberg argues that there were plenty of women on battlefields across Europe between 1550 and 1850, mostly solving tasks related to nursing and cooking (see also Hacker 1981). However, according to Sjöberg, these efforts have been overlooked because the women's contributions do not fit with our current understanding of military work; an understanding closely tied to combat, as I noted earlier on in this chapter. Thus, returning to the 'narrow' definition of militaries and warfare that feminist IR scholars critique, the absence of women in military history may be explained as a consequence of the fact that their contributions were often other-than or outside the boundaries established around the military profession; this further stresses the potential of exploring military boundary work and its gendered components.

This also suggests that defining who 'counts' as a soldier is indeed an expression of boundary work that is performed and policed – not only by representatives of the military organization but equally by scholars studying the military. Furthermore, both the work of Sjöberg and feminist IR scholars support the assumption that combat is again and again constructed as the 'core' of the military. However, we might learn just as much about the military, war, and violence by looking elsewhere; for instance, at conscription.

In the Danish empirical setting, the number of contributions attentive to gender is still very few, although some studies have recently appeared (Vammen 1992; Warring 1994; Sløk-Andersen 2014; Muhr & Sløk-Andersen 2017; Knudsen & Teisen 2018). And while gender may not be the overall subject of this dissertation, my intention is to contribute to the emerging analytical field of gender in a Danish military setting. I do so by drawing on the growing body of research that developed from feminist studies, which provides me with the analytical tools to make the 'objective standards' more visible. Hence, paying attention to gender (in particular, the female gender) can indicate where standards are breached or negotiated, which provides an outline of what is naturalized in the military setting.

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<sup>30</sup> To Enloe, those who argue that more women should be enlisted in state militaries "have a stake in perpetuating a patriarchal culture and structure" (2007: 93).

## 2. The concept of military masculinities

While some feminist scholars, including those of feminist IR, have been engaging with the matter of militarization and war for a couple of decades, they have not until recently made efforts to seriously engage with the 'inside' of the military/civil divide. Rather, the research leading up to and following the adoption of *UN Resolution 1325* has primarily addressed women as civilians or UN peacekeepers, not as combatants (Cockburn 2010; Hale 2010; Kuloglu 2008; Haugegaard 2017; Jørgensen 2018). This approach can easily emphasize the dichotomy of men as warriors and women as peace-seeking non-combatants. Furthermore, feminist scholars have been hesitant to focus on men's role in warfare, as this has already received much scholarly attention, unlike the women that feminist IR have primarily addressed. As sociologist and gender scholar Jeff Hearn argues:

"Studying men is in itself neither new nor necessarily radical. It all depends on how this is done. Men have been studying men for a long time, and calling it 'History', 'Sociology', or whatever." (Hearn 2004: 49)

The perhaps quite understandable feminist reluctance to write men's stories (Whitehead 2000), however, means that the agenda for how gender might be conceptualized within the military setting has to a large degree been shaped by what I provisionally refer to as *military masculinity studies* (MMS).

Hearn has been a great influence on the introduction of the term *masculinity* in this empirical setting, stating that "men and militarism are so obviously coupled that it is hard to know where to start" (Hearn 2012: 36). As a way to engage with this exact connection (and a very dominant one at that), the concept of *military masculinities* has been coined. Growing out of *critical studies on men*, which gives it different theoretical roots than feminist IR,<sup>31</sup> this field has been shaped by the work of sociologist Paul R. Higate in particular (2003; 2007; 2012; Higate & Henry 2004), as well as later developments by, e.g., sociologist Aaron Belkin (2012).<sup>32</sup> And pondering the idea of where to even start to explore the interconnections between men and the military, attention to topics such as

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<sup>31</sup> According to gender scholar Chris Beasley (2014), a primary difference is that, while the most influential scholars in feminist and sexuality studies (in general) can be characterized as postmodern, scholars shaping masculinity studies tend to be modernist. This indicates the potential for fundamental differences between feminist IR and masculinity studies. See also Gottzén 2018 for a discussion of this matter.

<sup>32</sup> For other examples of this approach, see, e.g., Kimmel 2000; Hearn 2012; Ahlbäck 2014; Lilleaas & Ellingsen 2014; Alvinius et al. 2016.

violence, hierarchy, and relations between men have been adopted from masculinity studies in particular and utilized in the new subfield of MMS.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of military masculinity, specifically as it emerged in the edited volume *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State* (Higate 2003), is based on the assumption that the military sphere cultivates forms of masculinity that shape gender expressions and taken-for-granted ideas in the military “without coercion” (Hearn 2004: 53). This implies that, in line with the sex/gender configurations articulated by feminist scholars, the (male) body does not come with a predetermined or certain nature-given gender expression. However, forceful ideologies uphold certain relations between sex and gender, which involves a perceived determination between the male sex and being masculine. From this perspective, a predominant masculine culture is not seen as merely a consequence of the statistical domination of men in the military but rather particular gender ideologies that form the actions and identity of soldiers. An emphasis on the plurality of military masculinities is inspired by gender scholar Raewyn Connell (1995), and it involves a hierarchy of masculinities wherein an idealized *hegemonic masculinity* steers the military; however, in practice, this is populated by multiple and contradictory forms of masculinity (Higate 2003, 2012; Higate & Henry 2004). Such a dynamic may be partially due to the ‘interference’ of other social categories, such as race, class, age, etc., which leads Higate to argue that gender may not always be the most important factor (Higate & Henry 2004). In addition, MMS scholars have emphasized the changeability of gender performances; i.e., that a man may perform a certain type of masculinity in one context and another type of masculinity in another (Higate 2003; Higate & Henry 2004; Ahlbäck 2014). As such, this conceptualization of masculinity does not involve a causal power that “controls men’s social practices” (Hearn, quoted in Higate 2007: 102). This refusal enables the possibility for individuals to occupy diverse and contradictory subject positions – a diversity that feminist IR does not necessarily accommodate.

An example of this multiplicity can, for instance, be seen in Higate’s work among deployed UN peacekeepers in sub-Saharan Africa (2007; Higate & Henry 2004). Here, Higate elegantly illustrates how the diverse contexts in which soldiers find themselves necessitate a multiplicity of masculine ideals – some of which inevitably contradict each other. As men, the peacekeepers see the accommodation of their sexual needs as taken-

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<sup>33</sup> The concept of *military masculinity* typically draws upon conceptualizations of masculinity as developed by sociologists like Raewyn Connell, Harry Brod, Jeff Hearn, and Michael Kimmel (Hearn 1998; Brod & Kaufman 1994; Connell 1995; Hearn, Kimmel & Connell 2005).

for-granted and, as deployed peacekeepers, they see themselves as protectors of the local population. These two quite different markers of masculinity entangle in the widespread sexual exploitation of the local women; a practice that appears contradictory to the role of protectors, yet should be read as an expression of the coexistence of quite different gender/masculinity ideologies.

While Higate does not see performances of masculinity within the military as exclusive to this setting – rather, he conceives them as gender ideologies that move beyond the military ‘inside’ – the work of connecting military masculinity to overarching questions of militarism and military agendas has been left to other scholars. For example, IR scholar Joshua Goldstein argues that, rather than men having a natural desire to fight, it is through concepts of masculinity that they become socialized into accepting the dangerous task of warfare on behalf of the nation, “constantly brainwashed and disciplined once there, and rewarded and honoured afterwards” (Goldstein 2001: 253). Along similar lines, Belkin (2012) bridges military masculinity with the aforementioned concepts of militarization, arguing that military masculinity is an institutionalized concept that supports overall military goals and the militarization of societies at large. To Belkin, military masculinity is a part of the process of militarization, as it “can enable – men and women – to claim authority on the basis of affirmative relationships with the military or with military ideas” (Belkin 2012: 3). While Belkin describes masculinity as not only accessible for male bodies, thus reimagining the concept, his approach still engages an institutional and ideological perspective that makes it difficult to find a way to go against the hegemony of military masculinity.

The scholarly attention to masculinity within a military framework has contributed immensely to a widespread recognition of the *gendered* and *gendering* foundation, power, and socialization of military organizations. Over time, the term has even reduced the distance between feminist IR and MMS, as both fields engage concepts of masculinity as it “is associated with conflict, bravery and military leadership, all regarded as proof of the masculine right and capacity to rule” (Parpart 2015: 313). However, feminist IR tends to suggest a more processual use of the term *militarized* masculinity, which “emphasizes that militarization is a process, and that it affects men and women outside of the military institution” (Blumer & Eichler 2017: 15, note 2). Thus, the two fields are still far from similar in their analytical scope. But there appears to be broad consensus among scholars attentive to gender that military organizations – even in a global perspective – are defined qua norms or ideals of masculinity (Carreiras 2006; Baaz & Stern 2010; Kronsell 2012). To

a certain degree, this is where concepts of masculinity can appear as an almost unavoidable way to approach the exploration of questions of gender in, say, the becoming of good soldiers. But, just as feminist IR can end up – perhaps involuntarily – emphasizing a dichotomy of men as warriors and women as peace-seeking non-combatants, so does much of MMS research tend to support the entanglement of men and the military rather than challenge it.<sup>34</sup> Despite proclamations that (military) masculinity is not contingent on a male body, very few MMS scholars do in practice attempt to broaden the concept of masculinity.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, while attention to the violence (assaults, sexual abuse, killings, etc.) that military masculinity inevitably entails is of the utmost importance – not least of all to the many people whom it affects – this adds to the exceptionality and ‘spectacle’ into which the military sphere is often woven. Thus, my decision not to use the otherwise interesting concept of military masculinity is out of analytical considerations and my desire to unfold the becoming of soldiers – not merely in relation to the exceptional but with attention to the everyday trivialities that are otherwise easily overlooked.

Finally, both MMS and feminist IR tend to foreground gender in a way that could emphasize the connection between ‘the good soldier’ and the male gender, which could thereby overshadow other equally relevant factors. Because, while MMS scholars such as Higate argue that gender may not always be the most important factor in a social context (Higate & Henry 2004), it can be difficult to see how it can *not* be. This is supported in the introduction to an issue of *Critical Military Studies* in which the editors suggest that the scholarly application of *military masculinities* has been “perhaps too comfortable” in its extensive focus on hegemonic masculinity, and thus excludes “marginal knowledges” (Chisholm & Tidy 2017: 1; see also Sasson-Levy 2003).

While the concept of military masculinity has enabled novel ways of addressing gender (not just the female one) within a military context, as well as opening up more complex understandings of the socialization of soldiers, the concept still has shortcomings; these become particularly evident in its analytical operationalization, particularly when tied to ethnographic fieldwork (the latter may be a consequence of this concept having developed

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<sup>34</sup> For theorizations on masculinity in general, there is a tendency to imply a deterministic relation between the male-sexed body and masculinity (plural or not), which attaches the performative potential of gender to the biologically-determined sex.

<sup>35</sup> For a convincing example of how it might be possible to move beyond a deterministic relation between the male-sexed body and masculinity, see Halberstam 1998.



from more institutionally-focused, sociological analyses). Thus, I refrain from making use of this analytical concept; rather, I draw upon some of the arguments that MMS has enabled, such as the existence of diversity within the ranks. Also, that a soldier is not merely a soldier; instead, power relations and social categories interfere with the often-assumed uniformity among soldiers.

Following the 'initial' maneuvers that feminist IR scholars have made to stress the gendered nature of warfare – as well as the attempts of female soldiers and historians to claim women's place in military history, and MMS scholars' conceptualization of the socialization of (male) soldiers – the absence of a gender perspective within military studies has been challenged. This is the case in both a Scandinavian context (Sundevall 2011; Persson 2011; Steder 2013; Lilleaas & Ellingsen 2014; Ahlbäck 2014) as well as the broader international context in which anthologies (so-called 'readers') and special issues on the intersection between gender and militaries/war/conflict have appeared (e.g., Aradau et al. 2015; Lippe & Ottosen 2016; Woodward & Duncanson 2017). Adding to these gender perspectives, a few recent publications have further explored the related issue of sexuality within the military (see e.g., Sundevall & Persson 2016; Näser-Lather 2018; Thylin 2018).

### **3. The military disciplining of bodies**

Scholars and members of the military profession alike stress the importance of physical strength in military work – to such a degree that it has been argued to define the profession itself and one's ability to succeed in it. Paraphrasing the intriguing work of William Arkin and Lynne R. Dobrofski (1978) on military socialization, sociologist Helena Carreiras, for instance, states that recruits "with better physical profiles are traditionally designated for the more prestigious and rewarding combat careers, while those with lower physical standards are tagged for support and administrative functions" (2006: 41, see also Thorsteinsson 1995). While this perspective supports the claim that combat is the 'core' of the military, it concurrently illustrates the centrality of the body and its performance in this setting. However, this emphasis on physicality – in terms of strength, endurance, or something else – is rarely specific as to what these terms actually mean: strong how, enduring what, and measured from what standard?

Scholars working with a gender perspective have attempted to unfold and challenge some of these questions; for instance, by pointing to the symbolic meaning of the push-up as a very specific exercise through which strength is performed and measured in a military context (Kimmel 1999; Cohn 2000). This is often part of the attempt to explain how such attention to the strong body is implicated in gendering the entire military profession. Building on her fieldwork among former combat soldiers suffering from Gulf War Syndrome – a disorder that has turned “formerly strong, fit and healthy soldiers” into weak and impotent veterans – anthropologist Susie Kilshaw makes a convincing connection between the military, its molding of strong soldiers, and a masculinity connected to potency (Kilshaw 2011: 1). Kilshaw draws on her interviews with and observations of these “impotent warriors” (also the book’s title), arguing that “the military could be seen as the embodiment of masculinity” and that “soldiers can be seen as the ideal, exemplary male” (2011: 182). Underscoring the symbolic importance of physical strength in this setting, Kilshaw adds in a footnote:

“US marines, the pinnacle of military masculinity, focus on creating bulk and muscle. Such a physique is not a requirement for their job. Indeed, it may be to their detriment as it impedes speed and endurance. However, the process of maintaining a body-builder body is part of the image of the US marines.” (2011: 182)

Based on this reading of the role of physicality and strength, it is not surprising that issues of gender in a military setting continue to refer to matters of the body: its size, abilities, strength, endurance, hormonal balance, and other ways to measure it. In particular, debates seem to revolve around whether or not women have bodies that enable them to become soldiers (Richman-Loo & Weber 1996; Simons 2004; Carreiras & Kümmel 2008; Maninger 2008). As a consequence, numerous scientific research projects have explored and often support very specific arguments against the inclusion of women in the military – or at least in combat units – which has resulted in publications with titles such as “The influence of lifestyle, menstrual function and oral contraceptive use on bone mass and size in female cadets” (Ruffing et al. 2007). Prevalent in these debates is a biologically-determined dichotomy between a male and a female body, particularly among those who are skeptical about the inclusion of women. This entails some very generalizing arguments about male and female soldiers; arguments that inhibit a nuanced perspective on the intersection of gender and embodiment. For this reason, my inspiration for how to conceptualize the body and the embodied process of becoming within this setting draws

primarily on studies that are not focused on gender but more on what happens when bodies are subjected to military ideals and training.

One of the most iconic studies of how soldiers' bodies are disciplined and governed can be found in historical-philosopher Michel Foucault's genealogical work. Tracing the development of military training, forms of punishment, and other control mechanisms, Foucault (2006; 2008) illustrates how docile bodies are produced through discipline. In *The History of Sexuality* (2006, original 1976) as well as *Discipline and Punish* (2008, original 1975), Foucault describes *discipline* as a technology of power that cultivates the obedience and usefulness of the body, improves its abilities, and integrates it into systems of control (see, e.g., 2006: 142-145). *Biopolitics* are equally present as a technology of power, and Foucault traces the ways in which the human body has been governed in Western societies since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas disciplining ensures the proper functioning of "man-as-body", *biopolitics* addresses "man-as-species" (2006: 143)<sup>36</sup> and the biological processes of the population: e.g., reproduction, mortality, health, and longevity. The two entangle in the military sphere, as the training of soldiers also becomes a means of biopolitical power; military service simultaneously disciplines the individual while it also surveils and improves their health. With this in mind, it is not surprising that Foucault's work has inspired many scholars in their conceptualizations of the bodily process of becoming a soldier, not least of all in the academic work that focuses on conscription. In some of these studies, the disciplining of bodies through military training has also been linked to broader issues of disciplining and governing citizens (Damsholt 2000; Eriksson 2014; Ahlbäck 2014). From a historical point of view, it has been argued that conscription is assumed to "not only train soldiers but also shape, raise, and educate the majority of the nation's men" (Rudberg 2014: 75, my translation).

The work of ethnologist Tine Damsholt (2000; 2001; 2002) provides a good example of a Foucauldian analysis that explores conscription as it is tied to the governance of a population. In particular, Damsholt illustrates how, as a consequence of a new patriotic discourse, Danish military reforms in the 18<sup>th</sup> century worked to discipline the bodies of soldiers in a different way. Damsholt describes how the Danish monarch changed the foundation of the national army from that of foreign, enlisted soldiers to conscripted, native soldiers, mostly due to new military ideas and greater experience with which types

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<sup>36</sup> The reference here is to the Danish version of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in which these terms are "kroppen som maskine" and "kroppen som art". My translation of these two terms has been made with the help of *Society Must Be Defended* (Foucault 2003: 243).

of recruitment were most efficient and inexpensive. However, she argues that this change to a conscripted army was dependent on patriotism and the conscripted peasants' will to defend their country, which was achieved through the cultivation of a patriotic discourse. Inspired by Foucault, Damsholt argues that military training and drills can be seen as the disciplining of both body and mind towards the right citizen virtue (2000: 256-291), thereby concluding that the (bodily) disciplining of soldiers is involved in the 'shaping' of citizens within the patriotic discourse. From this perspective, military service and the embodied process involved was crucial to constructing both military and citizen subjects.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, in a Swedish context, it has been suggested that the medical examinations that came along with the introduction of a conscription system not only enabled health statistics but also supported ideas about what is "normal" and what is "deviant" in bodies (Rydström & Tjeder 2009: 96).<sup>38</sup> This claim is in line with Foucault's attention to describing the demarcation of that which is sick or deviant in the constitution of subjects; biopolitical means that are closely tied to scientific quantifications, disciplining, and the standardization of bodies.<sup>39</sup> These processes are embedded in military practices and training, and stretch far beyond the military sphere, a Foucauldian analysis would claim.

Governing the population through the conscription system, however, may carry greater importance or impact in times and places in which most men are called upon to perform their military duty; something that is very far from the case with the current Danish conscription system. This is one reason why the biopolitical project of governing the population through military training is not given much attention in this dissertation.<sup>40</sup> Rather, I focus on the "man-as-body"; i.e., the disciplining of the soldiers' bodies as part of their becoming as military subjects.

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<sup>37</sup> Following a somewhat similar conceptualization of how the body is disciplined in accordance with broader (and productive) discourses, IR scholar Synne Laastad Dyvik argues that "[w]ar can literally be the destroyer of bodies through killing and maiming, but practices of war also create gendered bodies" (2013: 32).

<sup>38</sup> Connecting military service to the idea of when one is a capable or contributing citizen, the standardization of old age as an administrative category has for instance been based on one's "capacity to bear arms" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Bourdelaïs 1998: 111).

<sup>39</sup> This quantification and standardization of bodies through science indicates the role of knowledge in discipline and biopolitics; an emphasis that is stressed in the subtitle of *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*.

<sup>40</sup> Drawing on a different body of literature, the field of *military sociology* has also been active in connecting the training of soldiers with broader questions of societal changes and governance of the population. These studies tend to be inspired by the work of Morris Janowitz, Anthony King, and Samuel P. Huntington.

What makes Foucault – and the many scholars inspired by his approach – stand out is how this disciplining does not merely happen through an explicit use of power (i.e., as force or threats) but just as much through the internalization of this power. So, while the yelling sergeant and his surveillance and control work as an external gaze, the soldier is equally disciplined by an internal gaze that constitutes a continuous process of control and correction that goes through the body (referred to as *technologies of the self*; Foucault 1988). Thus, the body cannot be perceived ‘prior’ to these disciplining powers but should be understood in relation to a *regulating control*. However, a recurrent challenge with most Foucauldian analyses is that they concurrently leave little room for standing outside of the disciplining mechanisms; i.e., for *not* following orders and internalizing the regulatory gaze. This calls for alternative approaches to understanding the embodied experience of becoming a soldier; ethnographic studies are particularly well-suited to contribute in this way. If nothing else, these approaches can enhance our understanding of why it is so difficult to stand outside the disciplining mechanisms. I discuss ethnographic explorations in more detail in the next section just as I elaborate further on Foucault’s concepts of power, subjectivity, the body, and technologies of the self when I introduce the theoretical terms and analytical framework in the chapter *Analyzing good soldiers*. For now, my focus is on ‘the soldier body’ and how its engagement in the military sphere has been conceptualized.

The centrality of the body in military studies is difficult to ignore, whether or not it is inspired by Foucault. Within *critical military studies* (CMS), the matter is approached in a way that questions the aforementioned focus on the strong bodies of soldiers; e.g., by examining the processes in which the body is made to be strong, or by examining how war as an embodied phenomenon cannot be limited to the bodies of soldiers. Presenting the latter argument, military sociologist Kevin McSorley argues for a “corporeal turn in war studies” (2014: 121). His edited volume, *War and the Body* (McSorley 2015), describes what such a turn might imply, opening with a quite vivid description:

“From steeled combatants to abject victims, from the grieving relative to the exhausted aid worker, war occupies innumerable bodies in a multitude of ways, profoundly shaping lives and ways of being human” (2015: 1).

With this, war is presented as an inherently embodied matter, which is similarly suggested in the work of other critical military scholars. For instance, MacLeish – whose research opened the matter of boundary work in the beginning of this chapter has coupled much of the policing and performance of military boundaries with the bodies of soldiers, as it is

often argued that these bodies are the raw material of what he calls “the military machine” (2015: 15). And, beautifully unfolding how this “machine” works on the most intimate details of the body, sociologist Brian Lande (2007), another military scholar, demonstrates exactly that in his paper, “Breathing like a soldier: culture incarnated”. In particular, he describes that even how a soldier breathes is affected by the requirements of military training; in this case, because inhaling and exhaling affect the trajectory of a gunshot. Based on his own embodied ethnographic experiences with becoming a soldier, Lande unfolds how the specific strain required in shooting (or, we might say, disciplining) and the stress it puts on the body can be seen as an example of how military culture needs to be embodied to such a degree that it affects even the life-sustaining act of breathing. While not unfolding as wide a field as suggested in the quotation from McSorley, I will address the embodied dimensions of the military profession, first, as the draft examinations classify citizens as eligible or not due to an assessment of their bodies, and second, as the conscripted soldiers are disciplined and trained during military service.

Finally, another unique study that addresses how the bodies of soldiers are engaged or molded to meet military goals is the work of anthropologist Erella Grassiani. Studying Israeli soldiers guarding the border to Palestine, Grassiani (2013) describes how the brutal actions of these soldiers can be seen as the result of a numbing of their emotions, consciousness, and bodies. This, she argues, happens through “processes of numbing” that are closely tied to the body; for example, long periods of being cold, bored, and tired. She presents these continuous and very physical states or experiences as complicit in the becoming of Israeli soldiers as “perpetrators”. From her use of this particular word when referring to Israeli soldiers, it is clear that Grassiani writes from a pro-Palestinian point of view, which is perhaps an understandable position for someone living in the midst of an occupation. However, this also presents a strong bias that unequivocally casts soldiers as ‘the bad guys’ and civilians as ‘the good guys’, which does not leave much room for nuances that go beyond this differentiation. Nevertheless, Grassiani’s analytical emphasis on the often overlooked conditions that work on or through the bodies of soldiers is of great importance, and her work enables a unique recognition of the affective, bodily experiences that are generally not included in the attention paid to military work.

#### 4. Ethnographic explorations of the military

Reflecting a feminist IR approach, Lauren Greenwood argues in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (eds. Woodward & Duncanson 2017) that “[t]he point for qualitative researchers is recognising and interrogating the nuance and complexity behind these terms in their research” (Greenwood 2017: 89): i.e., “‘the military’ (the institution responsible for the legitimate forms of violence carried out by states), ‘militarism’ (a system of ideas designed to legitimate the use of military force) and ‘militarisation’ (the process and practices that uphold militarism)” (ibid.).

While I only focus on one of these three terms, specifically ‘the military’, the nuances and complexity of key terms used in the military setting is precisely what seems to have been absent in much research on the military; it is here that thorough ethnographic accounts can make a significant contribution. Turning from the more theoretical and conceptual work I presented in the previous sections, this section discusses some of the ethnographic work that has been done in a Scandinavian context, focusing on recent studies that have empirically explored processes of becoming within the military; a field primarily comprised of what I refer to as *military anthropologists*.

A highly relevant and recent example is the work of Thomas Randrup Pedersen (2017) who, with great ethnographic attentiveness, has explored the becoming of Danish ‘warriors’ by following low-ranking soldiers before, during, and after their deployment to Afghanistan. Rather than echoing patriotic discourses or humanitarian intentions of making the lives of Afghani people better, the soldiers who Pedersen interviewed and worked alongside during his fieldwork were motivated by a desire to become “true warriors” – or “real soldiers”, as they called themselves. Pedersen refers to this process as *soldierly becomings*. Being deployed as part of the Danish military engagement in Afghanistan offers the potential for such becomings through “tests and trials of extreme bodily experiences in warzone deployment, including, above all, real combat” (Pedersen 2017: 205). Interpreting this desire of *becoming* from an existentialist perspective, Pedersen thus argues that *soldiering* is “a continuous process of self-becoming” (2017: 216), both as a warrior and as a human.

While *warrior* is presented as something one only has the potential to become through deployment and proximity to real combat, the category of *soldier* in Pedersen’s work appears as something that everyone automatically becomes when joining the ranks. At the same time, the challenge for these military subjects is not so much about becoming

soldiers but becoming true warriors. As I already suggested in the first part of this chapter, my intention is to question the taken-for-grantedness of becoming part of the category 'soldiers' –both as a military insider and a subject. I do this by broadening the scope of *becoming* to include the conscription period. In light of feminist IR and MMS, we might also ask whether the becoming as real soldiers or warriors also means becoming as a man. However, Pedersen does not explicitly address the question of gender, although the issue is present in his work. Because Pedersen's study is closely related to my own research field and object, I draw substantially on his work while expanding on it by applying a gender perspective to the subject of becoming.

Pedersen's work was part of a research project, *Soldier and Society* (2012-2015), that was based at the Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen. Marking a new interest in military anthropology in a Danish context, this project was inspired by Denmark's recent involvement in coalition wars and its transformation into a "warring nation" (Daugbjerg & Sørensen 2017). The *Soldier and Society project* has examined, for example, the post-deployment experiences and societal recognition of veterans as well as how deployments reach far beyond the military organization and into the families of soldiers (Sørensen & Pedersen 2012; Sørensen 2015; Daugbjerg & Sørensen 2017; Heiselberg 2018).<sup>41</sup>

Engman – who I noted for his surprise that such little attention has been paid to the military within ethnology (see the opening of the research review) – is, perhaps not surprisingly, one of the few ethnologists who has conducted thorough empirical studies within the Scandinavian military setting (2013; 2014). Specifically, Engman has researched the Swedish navy, wherein he explored how military training prepares sailors for combat. Using an analytical approach informed by Victor Turner's conceptualization of rituals and *rites of passage* – as I discussed in the previous chapter – Engman analyses how training and social interactions between sailors are essential to making these men risk their lives, thereby constituting what I refer to as a military 'inside'. However, in emphasizing the question of life-or-death, Engman's work also participates in the boundary work that I wish to explore critically. For instance, Engman cites sociologist Hans Joas, writing: "Like all experiences out of the ordinary, those of war and violence quickly go by definition beyond the interpretative frameworks of ordinary life" (Joas, cited in Engman 2013: 119). As such, the scene is set for understanding the military setting as

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<sup>41</sup> Within the field of ethnology, a few Master's theses have also recently been written on the subject of Danish war veterans (e.g., Nielsen 2017; Bovbjerg 2018).



anything but 'ordinary'. However, due to Engman's ethnographic attention to detail and inter-subjective relations, I draw on his conclusions regarding, e.g., the function of a phenomenon such as laughter within the military setting.

As I already briefly mentioned, Wollinger (2000) has also done extensive work in a Swedish military setting; specifically, among conscripted soldiers in the army. Drawing on seven months of observations and interviews, Wollinger demonstrates how the conscripts tackle and organize everyday life within the military sphere; a sphere that is here analyzed through the lens of sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of *total institutions* (Goffman 1972; see also Sundberg 2015; Bjerke & Rones 2017). While the concept of total institutions and military service as a rite of passage might not fit a contemporary Danish context, Wollinger's work is useful, not least of all because of the empirical observations from her fieldwork. For instance, she observes that conscripted soldiers need to have the "right attitude" (see also Rones 2015); a trait that Wollinger argues has the utmost importance for social relations among conscripts.

"To have the 'right' attitude does not entail that everyone must act similar, like physical exercise or go out for beers on Wednesdays. Rather, it was about a specific approach which was focused on standing up for others, but also to not take the role as a conscript too seriously." (2000: 83, my translation)

What Wollinger here suggests is that being a conscript comes with certain ways of enacting the role; ways of 'doing' military service correctly, not only in the eyes of superiors but also in the eyes of other conscripts – which however is not put into words but rather an unspoken agreement amongst the conscripts. Further, individual habits can be read as obstructions to the social bonds, if they are not in line with the actions of the rest of the group; a very valuable interpretation of that which goes against the collective actions – as oppose to reading this as expressions of failed disciplining or wrong-doing.

Wollinger's study demonstrates the importance of ethnographic detail; something that I build on and explore through my own use of a more participatory approach. This is intended to enable different types of empirical insights that are more closely related to the embodied process of becoming a military subject. Addressing the more material aspects of becoming a soldier, Wollinger describes how the conscripts move in two spheres that constitute different conditions for them to act within: the camp (home), and the field (outside). This insight has sharpened my own ethnographic attention to how different

spaces enable or calls for different versions of being a good soldier as well as the materiality of the military setting.

Dress scholar Mari Bjerck has recently connected the importance of materiality in the process of becoming an insider to the military profession (Bjerck 2017). In particular, her study examines how standardized workwear such as the military uniform can negotiate gender. Based on her ethnographic fieldwork onboard a Norwegian navy vessel, Bjerck illustrates how dressing similar means that anyone can participate in the work, regardless of gender. Hence, the apparel that is part of the profession facilitates the inclusion of women, which suggests the uniform's "change potential for the gender-segregated labor market" (Bjerck 2017: 161). Yet, at the same time, the uniform affects how the women wearing it are able to 'do' gender because small details in its design mark women as being outside the assumed standard for which it was designed. From a Danish context, this has also been indicated by a high-ranked female officer who in a newspaper article a few years back noted that the uniform shirts designed for women simply did not have room for all of her distinctions. The women's uniform did not take into consideration that women might be high-ranked, thus leaving her to wear men's shirts instead (Cramon 2013). A few scholars besides Bjerck have made such arguments about the gendered and gendering nature of the military setting's materiality (e.g., Richman-Loo & Weber, 1996), but this appears to be an underdeveloped focus with regards to the becoming of soldiers.<sup>42</sup>

Returning to Foucault, I want to add that he too addressed the importance of materiality; e.g., the outline of buildings and objects used in the execution of punishment and surveillance (2008). However, in work such as Bjerck's, the materiality of the uniform is allowed to steer the analysis. As Bjerck illustrates, materiality can do more than materialize a discourse and support processes of subjectivation; it is an agent that participates in shaping one's possibilities for being recognized. This claim has been essential to an emphasis on materiality in my own study.

## **5. Military boundary work**

While I already discussed perspectives on military boundary work in the section about feminist IR, I also want to address some of the existing research that has approached this

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<sup>42</sup> Scholars doing ethnographic explorations of the military have also illustrated the extensive work that goes into upholding the naturalness of men's masculinity in the military; e.g., Persson (2012), Kilshaw (2011), Totland (2009), and Knudsen & Teisen (2018).

matter not as a gendering divide, but as a divide that constitutes a professional inside and a non-professional outside. For instance, this has been done within 'traditional' fields of military studies, such as political science, sociology, international relations, and security studies. Here, scholars have in particular contributed to the conceptualization of military boundaries through the lens of *civil-military relations* (CMR). This field is typically associated with political scientist Samuel P. Huntington (1957) or sociologist Morris Janowitz (1960), and it emphasizes the organized or monopolized violence that state militaries produce. This work often takes an institutional or structural approach to military boundaries rather than examining the work that goes into upholding them, which makes these perspectives less relevant for my specific research agenda.<sup>43</sup>

However, it is relevant to note how much CMR research reinforces military boundaries – specifically, by contributing to the narrative of exceptionality, which thus inscribes itself in the configuration of military boundaries. This is equally the case within feminist IR, despite attempts to challenge these boundaries. Formulations like “Military culture can be described as a unique way of life. It is very distinct from civilian institutions and organizations” (Hale 2012: 699-700) are used to stress the extremity and toxicity of the form of masculinity that some argue defines the military. But, with such formulations, the military setting remains a spectacle, and it is difficult to grasp the mundane and highly ordinary elements within this setting. Thus, I now turn to a related field of studies that enables a critical and non-institutional engagement with military boundary work.

Within the field of *critical military studies* (CMS), the military-civilian divide has been explored through other “betwixt and between” positions; for instance, reserve soldiers.<sup>44</sup> Edna Lomsky-Feder, Nir Gazit, and Eyal Ben-Ari argue that, as members of both the military profession and civil society, reserve soldiers are “outside yet inside the military system” (2004: 594; see also Ben-Ari et al. 2004). Drawing on a figure from the expansive field of border studies, they describe these soldiers as “transmigrants”; i.e., subjects always on the move between two or more states, which results in a mix of identities and memberships. While the authors intend to illustrate how these transmigrants cause

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<sup>43</sup> Emphasizing this divide is the concept of “the civil-military gap” as formulated by scholars such as political scientist Peter D. Feaver and historian Richard R. Kohn (2001). This concept stresses the threat of a growing distance between the values of the military and civil society, which consequently damages the security of a given nation.

<sup>44</sup> A critical exploration of the military/civil divide is widespread in *critical military studies*. But while there are some overlaps with feminist IR, this field is generally not focused on the gendered/ing aspects of this dichotomy. Rather, it aims to “expose tensions and problematize military power in its multiple manifestations” by exploring what is in-between the military and the civilian (Basham, Belkin & Gifkins 2015: 1).

changes in both the military and civilian spheres, thereby introducing a more dynamic and processual conceptualization of the military-civilian divide, they also tend to reproduce the assumption of two fundamentally different settings. For instance, there is an implied assumption that “the civilian and military realms” (Lomsky-Feder et al. 2004: 601) engender different competences and values: “...reservists may be better suited for missions that involve policing and peacekeeping since they are older and perhaps less aggressive and more tolerant [than regular soldiers]” (ibid.: 599). While attempts are made to destabilize the boundaries, we get a sense of how the two realms prompt different types of subjects. While the ‘regular soldiers’ are cast as inherently aggressive and not very tolerant, those who switch between civilian and military settings are less so, which reproduces the opposition between passive civilians and aggressive soldiers (or, in line with feminist IR, the peace-seeking women and the fighting men). Furthermore, the membership that comes with being a regular soldier is seemingly so intense that it is implied that they do not have much contact with civilian society.<sup>45</sup>

However, such analyses from feminist IR as well as critical military scholars operate on a quite structural level where the everyday practices that make up the military boundary – as illustrated through the work of Sandberg that I mentioned in the previous chapter – are difficult to grasp.<sup>46</sup> Such an approach to military boundary work has been developed by another scholar within critical military studies, though – namely, the aforementioned MacLeish (2013; 2015) whose argument about the constant policing of the boundaries deserves great credit for framing my overall approach to this issue.

Along the lines of Cohn’s denouncement of war as something that simply begins “with the first gunfire” and ends “when the treaties are signed” (2013: 21), MacLeish has a similar intention to expand the concept of war and unfold how “war persists in the lives, bodies, and social worlds it has touched” (MacLeish 2013: 1). And it is here – in the lives and bodies of veterans, soldiers, and their relatives – that MacLeish finds a “constant policing, performing, and imagining of the boundaries between in and out” (2015: 17). Based on a year of fieldwork at one of the largest military installations in the world, Fort Hood in Texas, USA, MacLeish elegantly describes the entanglement and constant shifting of

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<sup>45</sup> This may be a consequence of how soldiers’ work is spatially and temporally organized in Israel where all three authors are based. But they also draw on material from across Western Europe, Israel, USA, and parts of Asia, which suggests that a great diversity is to be expected in this organization.

<sup>46</sup> As feminist IR scholar Victoria Basham has speculated, while reflecting on the scarcity of IR scholars doing ethnographic fieldwork, this might mean that “the stories we tell are too ‘neat’” (Basham cited in Baker et al. 2016: 141).

boundaries between the civilian and military spheres, bodies, institutions, and responsibilities. Through the narration of personal stories, for instance, MacLeish illustrates how government requirements, policies, marital statuses, frustrations, and experiences during deployment merge in the bodies of war veterans, making it impossible to differentiate between a military and a civilian realm. Nevertheless, the army makes great efforts to define and redefine this boundary; the allocation of pensions and medical treatment, for instance, is dependent on the veteran's status as an insider or outsider. MacLeish further points out that the presence of an outsider – such as an ethnographer – “can even serve as a salutary provocation for the definition of these boundaries.” (2015: 17). I later reflect on how this may have affected my own work, but my intention here is to stress how this policing and performance of boundaries is a continuous process closely tied to the body rather than given organizational entities.

MacLeish's claim that “war is not at all an exceptional condition” (2013: 2) is the analytical perspective that I apply to the military profession. It is this attempt to go beyond exceptionality that inspires me; an approach that can move the analysis beyond structures and formal discourses, and into the flesh of those said to embody the military setting. His approach to this boundary work – not least of all, from the perspective of veterans – indicates the usefulness of exploring a phenomenon at its borders or boundaries, as has also been illustrated in a Danish context (e.g., Sørensen & Pedersen 2012; Sørensen 2015; Pedersen 2017).<sup>47</sup>

Unfolding the boundary work that takes place within the military from an organizational perspective, Persson has made a valuable contribution with her study of “the new Swedish Armed Forces”, an international defense organization that focuses on peace-keeping operations rather than the defense of its own territorial boundaries against invasion.<sup>48</sup> As indicated in the title of her PhD dissertation, *Changing Boundaries, Defending Boundaries* (2011), Persson's work examines the negotiations and work around boundaries that comes with such an organizational change. Merging concepts of (military) masculinity and boundary work, Persson draws on the narrative figures of core/periphery and

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<sup>47</sup> While veterans are often considered to be a fruitful point of departure to study the relation between the civil and the military spheres, a focus on veterans – defined as formerly deployed military personnel – can, however, support the military/civil divide, as this connection to warfare and ‘real action’ distances the military sphere (geographically as well as symbolically) even further from the civil sphere.

<sup>48</sup> For other studies on recent organizational changes in military settings, see, e.g., Nørgaard et al. 2008; Ashcraft & Muhr 2017; Holting 2017.

combat/support to illustrate how work around boundaries is not a question of gender, but also the professional demarcations between civilian and military employees.

Some of the insights from Persson's study are echoed in a survey conducted by the Danish Defence in 2003. Based on questionnaires answered by female employees in the Danish Defence, the survey shows that experiences of harassment based on gender were far more widespread among women employed in military positions than those employed in civil positions (Øhrstrøm et al. 2003). This might support Persson's argument that civil-military boundary work also occurs *within* the military setting, and that it might indeed also be gendered; as she claims, once women occupy positions as soldiers, it causes much more of a stir than if they stick to being secretaries (Persson 2010). Thus, if we want to understand the military profession and the becoming of soldiers, it is useful to approach the multiple layers of boundary work that occur at both the empirical and physical boundaries of the Danish Defence, but also within it.

In summary, explorations of military boundary work – for which much credit can be given to feminist IR and critical military studies – are a useful way to examine the establishment of a military inside to which soldiers feel a sense of belonging or identity. By unfolding the subtle practices and discourses that create an illusionary yet distinct military inside, it is possible to examine the policing and performances that take part in constituting new military subjects. And so, we come full circle to where this chapter began.

## Defining the research object: challenging 'ground truth'

Over the previous pages, I have primarily focused on scholarly work that has explored and expanded on the complexity of military matters. But this selection does not represent the wider field of military studies, as large parts of this field could indeed be said to “cut out the many shades of gray that lie between black and white [...] and] seem able to tell good from evil and to discern who is to blame and who is not” (Law & Mol 2002a: 2). Following a feminist IR approach, this lack of ‘gray’ could be a consequence of the militarization of our lives; the unquestioned waging of war and the scholarly support of this may be a result of how military ideology has shaped our reasoning. Another explanation could be the moral density of subjects such as war and violence; subjects that ask scholars and others to take a stance either for or against these heated topics (Wendt & Åsa 2016). After attending my share of seminars and presentations about gendered violence and the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war, it is easy for me to see how tempting it might be to pinpoint the ‘bad guys’. However, my ambition has been to locate and make room for a complexity that is often neglected when the military and soldiers are framed as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ guys.<sup>49</sup> As sociologist John Law and philosopher Annemarie Mol note: “Denouncing violence is no doubt appropriate, but it is also disturbingly agreeable and self-satisfying, too simple. [...] We need other ways of relating to complexity, other ways for complexity to be accepted, produced, or performed” (2002a: 6).

Initiating this attempt to bring complexity back, I have attempted to nuance MacLeish’s claim that the military is embedded in a “constant policing, performing, and imagining of the boundaries between in and out” (2015: 17) throughout this chapter. After giving two specific examples of how I have encountered boundary work, and how it has affected my approach to the empirical field as well as the design of this study, I then unfolded how such processes have been studied; what their effect might be as well as the ways that bodies are engaged and disciplined as part of this constitution of a distinct inside. With this foundation, I now formulate the overall research object that is addressed in my study.

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<sup>49</sup> Law and Mol open the introduction to their edited volume, *Complexities: Social Studies of Knowledge Practices*, with an attempt to define complexity: “There is complexity if things relate but don’t add up, if events occur but not within the processes of linear time, and if phenomena share a space but cannot be mapped in terms of a single set of three-dimensional coordinates” (2002a: 1). However, they discard this definition at the end of the introduction, calling it “too simple” since it draws on binary oppositions.

## Challenging ground truth

The object of my research and my motivation for going ‘against the grain’ of much military research can be framed in the term *ground truth*, which feminist IR scholar Joanna Tidy (2016) introduced to the scholarly debates. This is a term that is supposedly widely used in the U.S. military as a way “to describe the reality of a tactical situation as opposed to what intelligence reports or senior leaders (far removed from the battle) assert the reality to be” (Linden 2010: 129). Thus, ground truth is a way to emphasize the authority ascribed to the perspective of those who are or have been on the ground, in or near combat; i.e., those who are closest to being “true warriors” or “real soldiers” to use Pedersen’s terms (2017). The concept of ground truth creates a boundary between those who represent reality versus those who can only represent assertions of it; according to Tidy, this “reproduces the privileging of combat soldiers [...and] reproduces the account of war that is entailed in the perspective of combat soldiers” (Tidy 2016: 2). As Persson (2011) and Sjöberg (2008) also suggest, this is a gendered divide that privileges men’s participation in military work as ‘real’.

Using the accompanying nicknames of those cast as representatives of one or the other side of this divide, combat soldiers are referred to as ‘the tooth’ while those in non-combat military roles are referred to as ‘the tail’. Using this animal-inspired analogy of the two groups that ground truth creates, Tidy argues that “we remain preoccupied with studying and understanding war through the ‘tooth.’ Yet, most people in Western militaries comprise ‘the tail’; they are not combat soldiers but are instead engaged with the administrative, logistical, headquarters, and life support duties of war” (Tidy 2016: 2).

Following this problematization of the disproportionate amount of attention paid to ‘the tooth’ and how this lends authority to those who represent ground truth, this dissertation focuses on the ‘tail’ while analytically engaging with the boundary work that establishes such divides. How are assumptions about soldiers established through such boundary work? I suggest that the privilege of ground truth that denotes combat as the core of the profession also affects the rest of the military ‘animal’, thus also influencing the training of conscripted soldiers and their movements in the military borderland.



## Research object: studying the becoming of good soldiers

In light of the boundary work that reiterates combat as the core of the military profession, it becomes apparent how conscripted soldiers cannot possibly 'count' as real soldiers. Due to the contemporary design of the Danish conscription system, conscripts never deploy or engage in combat, and are thus miles from the life-or-death scenarios of war that are continually referred to as the core of the military profession. To use Law's expression, we could say that the current Danish conscription system is in fact defined through the *absence* of any form of "real action"<sup>50</sup> (Law 2004; Callon & Law 2004). Furthermore, as the ethnographic efforts of scholars such as Persson (2011), MacLeish (2013; 2015), and Pedersen (2017) have made clear, the fragility of 'real' soldiers' becoming and the porous boundaries of the military profession necessitate continuous boundary work. Because the military inside is constituted in opposition to a non-professional and civilian outside, conscripted soldiers are caught in this boundary work: they are only difficultly embraced as insiders – i.e., as members of the category of *soldiers* – as full acceptance of these unexperienced and somewhat demasculinized newcomers would further emphasize the fragility of the boundaries. Following this argument, I hope to contribute to the existing body of literature by investigating how some of these conscripts, in spite of finding themselves in the borderland of the military profession, succeed in *becoming* recognizable as insiders.

As illustrated through previous studies, the betwixt-and-between position of veterans and reserve soldiers – or in my case, conscripted soldiers – can be extremely useful as a means to ethnographically explore the assumed 'core' of the inside that steers processes of becoming. However, instead of analyzing conscription as a ritual in the grand anthropological sense, I want to embrace the continuous process of becoming that has been implied in existing ethnographic studies. Because it seems as though there is no end to the transformation. One never really 'becomes' a military subject: military service does not make you a soldier, deployment does not ensure the feeling of being a 'real soldier', and returning home might just position one as a veteran in the borderland of the profession. Thus, I examine the category of soldiers as something that is defined through a continuous process of becoming a *military subject*.

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<sup>50</sup> According to Callon and Law, "... what is being made present always depends on what is being made absent" (2004: 83, original italics removed). Here, the word *present* does not imply a physical presence but rather a provisional reality or meaning; in this case, a reality in the shape of a notion of conscription in which atrocities, combat, or action are made absent.

It is argued that such a becoming is deeply embedded in matters of gender, as military service is considered to be a disciplining scheme that turns boys into men and/or good citizens. Through the work of scholars like Enloe (2000; 2007) and Cohn (2013), this gendered (i.e., masculine) foundation for the entire military profession has been suggested to take part in a gendering boundary work that ensures that men's bravery is heralded. Moreover, it has also been suggested that this foundation defines an invisible ideal or standard for the entire military setting; materially as well as culturally. Thus, being recognized as good at one's job may be defined qua certain gendered standards that are tied to boundary work. I attempt to grasp the requirement to live up to certain standards as an expression of when one might be considered to be a **good soldier** – specifically, as something that is assumed to be connected to the core of the military profession; i.e., combat and life-or-death scenarios.

The ethnographic work of scholars like Wollinger (2000) and Bjerck (2017) illustrates how seemingly passive material objects or surroundings affect or even obstruct one's ability to perform as a (good) soldier; the design of a uniform, the outline of a cockpit, the movement from a military camp to the woods influence the 'doing' of a soldier. As a way to include elements such as these that are entangled in the performance as a good soldier, I focus on the **everyday life** of the conscripted soldiers. This entails challenging the assumed core of the military (i.e., combat), which privileges ground truth (Tidy 2016) and supports the narrative of exceptionality, as these are defined in opposition to that which is ordinary.

Finally, as the critical military scholars' explorations of the military-civilian divide has illustrated, the boundaries between the two are difficult to define or locate. Rather, the boundaries may be performed through the bodies of those entangled in war and violence (however loosely or narrowly we might define these concepts). Most significantly, an inside is established through the disciplining of soldiers' bodies; a process that, following Foucault's argument (2008), makes them recognizable as military subjects. With the suggestion that boundary work happens in and through the bodies of soldiers, I want to emphasize the **embodied** aspect of this becoming.

Pulling these elements together, the overall research question for this dissertation is: ***How is the figure of 'the good soldier' performed in everyday life among conscripts, and how does this figure affect the embodied becoming of military subjects?***

In the next chapter, I explain why being a good soldier is presented as a material-discursive figure, and I subsequently unfold the analytical framework needed to answer the research questions posed here.



**Illustration 4. The regiment parading through town**

# Analyzing good soldiers

## Theoretical resources and analytical framework

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“A good soldier always sleeps whenever he can!” (field notes, week 2)

This statement was made during a ten-minute break between two classes being held in an auditorium. The newly enlisted conscripts in the room were jerking around, going out for a smoke, or hanging out on the seats lined up in even rows. But no one was sleeping. The sergeant who uttered these words seemed somewhat surprised that none of the conscripts took advantage of the chance to sleep; from his tone of voice, it appeared to be the most obvious thing for them to do. In light of how bodies are disciplined that I discussed in the research review as well as the argued military ideals of strength, athleticism, and aggression (Bulmer & Eichler 2017), the sergeant’s encouragement of rest may be surprising. However, his statement can be understood as an expression of certain perceptions of military work in which the statement is embedded; i.e., perceptions that military work is exhausting and unpredictable, even while it requires good soldiers to always perform their best. Following these perceptions, the rationale is that, whenever the opportunity appears to eat or sleep, you should take it. This will make you the best possible soldier later on – plus, it makes visible to others that you *want* to be as good as possible; that you are constantly working to improve your own abilities. In this case, not taking a nap in between classes did not make us bad soldiers. We were just not taking the steps necessary to become as good as we *could have* been.

The idea of using a figure as the analytical approach to my research developed during an early stage of the process, long before my four months of participatory fieldwork and my encounter with the emic term *the good soldier*. When I began my fieldwork in the autumn of 2015, I started out with an intention to unfold the ideal of what it might mean to be a *Danish* soldier, as I figured that the context of the national military would be essential to what it means to be a soldier. From a historical perspective, there are strong ties between citizenship and military service (Damsholt 2000; Carreiras 2006; Kronbergs 2014; Ahlbäck 2014), and this is still the case in some countries. Military service, it has been argued, “has been valorized as the definitive demonstration of citizenship” (Coy et al.

2008: 161). However, citizenship – as well as the related mechanisms of nationalism and patriotism – was surprisingly downplayed in the meaning-making of the conscripted soldiers around which my research revolves. Discourses of citizenship, the nation, or patriotism were rarely activated. This may be related to the quite recent process of Denmark becoming “a warring nation”; a turn towards a more ‘activist’ Danish foreign policy that has changed otherwise distant combat scenarios and the need to defend or protect the nation (Daugbjerg & Sørensen 2017). Furthermore, as convincingly argued in the work of Pedersen that I presented in the previous chapter, Danish soldiers do not enlist and deploy due to grand motives related to altruism or patriotism; they deploy to fulfill an existential desire to become *somebody*. Nonetheless, the figure of the good soldier did have a national specificity to it, primarily established in the sergeants’ occasional comments about Danish soldiers’ allegedly unique ability to think for themselves. But being a good soldier is a much more complex matter, which is why I revised my initial idea of analyzing *Danish* soldiers during the participatory fieldwork.<sup>51</sup>

At the military camp, the *good* soldier appeared as an emic term that was mostly used by sergeants to give a clear indication of what was expected from us in order to succeed, as illustrated in the example above.<sup>52</sup> I decided to embrace this term for a number of reasons that I elaborate on throughout this chapter. By conceptualizing *the good soldier* as “a figure or character with agentic presence and force” (Ashcraft 2017: 53), I want to unpack the contradictions, negotiations, and compromises that are inherent in the becoming of soldiers, thus indicating an approach in which recognition is never ensured but rather requires continual work.

As the example with sleeping indicates, there are strong bonds between valuing and recognition; the assessment of how good we were as soldiers and the recognition of certain actions or behaviors as an expression of this was essential to the ‘reading’ of us as good soldiers. Describing the meaning of *recognition*, Sara Ahmed states that this is a process of how “certain lives become valued over other lives” (2000: 30). Embedded in such recognition is also the valuing of subjects in relation to more-or-less specific

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<sup>51</sup> Had I been keen to explore how notions of nationalism and patriotism are enmeshed in the training of Danish conscripts, I undoubtedly would have seen more traces of this. But my attention to the everyday lives and routines of these soldiers emphasized elements other than those of international relations, foreign policy, and nation-building.

<sup>52</sup> An *emic* term – as opposed to an *etic* term – has its origin in “the distinction in linguistics between phonemics and phonetics – phonemics classify sounds according to their internal function in language, phonetics classify them according to their acoustic properties as such”; these can be ‘translated’ as “experience-near” and “experience-distant” (Geertz 1974: 28).

standards or categories. Following this conceptualization, valuing thus privileges some soldiers over others in the process of becoming recognizable as a good soldier.

With my intention to move beyond dichotomies of who might be considered the good and the bad guys, the meaning of *good* implied in both the emic and my analytical use of the term is not morally contingent. The mention of *good soldiers* in this dissertation does not mean that soldiers act in a way that can be said to be morally good. This is a different – but no less relevant – debate. Rather, inspired by philosopher Annemarie Mol's conceptualization of 'good' (2002; 2008a; 2008b; Heuts & Mol 2013), I take a *valuing* approach to the becoming of soldiers. From this perspective, there is neither wrongdoing nor absolute good involved – no binary opposition or unilateral definition of good or bad – but rather multiple versions of *how good* a soldier one might be assessed to be; an assessment that changes depending on the eye of the beholder, previous evaluations of the person being assessed, and the specific scenario that is unfolding.<sup>53</sup> Concurrently, I explore how different perceptions of what it means to be 'good' entangle, thereby constituting the becoming of a good soldier as a *multiple* phenomenon.

What I hope to suggest in this dissertation is that military service is a process of becoming recognizable as a military subject; a process that requires a conscript to perform as a good soldier. In order to execute this ambition, this chapter takes the reader through the elements that comprise my analytical figure of the good soldier. First, I present the overarching ontological and epistemological framework. I do this by introducing the post-humanistic use of figurations as a way to unfold how such an approach can collapse traditional divides, such as material/discursive, nature/culture, and human/non-human. I follow this by connecting figurations with philosopher Judith Butler's concept of the heterosexual matrix as a way to understand the processual becoming of a subject. With my decision to introduce this understanding of subjectivity, recognition is positioned as an essential matter of becoming; a concept that invites attention to the performative and embodied aspects of becoming. By examining how recognition might be explored empirically, I present three analytical strategies for how my analysis operationalizes the process of becoming. First, I focus on the affects that are involved in the process of becoming recognizable as a good soldier; i.e., the laughter, anger, or frustration that indicates when performances are either inside or outside understandings of 'good.'

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<sup>53</sup> Foucault, whose work I build upon in my conceptualization of discipline (and in part, subjectivity), was reluctant to define morally good and evil in the actions of human beings. This is suggested in the title of a 1993 documentary about his career and analytics, "Beyond Good and Evil".

Second, I introduce the concept of *valuing*; a conceptualization of how value is ascribed and performed as a multiple phenomenon. And finally, I introduce the concept of *routines* as a way to understand certain patterns in everyday life; specifically, as forms of tacit knowledge that are part of making one recognizable or not.

## **The becoming of an analytical figure**

Having been introduced to post-feminist and post-humanist thought during my years as a university student, I have long been curious about and excited by the critical and surprising potential of contemporary scholars like Donna J. Haraway, Judith Butler, Susan Leigh Star, and Annemarie Mol. Their refusal to accept nature as a deterministic force, their questioning of the assumed universality and objectivity in research, and their skepticism about binaries – which has in turn led to an emphasis on examining multiplicity and complexity – their embrace of materiality and the body, and their significant attention to power relations and forms of inequality have all inspired my analytical ambitions in this study. The concepts and figurations that these scholars have introduced – e.g., cyborgs, matrixes, monsters, onions, multiple bodies – have helped to form my figure of the good soldier. My use of their work indicates the ontological and epistemological approach I apply in my study, which I elaborate on in the next section.

### **Feminist figurations: concepts with which to think**

Figurations are abstract shapes that are used to illustrate or encapsulate a phenomenon in the world. They are figurative ‘representations’ that do not represent anything matter-of-factly; rather, scholars who use such figurations insist that there is actually nothing authentic for the figuration to mirror (see, e.g., Barad 2003). They are figures with which to think, and images that are meant to challenge established notions about the world in which we live. At the same time, they can also be desired and inhabited, and we can feel as though we belong to or in them (Lykke 2008: 46). As such, the use of figurations as analytical concepts first emerged among feminist scholars within post-humanism and science and technology studies (STS) as a way to challenge established notions about subjectivity, knowledge production, and binaries such as nature/culture. According to Haraway, scholars who use this approach supposedly thrive on the “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries” (Haraway 1991: 150), as figurations contain past, present, and future all in one.

In particular, the publication of Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985, reprinted in Haraway 1991) has inspired a great deal of work that explores and challenges well-established



delineations and divides. An example of a cyborg somewhat related to the field of military studies would be the Terminator; the man-machine from the 1984 movie featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger as the title character who is sent back in time from a post-apocalyptic future.<sup>54</sup> The Terminator is a technologically-enhanced warrior who embodies the entanglement of human and technology to a point where one can barely be differentiated from the other; for what exactly is the Terminator? How do we classify him – is he still human? And is it even a ‘he’? Such confusion is intentional:

“Cyborgs are about particular sorts of breached boundaries that confuse a specific historical people’s stories about what counts as distinct categories crucial to that culture’s natural-technical evolutionary narratives. (Haraway 1995: xvi)

By blurring boundaries, the figuration of a cyborg is intended to illuminate that categories and classifications are the product of “a specific historical people” (Haraway 1995: xvi). This specificity of phenomena, which is otherwise perceived as nature-given, inevitably travels into questions of ontology and epistemology: through the lens of figurations, research objects are not understood as nature-given or naturally demarcated but rather as a consequence of the production of boundaries, including those established through knowledge production. In my attempt to explore the military borderland, I do not claim to be outside of this historical specificity; the knowledge I have accumulated is just as *situated* (Haraway 1991) as the research object with which I engage.<sup>55</sup> But with this approach, my attention is focused on the mechanisms that constitute boundaries around the profession, rather than trying to locate the exact boundaries or to define the inside they are assumed to constitute. Reflecting on the extensive consequences that such an approach has on knowledge production, Haraway notes:

“I never wanted to be posthuman, or posthumanist, any more than I wanted to be postfeminist. For one thing, urgent work still remains to be done in reference to those who must inhabit the troubled categories of woman and human, properly pluralized, reformulated, and brought into constitutive

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<sup>54</sup> On the subject of military matters, Haraway notes that “war is a cyborg orgy” (1991: 150) and that the Terminator in particular is an “all-to-real, ideal cyborg warrior” (1995: xv).

<sup>55</sup> With an increasing focus on reflexivity and positioning within the social sciences and humanities over the past few decades, claims of neutrality in the production of knowledge have been met with criticism and reformulation, not least of all due to feminist scholars like Haraway. Yet this turn towards a greater reflexivity has also been criticized and ridiculed for foregrounding the researcher rather than the research object(s). For instance, Newton (1993: 3) quotes the following joke: “A postmodern anthropologist and his informant are talking; finally, the informant says, ‘Okay, enough about you, now let’s talk about me’.”

intersection with other asymmetrical differences. Fundamentally, however, it is the patterns of relationality and, in Karen Barad's terms, intra-actions at many scales of space-time that need rethinking, not getting beyond one troubled category for a worse one even more likely to go postal." (Haraway 2008: 17)

Thus, the scholar's question of how and what to study is redefined by an urge to unfold relations and *becoming* rather than *being*, as well as the ambiguity and multiplicity that defines this process. As gender scholars Barbara Pini and Bob Pease remark, in reference to the predecessors of such an approach: "Second-wave feminist scholars' agenda was not simply to include women – 'add them on' – in existing knowledge, but to challenge and recalibrate the definitions and practices of knowledge itself" (2013: 3). This agenda is clear in the ontological and epistemological recalibration that post-humanism and post-feminism offers.

Turning to the matter of how we might understand processes of subjectivity within this framework, philosopher Rosi Braidotti notes that a feminist figuration is "a politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity" (1994: 1). Figurations can thereby be used as a way to analyze questions of subjectivity, albeit in a somewhat different way than, e.g., Foucault suggests, as "figurations entangle a motley crowd of differentially situated species" (Haraway 2008: 41). They also bring an array of phenomena together and create meaning through relations. As Haraway argues: "The partners do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with: those are the mantras of companion species" (ibid.: 17). In this way, nothing is prior to its entangled *becoming with* other phenomena; a concept that I use to suggest how the becoming of military subjects cannot be seen as independent from the becoming of, e.g., the ranking system or the equipment that might otherwise be assumed to constitute soldiers.<sup>56</sup> This is emphasized with the term *entanglement*, which I use in the analysis for its productive ability to collapse traditional divides, such as material/discursive, nature/culture, and human/non-human.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Following my scholarly attention to the body, it is worth noting that Haraway argues that "bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their *boundaries* materialize in social interaction. Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; 'objects' do not pre-exist as such" (1988, reprinted in 1991: 200-201, original italics).

<sup>57</sup> American communication scholars Karen L. Ashcraft and Kate L. Harris, for instance, have suggested the term *interpenetration* as a way to conceptualize an approach in which "discourse and material collide and fuse in agentic enactments that yield 'meaning that matters'" (2014: 145). Here, interpenetration defines "the entangled relation between materiality and discourse that goes beyond that of dialectics. Gender-sexual wordplay intended" (ibid.).

Inspired by this somewhat new tradition of using figurations as an analytical approach, the articles in this dissertation also “entangle a motley crowd of differentially situated species,” such as human bodies, uniforms, discourses, military history, policy papers, etc. In particular, I use my empirical material to explore how the good soldier can be understood as materialized and performed through its heterogeneous entanglements; entanglements that connect diverse things like the tears shed after completing exhausting drills; shirts folded and stacked to perfection in a locker; a sigh when someone gives the wrong answer to a question during class; the collective ability to march together in rank and file; bodies responding instinctively to the voice of a sergeant giving orders to “march” or “halt”; and standardized uniforms that leave little room for ‘abnormal’ bodies. But, the question that arises from an approach that refuses nature-given demarcations of the research object is: How should I delimit my analysis when multiple phenomena co-shape one another in continuous entanglement? I return to this matter at the end of the chapter but, for now, let us stay with the analytical framework.

The many figurations that feminist scholars have formulated over the last few decades may appear to be abstract concepts that are difficult to apply. The various cyborgs that Haraway presents, for instance, appear far from the very physical exhaustion of military training. However, according to gender scholar Nina Lykke (2008), an anchoring in reality combined with the openness to phenomena that comes with an emphasis on processes of becoming is exactly what defines feminist figurations; an approach that opens up many possible futures. The “world-destroying and world-building processes” (ibid., my translation) involved in figurations indicates an agency of its own; i.e., the figuration *does* something in the world. Borrowing a formulation from communications scholar Karen Lee Ashcraft, my figuration of the good soldier could be defined as “a figure or character with agentic presence and force” (Ashcraft 2017: 53).

However, the concepts of subjectivity and recognition on the one hand and empirical material on the other is difficult to connect due to the (intentional) abstractness of such figurations, which leave recognition quite loosely defined in, e.g., Haraway’s work. This may be even more of a challenge when applying such concepts beyond the disciplinary borders of STS from where such figurations have emerged and perhaps have greater resonance. Thus, I combine this overall ontological and epistemological approach with Judith Butler’s concept of the heterosexual matrix, as this answers to a greater extent the question: recognizable in relation to what?

## Butler's heterosexual matrix

In an attempt to break with naturalized and deterministic gender categories, Butler presented her idea of the heterosexual matrix in her 1990 classic *Gender Trouble* – a book that has had significant influence on the broad field of gender studies.<sup>58</sup> She describes the heterosexual matrix as “a grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized” (Butler 1990: 151, see also Butler 1997). The matrix is “a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchally defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (ibid.). Simply put, this matrix describes the expected patterns and normative correlation between sex, gender, and sexual identity. The patterns of how these roles should be enacted do not have their origin in a biological sex but rather in the cultural patterns of a compulsive heterosexuality described through the matrix. From such a perspective, gender is not perceived as the social attribute to a biological sex but rather as “a kind of imitation for which there is no original” (1992: 21). Thus, gender is nothing more than a reiteration of itself; however, this makes its consequences no less real for or felt by the bodies to which gender categories cling.

With the heterosexual matrix, we are offered an explanation as to why men tend to act in a certain way and women in another way; the way in which our individual sense of freedom to act as we please somehow results in quite similar and recognizable expressions of femininity and masculinity. There is an intriguing combination of personal freedom on the one hand and, on the other, restrictions rarely felt as we impose them on strangers and ourselves alike. The key to understanding such restriction is the term *recognition*; the ability that we and others have to make sense of ourselves as subjects – as human beings – within a pattern of what is intelligible or comprehensible to us (Butler 1991; 2004). Butler argues that such recognition is based on our *performance* of gender; how we ‘do’ the role of being a woman or a man defines how others (and we ourselves) recognize us as a ‘woman’ or ‘man’ – and thereby as subjects, since subjectivity according to Butler is inherently gendered. With the good soldier, I rely on such an understanding of recognition as it is enabled in relation to patterns for performing ‘good.’

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<sup>58</sup> Following Thomas Kuhn's notion of paradigms (1963), this publication could even be argued to be ‘paradigmatic’.

While a performative approach, such as the one implied in Butler's heterosexual matrix, can be read as quite static, it is important to note that 'doing' gender also means doing it differently from one context to another, depending on varying expectations for masculinity and femininity. Feminist IR scholar Cohn describes this in a military setting:

"A man who is an army drill sergeant, for example, will likely "do masculinity" one way when he is interacting with new recruits, a different way when he is interacting with his superior officer, and a third way when interacting with his wife, and yet another way when interacting with his newborn infant." (Cohn 2013: 9)

If the man in this example does not comply with – and thereby reiterate – the expected performances of masculinity in each context, he faces very real repercussions; just imagine what would happen if he treated his newborn like he treated the recruits. Thus, while a certain performance is expected for one to be recognizable as a particular gender, the performativity is fluid and changes from one setting to the next. Inspired by previous ethnographic studies (e.g., Wollinger 2000; Engman 2014; Pedersen 2017), I believe this must also be the case for the conscripted soldiers in my study; they are not expected to perform similarly in all situations, but they do have to learn to decode which performance is 'acceptable' when and where.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler's discursive approach is reflected in her attention to terms like reiterations, representation, and identification. For this very reason, Butler has received much criticism for 'forgetting' the body. However, as she later stressed in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), the reiterations of gender should not be understood as merely linguistic repetitions but as actions through and with the body. To stress this argument, I rely on the terms from her later work; i.e., recognition and performativity (see e.g., Butler 2004). Encapsulating Butler's ideas, IR scholar Synne Laastad Dyvik, who has studied how the war in Afghanistan has called for certain gender performances, pinpoints how such an approach can open up the analysis:

"Understanding gender as performative offers therefore a particularly embodied, active and dynamic approach to studying gender, one that remains open to the conflictual and unpredictable productions of gendered performances on and by bodies." (Dyvik 2013: 32)

Switching the word 'gender' to the word 'subjectivity' in this quotation, we arrive at an understanding of performativity that I introduce in my analysis: i.e., subjectivity as a never-ensured but rather open-ended reiterative process that is dependent on bodily

performances. By using *the good soldier* as an analytical figure, I transfer to the military borderland this same attention to the conflictual and unpredictable performance of becoming. Because, if we assume that “there need not be a ‘doer behind the deed,’ [...but rather] the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed” (Butler 1990: 142), then it becomes possible to grasp the processes that make some conscripts appear to be ‘naturally’ good soldiers while others are given up on almost before the training even begins. Conversely, *the good soldier* should not be perceived as an ideology that determines each soldier’s performance.

Hence, we are not merely subjected to an installation of (gender) norms, but rather take part in ‘doing’ these. This turn away from a ‘classic’ conceptualization of interpellation as the means of subjectivity reveals a more complex and, I must say, messy concept of subjectivity. While terms like *enactment*, *reiteration*, and *performativity* might imply a certain optionality or detachment, this is in no way what is implied with a performative understanding of subjectivity. Due to the connection between performativity, recognition, and subjectivity in Butler’s work, we cannot stand outside the discourses that compel us to perform in a certain way. Building on the work of Foucault, Butler argues that “[p]ower not only *acts* on a subject, but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being” (Butler 1997: 13).

As perhaps noted from the outline, the concept of the heterosexual matrix and the gender patterns it produces may appear somewhat structuralistic; male sex equals masculine behavior equals sexual desire directed towards women. The discourses become highly deterministic in Butler’s work, as “there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices” that enable subjectivity (1990: 148). And, while Butler in her later work emphasizes concepts of performativity and recognition rather than a specified matrix, the work by scholars such as Haraway has been more inspirational to my analysis, especially in terms of how their conceptualizations of subjectivity and recognition can be combined with the potential for change and the existence of multiple ways of being recognized.<sup>59</sup> Although Butler is highly attentive to critiquing assumed matters-of-fact, Haraway pays more attention to the emergence of new ways of being recognized, thus enabling a greater focus on the process of becoming within a military profession that is argued to be undergoing changes. The emphasis on emergence and change in Haraway’s

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<sup>59</sup> In her later work (e.g., *Frames of War*, 2016), Butler still uses the figure of a matrix as the foundation for how subjectivity is enabled, albeit with a broader focus on how one becomes recognizable as a human rather than a gender; as such, there is a less specific matrix to define this.

work is mobilized through her use of *figurations*. Because, while Butler's heterosexual matrix might be a figure, it is hardly a figuration. Thus, in the analytical figure of the good soldier, I have created a mash-up of the two based on an emic term. Specifically, I combine Butler's claim that, in order to be recognized, we need to be recognized in relation to something, and Haraway's claim that becoming recognizable involves actors other than human beings.

Thus, we return to the question of – recognized in relation to what? The figure of the good soldier that I suggest makes one recognizable as a *military subject*; an insider to the military profession. Although this term may contrast the skepticism about whether the conscripts I focus on even count as soldiers, I have developed it to emphasize how the valuing and disciplining of conscripts is attached to broader questions about the military profession as such. What is required to be recognized as a good soldier will no doubt change from one empirical setting or hierarchal level to the next, but I use this term to address the mechanisms that constitute insiders and outsiders in relation to the various boundaries that are 'done' in and around the military profession; a process that, as I discussed in the research review, is not only relevant to conscripted soldiers.

Before moving on, I want to acknowledge that making use of an analytical approach inspired by Butler's writings might seem controversial in light of her stance on military issues. With the publication of *Frames of War* – a collection of essays on the media's role in waging war – Butler pleaded for greater consideration of "what conditions might make violence less possible, lives more equally grievable, and, hence, more livable" (2016: viii). In a comment on precisely this aspect of Butler's approach to the military, gender scholar Tiina Rosenberg states, following Butler's argument: "That there are now women working as soldiers might be progress for the numeric equality, but not for feminism" (2015: 158). The somewhat hesitant embrace of the military setting as a field of study for those critical of military power and culture is, however, overcome by Butler's recognition that "there are conditions under which war is waged, and we have to know them if we are to oppose war" (Butler 2009: ix).

While my intention is not "to oppose war" as such, I follow ethnologists Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren's call for a pragmatic attitude to theory (2001: 15-16), making it travel from one context to another in the process of constructing an analytical framework. I may have a hope that the number of women in the ranks will increase, and that their efforts and difficult position will be recognized, but most of all, I want to urge leaders in the Danish

Defence, politicians, and military scholars alike to reflect on the assumed notions about what it means to be a soldier; who gets to become one, and what is recognized as 'good' when performing this role. I hope to contribute by taking a critical approach and examining the becoming of soldiers in relation to the analytical figure of the good soldier.

## **Recognition and the ability to be heard**

The term *recognition* that is found in the work of both Haraway and Butler is not merely an abstract and fluffy concept, but the name for powerful processes involved in the becoming of subjects. Butler defines it as "a site of power by which the human is differentially produced" (2004: 2), thus implying that recognition is a process with lived and felt effects that cast some people as more privileged than others, due to the norms established through the matrix. Inspired by Butler, my point of departure is an exploration of, as she says, "how such norms [of personhood] operate to produce certain subjects as 'recognizable' persons and to make others decidedly more difficult to recognize. The problem is not merely how to include more people within the existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate recognition differentially" (2016: 6). But how can recognition be explored in the everyday setting of a military camp? A recurrent scene from my participatory fieldwork helps to provide an initial indication.

Over the course of the four months, I started to notice that being heard was an ability, or rather a privilege, that was not granted to everyone on equal terms. Quite the opposite, actually. Different voices prompted different reactions from the surroundings. Due to the hierarchical structure, the voices of soldiers with a higher rank than us were in most cases given more authority than the other conscripts. However, this clear hierarchy was made more complex when equally-ranked conscripts started giving each other orders. This was apparent when the platoon assembled – typically, when starting or finishing an activity. Before a sergeant appeared, it was our responsibility as a group to make sure that everyone in the platoon was neatly lined up in three ranks, which was achieved by aligning the front of our boots. As this spatial symmetry was difficult to manage, and since some were keener to achieve it than others, the process of lining up would always entail a number of conscripts yelling, "Get in line!" to the rest of the platoon. In theory, a conscript ordering other conscripts to do something does not correlate with a hierarchical system in which we all had the same rank, but almost like magic, some of conscripts were able to



make the rest of the platoon follow their orders. When they yelled an order – often in a deep tone of voice – it would call the rest of the platoon to attention, causing us to do the careful, minor movements that were needed to create symmetry. When other conscripts made similar attempts, like the somewhat uncertain Hajjar or the often-injured Johansen, they were ignored or even laughed at. Their voices did not have an effect on the disciplining exercise of creating bodily symmetry. So, while some conscripted soldiers were recognized as ‘entitled’ to give orders, others were mocked for even attempting to do so.

After having experienced this scenario on a daily basis throughout the four months, I became curious about the pattern of who was heard and who was not. It had a sort of stability to it yet it changed slightly, with some losing the ability to be heard and others momentarily gaining it. The silences and laughter that appeared seemed so powerful. To make sense of these scenarios, I have found great inspiration in the work of feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2000; 2014a; 2014c) who has conceptualized the intersections between subjectivity and power through the lens of *affect*. Along with scholars like gender scholar Clare Hemmings (2005) and anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2007), Ahmed argues for paying analytical attention to emotions and affect in the process of subjectivity and recognition.<sup>60</sup> Arising from an argued lack of attention to the body as a result of the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ (Massumi 2002; Kuhn et al. 2017), these scholars argue for *affects*, *emotions*, or *moods* as a force of power that ties us to the social realm. As communication scholars Kuhn et al. argue: “Affect is *feeling* before it gets sifted into distinct feelings that ‘one has,’ as if the borders afforded by self and skin are sufficient to contain emotion” (Kuhn et al. 2017: 60, original italics). Thus, rather than power working through social structures, these scholars describe affects as “interpersonal relationships as formative of the subject” (Hemmings 2005: 548).

From such a perspective, the analytical tools brought about by the linguistic turn (e.g., discourse analysis) are considered inadequate for grasping the matter of materiality and embodiment. Focusing on language also means overlooking the communication or mattering that happens through media other than language. Butler for one has been at the receiving end of such criticism. Although she has engaged the challenge of the linguistic turn, she has perhaps not overcome the challenge of going beyond language as the

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<sup>60</sup> This is an attempt to encapsulate affect theory, despite scholars having argued that “if we have learned anything from recent theorizations of affect, it is surely that affect renders capture implausible” (White 2017: 178).

medium through which mattering happens.<sup>61</sup> Thus, including an attention to affects in my analysis is also a way to compensate for some of the shortcomings in Butler's conceptualization of recognition.

Within military studies, there is little focus on the work of affects; the most relevant is perhaps Grassiani's (2013) study of how the emotions of Israeli soldiers are numbed through the unpleasant bodily experiences of military work (see also Alvinus et al. 2016). In my fieldwork, affects became vivid in scenarios like the one described above. As we stood together in the ranks, I sensed the work of ridicule, respect, and confusion – but they were momentary and difficult to pin down as they occurred. Affects can be difficult to describe when we experience them; they are bodily sensations, encounters, forces, and momentum that we might not otherwise notice or reflect on (Kuhn et al. 2017).<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, they are powerful in their ability to constitute collective moods that render some recognizable as subjects while discarding others. As with the post-humanism represented by Haraway's cyborgs, affects may also constitute matter in the relations and materiality of a given context or entanglement. Affects punctuate "matter into what matters" (Kuhn et al. 2017: 60). Thus, meaning is not fixed but established as open-ended and ever-changing, which is also implied in the word *affect* itself; to be affected is to be moved, transformed, or displaced. Affects are thereby a force or energy that connects us and takes part in our continuous becoming. As Clare Hemmings writes, affect manifests "as a central mechanism of social reproduction in the most glaring ways" (2005: 551).

To Ahmed, the establishment of a collective *mood* illuminates how affects come to matter in processes of recognition. In her paper "Not in the mood" (2014a), Ahmed suggests how being recognized as part of a collective requires us to be "in the mood"; i.e., that we participate in the same affective performance as everyone else. She notes that this simultaneously positions us "not only as being with, but being with in a similar way" (ibid.: 16). This becomes a challenge for those who are not in the mood, like if someone had taken a stance and opposed the ridicule Johansen and Hajjar received as they attempted to claim authority; this would have disrupted the mood. Alas, being positioned as either

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<sup>61</sup> In her reading of Foucault and Butler, Barad (2003) recognizes that both do take materiality into account but their conceptualizations of materiality fall short due to their support of a human/non-human divide. This divide enables them to argue that signification processes are still led by the discursive; i.e., that the world is filtered by words.

<sup>62</sup> Although affect theory has been presented as a critical response to the linguistic turn, affects should not be understood as completely detached from language. Instead, affects overwhelm language rather than just surrounding it (Kuhn et al. 2017: 86-87). In other words, affects are not different from language but are rather within it.

inside or outside the established collective is a fine line to walk – and one with dire consequences because, as Ahmed notes:

“If you have to shout to be heard, you are heard as shouting. If you have to shout to be heard, you are not heard. [...] It is only when you seem to lose it, when you shout, swear, spill, that you have their attention. And then you become a spectacle.” (Ahmed 2017)

Taking a performative approach – whether with the lens of affect or figurations – enables me to examine “ontological politics, wherein ‘doing something’ is also ‘making something,’” and thus calls for an answer to the question “what difference is made?” (Ashcraft 2017: 49). In my analysis, it is the making and breaking of military subjects. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Ahmed argues that recognition is a process of how “certain lives become valued over other lives” (2000: 30). Emphasizing the power relations inherent in one’s ability to be heard – and not as a spectacle – Ahmed ties this to factors such as race and gender; here, some are more likely to be heard (and thus, recognized) due to the color of their skin or the gender categories to which they are ascribed. This underscores the importance of including the materiality of the body in my analysis.

### **The disciplined and able body**

For the phenomenologically-grounded Ahmed, the body becomes an unavoidable center of attention due to her focus on affect as it is felt through the human body. In Butler’s work, the body takes on a more complex and changing role; as mentioned earlier, she initially received great criticism for her questioning of a pre-discursive biological sex as it was conceived as a neglect the materiality of the body. However, my use of the term *performativity* is motivated by an intention to stress the embodied dimension of the becoming of subjects that Butler’s work does include. This is also acknowledged by physicist-gone-philosopher Karen Barad, who states that:

“If performativity is linked not only to the formation of the subject but also to the production of the matter of bodies, as Butler’s account of ‘materialization’ and Haraway’s notion of ‘materialized refiguration’ suggest, then it is all the more important that we understand the nature of this production.” (Barad 2003: 808)

To follow this encouragement, Barad (2003; 2007) presents a notion of what she calls “posthumanist performativity”, in which differentiations between *human* and *non-human* are not only challenged but thrown overboard. However, in this section, I limit myself to dealing with the human body to explore “the production of the matter of bodies”.<sup>63</sup>

As I noted in the state-of-the-art in the previous chapter, the military disciplining of bodies has been and is still a substantial matter of interest within military studies, often inspired by Foucault’s conceptualization of *discipline*. While his work on discourses in particular has shaped much research in the humanities, Foucault’s intention is not to undermine the body but to illustrate how power works through the body (2008; see also McNay 1991). From such a perspective, the body cannot be perceived as pre-discursive or natural, but rather as a sort of nexus through and in which power works. And indeed, power becomes the focal point of Foucault’s work; power as a force that produces recognizable subjects through the regulation and exclusion of that which is deviant. But to say that Foucault developed a theory about the body would be wrong. Quite the opposite, in fact – he was critical of conceptualizations of ‘the body’ as a physical and delineated entity. As queer scholar Nikki Sullivan writes, “a Foucauldian analytic shows that ‘the body as an entity can only achieve its cultural intelligibility as ‘body’ precisely because it is always already inscribed by a series of discursive and technological medications”” (Sullivan 2012: 113). Formulated in Butler’s vocabulary, we could say that Foucault was curious about how we ‘come to matter’ through the body.

The understanding of power that is found in the work of all of the scholars presented thus far in this chapter can, to various degrees, be credited to Foucault’s thesis on how the subject is disciplined – not through a sovereign power that someone can *have*, but through the relational and internalized *doing* of power. Working in and through the body, power constitutes disciplined subjects in docile bodies (Foucault 2008; see also Heede 2000). As a technology of power, *discipline* cultivates the obedience and usefulness of the body, improves its physical abilities, and integrates it into systems of control. One way in which this discipline is installed in the subject is through what Foucault (1988) refers to as *technologies of the self*. This term suggests a double meaning in the workings of power – i.e., referring to the subject ‘self’ as the target of these technologies, while simultaneously indicating that such technologies are for ‘self use’; “how an individual acts upon himself” (ibid: 19). As such, these technologies:

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<sup>63</sup> Among some scholars of affect theory (e.g., Stewart 2007), the differentiation between human and non-human bodies is discarded by merely referring to bodies.

“... permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” (ibid.: 18)

Thus, while discipline in a military setting may be associated with demeaning or tough exercises and socialization that makes recruits loathe the sergeants bossing them around, technologies of the self are self-imposed measures of discipline that are performed in the belief that one will benefit from them on a personal level. A similar mechanism is involved in my ‘self-disciplining’ choice to go to the gym three or four times a week to work out because I want to keep my body in decent shape (i.e., not feel tension or weakness). What Foucault demonstrates is how these self-imposed disciplining mechanisms are part of the *biopolitics* I mentioned in the state-of-the-art; i.e., the surveillance and regulation of the entire population’s health, which thereby make the body and life itself a political matter. So, when I go to the gym to keep my body fit and strong, it is no coincidence that my personal ambitions for my body align with a state apparatus that tries to limit spending in the public healthcare sector. In Foucault’s optic, such disciplining of the body is part of what makes us recognizable as subjects and citizens.

In an attempt to make clear how such processes cast some bodies as degenerate and deviant, crip theory scholar Robert McRuer (2006) has coined the term *compulsory able-bodiedness*, which critically engages with the hegemony of the able body.<sup>64</sup> Building on Foucault’s claim that normalcy is dependent on that which is not ‘normal’, the hegemony of the able body in McRuer’s work is equally dependent on the marginalization of *disabled* bodies. However, whereas the body might be more of a nexus for subjectivity in Foucault and Butler’s work, crip theory sets the materiality of the body as the focal point of the analysis. For instance, the concept of able-bodiedness builds on an assumption that some bodies are privileged over others, independent of disciplining mechanisms. In the military setting, this might be someone with a deep tone of voice, a certain height, or a great amount of upper-body strength; these features were dominant in the bodies of those sergeants and conscripts who were considered to be good soldiers in my fieldwork. Crip theory suggests that some people will always have a more privileged position due to the bodies they possess. However, what it means to be able-bodied continuously changes, just

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<sup>64</sup> Other scholars who work with so-called crip theory or critical disability studies are, for instance, Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997) and Margrit Shildrick (2009).

as our position in reference to it is “always temporary” (ibid.: 30). As such, this is a “category that all people will embody if they live long enough” (ibid.).

Approaching the matter of bodies from a queer perspective, McRuer’s ambition is not only to make visible those who fall outside of the norm, but also to utilize a “critically disabled position” that has “resisted the demands of compulsory able-bodiedness” (ibid.).<sup>65</sup> Indicating his own inspiration from Butler, among others, McRuer’s use of the word *compulsory* is similar to what Butler describes through the heterosexual matrix: i.e., that being able-bodied is no more natural or the inevitable outcome of an active decision than is heterosexuality. Rather, it is an imposed doing that is regulated through the use of sanctions, which are aimed at those who do not comply. In the case of able-bodiedness, according to McRuer (2002; 2006), this is driven by a neoliberalism within which the subject needs a body that can contribute to the capitalist society in order to be recognized as a subject; in other words, the body must be able to work.

Crip theory describes the body as “an open, unstable, and relational matter structured by, among others, linguistic, social, cultural, and historic narratives about bodily normativity” (Eriksen 2017: 64, my translation). Hence, perceptions of what it means for a body to be *able* – for instance, its ability to do military service – is contingent and unstable, even if it appears as a biological given. Historically, able-bodiedness also appears to have entangled with the aforementioned privileged position of combat. In a study of Danish draft examinations over several centuries (Thorsteinsson 1995), the author notes that draftees who were suffering from “smaller infirmities” but not altogether unfit for warfare were usually assigned to support units, but never to actual combat units (see also Carreiras 2006). Such studies indicate that the matter of able-bodiedness throughout history has been implicated in casting combat units as the ‘core’ of the military while simultaneously establishing the privilege of the able body. In my analysis, I use the concept of able-bodiedness as a way to locate processes that constitute ‘bodily normativity’ as an inherent part of being recognizable as a good soldier. In the following section, I will however turn to the issue of ‘good’ as this introduces another analytical strategy applied in this study.

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<sup>65</sup> McRuer is skeptical of the critical potential of ‘merely’ being disabled. Rather, he believes this potential is located in “the ways in which the disability-rights movement and disability studies have resisted the demands of compulsory able-bodiedness and have demanded access to a newly imagined and newly configured public sphere where full participation is not contingent on an able body” (2006). Others have argued that the critical potential lies in the tensions *within* the category of able-bodiedness (e.g., Vaahtera 2012).

## Valuing: the recognition of 'good'

Embedded in recognition is a valuing of subjects in relation to more-or-less specific standards or categories; as such, recognition enables and negotiates how "certain lives become valued over other lives" (Ahmed 2000: 30). Thus, I introduce valuing as another analytical strategy for operationalizing the concept of recognition. And indeed, when analyzing the process of how conscripts become recognized as good soldiers, certain questions are inevitable: What is good, and who gets to define it? In order to address these questions, I found inspiration in the work of Annemarie Mol (2002; 2008a; 2008b) and her concept of *valuing*, particularly as presented in Mol and Frank Heuts' paper, "What is a good tomato? A case of valuing in practice" (2013). Based on interviews with various experts involved in producing, selling, buying, and consuming tomatoes in the Netherlands, Heuts and Mol describe five *registers of valuing*; i.e., five parameters on which experts ascribe and assess the value of tomatoes.<sup>66</sup> Because these registers do not necessarily correspond, however, value becomes a contested and shifting subject. What might make a tomato good in relation to one register might deem it no good in another. Furthermore, opposing views can be found even within one register. For instance, experts might agree on the importance of economy but, while a low cost might make a tomato good for consumers, the opposite is the case for those growing and selling the tomatoes. The concept of coexisting registers of valuing thus enables an analysis of how the value of something – like a tomato – comes to be through continuous shifts, negotiations, and compromises.

Taking an example from my fieldwork, the sergeants stressed collaboration and working as a team from the very start, and the importance of this became clear to me during my time as a conscript. Yet in the interviews I did with 26 of the conscripts, the idea of collaboration turned out to contain contradictions as to how one might be recognized as 'good'. Mentioning situations from patrols or exercises in which heavy items needed to be carried, the conscripts presented opposing definitions of what it meant to collaborate. While some of those struggling to keep up stressed that a good soldier is someone who helps out by carrying some of the burden or by encouraging them, others stressed that a good soldier is someone who does not need help from others. To the latter, a good soldier is someone who contributes rather than "takes" energy from the group. This shows how

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<sup>66</sup> Heuts and Mol refer to all of their interviewees as 'experts' to stress the diverse ways of being an expert on tomatoes, and to circumvent the proclamation of some interviewees as being more 'in the know' than others.

elements of physical strength and collaboration entangle, and how contradictions in the performance of 'good' may exist, even when there is agreement about collaboration as a value intrinsic to being a good soldier.

Within this notion of valuing, 'good' is neither based solely on the object itself nor is it something for experts to establish. Instead, it is "established along the way" as a collective doing (Mol 2008a: 75). 'Good' is something that is done through the practices of which the object is part, which leads Heuts and Mol to refer to this as *valuing* (verb) rather than *value* (noun). This verb defines a process of compromise and points to clashes between the object being valued, the experts, and the registers of valuing that are established around these. Thus, as opposed to much other work on the subject of value, the result of valuing will never be a final determination of the value; rather, this is an ongoing process (Kuhn et al. 2017). One reason is that value can be affected. In the case of the tomato, this can happen through decisions about which dish to make with a specific tomato; some tomatoes are better for some dishes than others. As Heuts and Mol state, "... valuing does not just have to do with the question of how to appreciate reality as it is, but also with the question of what is appropriate to do to improve things" (Heuts & Mol 2013: 137). Hence, the value of a tomato is not a matter of fact or a predetermined value established through, e.g., biological or climate factors. Rather, it can be *made good*:

"Valuing tomatoes, then, is embedded in activities that have other names – growing, cooking, eating, etc. And compromises between clashing values are not so much found (argumentatively) as well as crafted (materially). They depend on the practical possibilities of attuning one's work to different kinds of good at the same time." (ibid.: 137-138)

Following such a conceptualization, Heuts and Mol add *care* as a central part of valuing, defining this as "enduring work that seeks improvement but does not necessarily succeed" (ibid.: 141; see also Mol 2008a). It is through care that experts attempt to make 'good' tomatoes.

Introducing this conceptualization of 'good' requires analytical attention to the processes that constitute the good soldier as a *multiple* phenomenon, which implies that it is "more than one – but less than many" (Mol 2002: 55, quoting Strathern 1991). To Mol, this multiplicity is a consequence of focusing on practices. As she notes, "Objects come into being – and disappear – with the practices in which they are manipulated. And since the object of manipulation tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiplies" (2002: 5). Such an understanding of objects as multiple stresses the heterogeneous actors



and relationality that goes into the enactment of reality; an ontological approach that – similar to that of Haraway – understands *agency* as distributed across humans and non-humans, and arising through the entanglement of these (Mol 2002; 2008a; 2008b). Thus, just as “[a] lot of *things* are involved” in the performance of identity (Mol 2002: 38), I suggest that a lot of materiality is equally entangled in the becoming of a good soldier.

However, there are points of departure between Heuts and Mol’s concept of valuing and my application of this term, not least of all due to Heuts and Mol’s differentiation between “objects being valued and valuing subjects” (2013: 141). In the military setting, the objects being valued are just as much themselves valuing subjects; this distinction is difficult to make. Furthermore, because the concept of valuing is combined with attention to processes of subjectivity, conscripts are dependent on others’ as well as their own recognition of themselves as good. Finally, I do not transfer Heuts and Mol’s *registers of valuing* to my study because – inspired by Haraway – my intention is to explore the good soldier as an entangled matter rather than trying to map out the different registers that might be involved in the process of becoming military subjects. So, while the reader may get a sense of some potential registers, I do not explicitly unfold them.

In Heuts and Mol’s paper, they argue that valuing takes place in an interplay between the tomatoes and the experts. In my study, this idea can be applied to, for example, the relation between conscripts and sergeants: neither party was solely responsible for transforming the conscripts into good soldiers. While sergeants continually stressed the need for us to take responsibility, arguing that our success was just a matter of personal motivation – thereby indicating the ambivalence of their own role in the valuing of us – they were also aware that their instructions and motivation mattered. In the interviews I conducted with them, this even appeared to be a key element in their own motivation for doing a good job as instructors.

Heuts and Mol’s emphasis on *care* in the process of valuing strikes a chord. Describing their perception of care, they state that “[i]t is not a matter of taking control and imposing an ideal, but of caringly playing with possibilities, while staying attentive to what is good, not just *about*, but also *for your tomatoes*” (ibid.: 139, original italics). While care might seem a foreign concept within a profession often defined qua notions of violence (as I argued in the literature review), care might be a useful way to grasp the practices of sergeants and other conscripts. Going beyond the becoming of a good soldier as a process of “taking control and imposing an ideal” (ibid.: 139), sergeants were not unambiguously

driven to fulfill political or organizational agendas in order to make good soldiers who could be recruited as professional soldiers; they were also focused on what might be good due to other considerations. In my interviews, the sergeants mentioned the positive effects of military service that would prepare conscripts for life in the civilian sphere outside; e.g., teaching conscripts to keep their things in order, being on time, being polite to other people, and to 'take it' when times are rough. I would suggest that care for the conscripts as members of civil society and not just the military profession is – at least in part – the remnant of a conscription system focused on creating 'good citizens' (Damsholt 2000; Kronberg 2014), which historically had an objective that went beyond the combat ability of troops and the survival skills of soldiers.

This focus on doing good for the conscripts implies that *a good soldier* cannot be decoded merely from who get positive evaluations and have the highest scores on physical tests. Instead, the scope should be wider and seen in relation to questions of subjectivity, which is what I attempt to do in the four papers presented in this dissertation. Analytically, I want to explore Law and Mol's claim that "[i]n complex, mundane, material practices 'the good' tends to figure as something to tinker towards – silently" (2002b: 85). Although explicit statements like, "A good soldier always sleeps whenever he can" were the outset of this figure, I also want to acknowledge this silent tinkering in the becoming of good soldiers; an approach that includes a recognition of the agency of non-human actors. Adopting and transforming the emic term of the good soldier into an analytical figure, my intention is to emphasize the ways in which value is assessed and practiced in the becoming of a soldier. Not as an individual process or personal experience, but as an entangled matter in which multiple practices and actors are involved. In addition, my intention is to make the analysis attentive to the mechanisms involved in the becoming of military subjects rather than a descriptive analysis of what it means to be a good soldier; an intention that I hope will allow this work to make a contribution that goes beyond the Danish army.

### **Routines and everyday life as an entry point**

Everyday life is a fertile entry point to explore the process of valuing and the affective flows involved in being recognized as a good soldier. In the small and easily overlooked details of daily routines, we can get concrete insight into how the good soldier is 'done'. This allows attention to be given to the human body, which is arguably key in the work of

soldiers, as well as the non-human materiality that surrounds the body and takes part in constituting good soldiers. But my attention to the routines of everyday life as a conscripted soldier also has another motivation; besides being a useful way to empirically explore the theoretical framework presented above, it is also a way to challenge the narrative of exceptionality that surrounds the military.

During my participatory fieldwork and in the interviews I conducted at the end of the conscription period, I noticed how repetitive the days became after a while; we became more and more used to 'the drill' of waking up, getting dressed, eating breakfast, cleaning our dorm room, etc. And while there were still insecurities whenever something changed, a lot of what we did during a day was familiar – it became routine. As such, many of the conscripts I interviewed expressed various degrees of disappointment in the triviality of their military service. Having heard stories of bravery and exhaustion from uncles, friends, and brothers, they had expected 'more' from the military. More discipline, more exhaustion, more angry sergeants, more punishment, more wild adventures. But what they experienced was a lot of chores, such as cleaning their weapons and uniforms, and other repetitive tasks that their friends and relatives had not really mentioned.

As I discussed in the state-of-the-art, studies of conscription and the military profession in general are typically presented as extra-ordinary or even out-of-the-ordinary; for example, the symbolism that comes with presenting military service as a rite of passage and the narrative of exceptionalism that works to prevent too much 'civil interference'. The extremeness of warfare makes these narratives persuasive; it is easy to accept an idea of the military as out-of-the-ordinary.<sup>67</sup> But as a way to go beyond the mechanisms of boundary work, which can cause an exaltation of the military setting, this project approaches it from the ethnological tradition of studying everyday life. In particular, by focusing on routines and the non-events that are also very present in the 'regular lives' of soldiers (as also illustrated in, e.g., Grassiani 2013 and Pedersen 2017).<sup>68</sup> As such, I am curious about 'the ordinary' within this out-of-the-ordinary military setting. While this could arguably be an essential part of what it means to be a soldier, it could also appear to be what MacLeish (2015) refers to as *unshakeable doxa*; an illegitimate and unwanted

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<sup>67</sup> As briefly mentioned in the introduction, casting the military setting as extraordinary is interwoven with a gendering of the military, as it has been argued that the ordinariness and repetitiveness of everyday life is primarily associated with women – as opposed to the eventful and extraordinary character of, e.g., battle that is typically associated with the male gender (Felski 2000).

<sup>68</sup> Critical scholars working with concepts of militarization, e.g., feminist IR scholars, have done great work to unfold the ways in which military rationales and goals are embedded in everyday life, specifically in the life of 'civilians' or the families of soldiers (Enloe 2000; Hyde 2016; Heiselberg 2018).

statement that clashes with the narrative of exceptionalism. It clashed with the heroic life of soldiers as a “sphere of danger, violence and the courting of risk whereas everyday life is the sphere of women, reproduction and care” (Featherstone, cited in Felski 2000: 80). This may be a reason why the conscripts were surprised by the triviality of everyday life at the military camp; it may have seemed like the repetitiveness and uneventfulness of daily chores and routines was everything that the military profession does *not* want to be associated with. But what does ‘everyday life’ even mean? As scholar of cultural studies, Rita Felski, argues:

“At first glance, everyday life seems to be everywhere, yet nowhere. Because it has no clear boundaries, it is difficult to identify. Everyday life is synonymous with the habitual, the ordinary, the mundane, yet it is also strangely elusive, that which resists our understanding and escapes our grasp.” (Felski 2000: 78)

Ethnologists Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren and anthropologist Richard Wilk suggest that one way to grasp this elusive phenomenon is to pay attention to the *routines* that comprise everyday life (2015; see also Ehn 2011; Löfgren 2014). The repetitiveness of tasks and actions create rhythms or patterns in our everyday. This enables an *autopilot mode* within which we can economize decisions, thoughts, and time because we do not have to ask or explain things to each other or ourselves: “Once one has developed routines, everyday life takes care of itself” (Ehn & Löfgren 2010: 67). However, this mode is only possible if we have obtained a sufficient amount of *tacit knowledge*; a form of embodied, silent knowledge upon which we rarely reflect but have slowly developed as “[r]outines sink into the body and turn into reflexes” (Ehn et al. 2015: 6).

Even if they are rarely reflected upon – or precisely because they are not – these repetitive actions deserve analytical attention because, as the three cultural analysts argue in *Exploring Everyday Life*, routines “shape people’s lives, often in unconscious ways” (Ehn et al. 2016: 1). Despite the concept of routines appearing quite conserving (much like the gender norms in Butler’s heterosexual matrix), their performative nature does leave room for change, as “these small repetitive actions can work to subtly change larger social structures, cultural values, and gendered notions of self and society” (Löfgren & Wilk 2005: 10). This connection “between small matters and large issues” (Ehn et al. 2015: 1) is exactly what an attention to the routines of everyday life enables me to do in this study; the large issue that I attempt to access is the military profession. Furthermore, as I mentioned in the outline of my ethnographic efforts in the first chapter, my decision to

conduct participatory fieldwork was motivated by an interest in exploring how “similarity and continuity in knowledge, forms of action and collaboration emerge” (Hastrup et al. 2011: 177, my translation) and how “tacit rules for behavior” (Spradley 1980: 53) are learned. According to Ehn and Löfgren (2010), this sort of knowledge is exactly what is established through everyday routines anchored in the body. But routines are not merely an individual matter: “Every day, all of us take part in an elaborate choreography, as intricate as the plot of any novel, where, more or less unaware of it, we coordinate our actions with other people” (ibid.: 6). Thus, routines enable us to participate in a collective – *if* we acquire the tacit knowledge and learn how to reproduce the routines, I would add.

Returning to Mol and Law’s suggestion that “[i]n complex, mundane, material practices ‘the good’ tends to figure as something to tinker towards – silently” (2002: 85), I want to consider the possibilities of exploring silence. With Ehn and Löfgren’s conceptualization of routines, silence can be interpreted as an expression of having obtained a sufficient amount of tacit knowledge in relation to shared expectations, viewpoints, and customs. As such, I would argue that the silence that comes with the routines could be seen as an ‘accomplice’ in the constitution of boundaries around an ‘inside’. To illustrate the connection between silence, boundary work, and routines, I want to go back to the draft examinations that I observed for a week (see page 43-44). As I mentioned, there was a sense of unease among the young citizens who arrived at the recruitment center, most likely because their military ‘destinies’ would be determined here. After observing nine of these events in total, I became more and more familiar with the routines and the flow of the event; however, the cohort of young citizens was always new to the routines. None of them had ever been in this situation before. And, unlike the employees at the center who knew all of the routines by heart, the young citizens seemed unsure how to act, where to sit, and when to speak – they did not have the tacit knowledge that came with the routines. Here, I got an initial impression of the importance of routines in relation to the positioning of one as an insider or outsider, which I discuss further in the analysis.

With inspiration from Ahmed’s more critical and power-attentive conceptualization of “being heard”, I suggest an extension of Ehn and Löfgren’s concept of silent knowledge that may, to a greater extent, acknowledge the power relations potentially implied.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> As ethnologist Karoliina Ojanen points out, “[t]here is a distinction between being silenced and being silent” (Ojanen 2016: 22): while silence may entail agency, silencing is the potential effect of interaction within asymmetrical relationships in which the desires and opinions of one part are ignored, silenced.

Specifically, the *silence* that with routines bring about may also be a *silencing* of those who do not know the routines or those who want to do things differently; something that becomes relevant in the negotiation and establishing of routines among conscripts who are subjected to requirements for uniformity. Thus, in the articles, I focus on routines with more attention to the power dimensions in which they are engaged. What I suggest is that routines take part in positioning someone as being either inside or outside the collective; thus, they contribute to whether or not one is recognizable.

### Summarizing the analytical framework

This chapter has taken the reader through the elements that comprise my analytical figure of *the good soldier*. First, I presented the overarching ontological and epistemological framework by introducing the post-humanistic use of feminist *figurations*. Through figurations like Haraway's cyborgs, traditional divides such as material/discursive, nature/culture, and human/non-human are collapsed, and attention is redirected to the *entanglement* and the *becoming-with* of phenomena that are otherwise assumed to carry an inherent and stable meaning. This focus on the becoming – rather than the being – of matter was connected to Butler's concept of *the heterosexual matrix* as a way to understand the processual becoming of subjects; in my case, *military subjects*. By combining the two, I have constructed the analytical figure of the good soldier based on an emic term used by sergeants during my participatory fieldwork. Specifically, I combine Butler's claim that, in order to be *recognized*, we need to be recognized in relation to something, and Haraway's claim that becoming recognizable involves actors other than human beings.

The concept of recognition was then unfolded through three different analytical strategies that in different ways address the *performativity* and *embodiment* that such a theoretical position calls for. First, drawing on the work of primarily Ahmed, I addressed the *affects* that are involved in the process of becoming recognizable as a good soldier; i.e., the laughter, anger, or frustration that indicates when performances are either inside or outside understandings of *good*. Second, I introduced the reader to Heuts and Mol's concept of *valuing*; a conceptualization of how 'good' is done as a multiple and social phenomenon. And finally, I suggested Ehn and Löfgren's concept of *routines* as a way to

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Thus, silencing "may also refer to an encounter where a person is not heard even though he or she has a voice" (Ojanen 2016: 21).

understand silent patterns in everyday life that constitute choreographed collectives; an 'inside' based on forms of *tacit knowledge* that are part of making one recognizable or not. Across these analytical strategies, the human body is essential as the materiality in which the valuing of military subjects and routines are anchored and through which affects flow. Thus, to address how the body is made recognizable, I have also introduced Foucault's concepts of *discipline* and *technologies of the self* as well as McRuer's concept of *able-bodiedness*.

As already mentioned, my analytical approach differs from most others in the broader field of military studies, although I do draw on insights from existing bodies of work within military studies, not least critical military studies. Focusing on the routines that comprise much of military service has enabled me to look beyond the spectacle of war and see the 'non-events' and routines of everyday life; paying particular attention to gender makes unquestioned standards visible; emphasizing materiality beyond that of the human body enables the inclusion of how distributed agency influences the becoming of soldiers; an attention to affect makes it possible to 'hear' powerful mechanisms that are not necessarily put into words; and an inclusion of discourses makes it possible to explore the limits of recognition as configured through the good soldier. This I hope will be vivid from the four articles that make up the core of this dissertation.

Just as Heuts and Mol do not aim to answer the question stated in the title of their paper "What is a good tomato?", my intention is neither to determine exactly what it means to be a good soldier or the exact characteristics a good soldier may possess. Rather, my aim is to explore *how* a good soldier comes to be. One reason for this emphasis on the process rather than the result is that there simply is no 'result'. What it may mean to be a good soldier is contested and multiple. Hence, producing an exhaustive list of characteristics that define a good soldier is neither possible nor useful. Valuing takes place in this process, even if it has no 'final conclusion'. Instead, my interest lies in analyzing the mechanisms that are part of constituting these good (and less good) soldiers, which may enable findings that are less dependent on the specific empirical setting. But before turning to this analytical core, I will in the next chapter discuss some of my methodological decisions and considerations during the ethnographic and analytical process, which have taken me from the initial idea to this final text. Here, the analytical framework and the state-of-the-art are used as the foundation for decisions on what to inquire about during fieldwork and how to structure the analysis.

# Openings and Closings

## The ethnographic and analytical process

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Having introduced my analytical framework, it should be apparent that this was not the result of a strict design developed from the outset, but rather a way of seeing that has been adapted and developed in dialogue with empirical insights throughout the research process. This seems almost inevitable when doing such an empirically-grounded study but, according to ethnologists Lars-Eric Jönsson and Fredrik Nilsson, the relation between theory and empirical material is arguably a central characteristic of ethnology:

“One of the strengths of ethnology is that theories – no matter which – is confronted with ethnographic observations or close readings of written sources, which has a tendency to complicate the theoretical claims and embrace the rich nuances, complexity, and contradictions of reality.”  
(Jönsson & Nilsson 2014: 9-10, my translation)

But how do we embrace these contradictions and complexity in the meeting between theoretical claims and empirical detail? In this chapter, I describe some of my methodological decisions and considerations during the ethnographic and analytical process, which have taken me from the initial idea to this final text. With an acknowledgement that the research process cannot only be done in one ‘correct’ way, the possible outcomes are multiple. However, discarding positivistic claims about truth does not entail unleashed relativism. Rather, I would argue that something else is needed: transparency and the considerate use of analytical resources. Transparency in how notes were taken, what was noticed and observed during fieldwork, which questions were asked during interviews, how field notes and interview recordings were coded, etc. Transparency about each step I took supports the sturdiness of the claims that I put forth in the analyses.

The motivation for my overall empirical approach as well as reflections on how the field has been constructed and how boundary work has influenced my ethnographic approach have already been discussed in the first chapter, *Setting the Scene*. In this chapter, I build on these initial discussions by addressing the most important considerations and decisions that my research process has generated. Starting with the openings and closings of the ethnographic process, I reflect on how this has affected the analytical potential for



the dissertation. I support this by outlining the steps involved – from the field to the final text. Next, I address the bodily dimensions of the field, and how this affected my analytical process, which also leads to reflections about the erotic dimensions of my fieldwork. These initial reflections and accounts are motivated by Haraway’s understanding of knowledge, as she claims that: “Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; ‘objects’ do not pre-exist as such” (1991: 201). Following this quotation, the objects presented in research are inevitably dependent on how we know them. This also calls for reflection on the ethical considerations that are part of studying a subject that is (sometimes) closely related to questions of life and death. These will be presented before turning to the final part of the chapter in which discussing how the topics of the four articles were chosen. This will lead to the four articles that follow.

### **Openings and closings in the empirical work**

While some of the theories and existing studies presented in the state-of-the-art encourage a more deductive approach due to their structuralistic approach, my intention with the empirical work in this study has been different. Inspired by philosopher of science Vinciane Despret (2005), I have followed her appeal that we as scholars should approach our fields of research with curiosity rather than limitations. The researcher will not be able to define what is of importance *to the field* prior to the actual fieldwork and, consequently, what should be emphasized in the analysis. This argument is presented in the beautifully titled paper “Sheep do have opinions” (2005) in which Despret – drawing on the work of primatologist Thelma Rowell – demonstrates how the research setup used to study the behavior of sheep has distorted results because it was based on preexisting assumptions about the sheep. Designing a study based on preexisting assumptions simply limits the possible outcomes, as they become narrowed down before one even enters the field (in Despret’s case, this is an actual agricultural field). As Despret notes: “Expanding the repertoire of possible motives allows far more sophisticated explanations” (2005: 368). Motivated by this argument, this dissertation is based on ethnographic fieldwork in which I have attempted to be curious and explorative. As mentioned in my introduction of Ahmed’s concept of moods (see the subchapter *Recognition and the ability to be heard*, p. 94-97), the importance of the affective flows in the becoming of military subjects is an example of an analytical opening that appeared during my fieldwork.

However, it would be naive to think that curiosity is not informed by previous knowledge, feelings, or stereotypes. For instance, I had to decide what type of empirical material to generate and include in this study – just as Rowell decided to observe the sheep for years – before I could approach “the repertoire of possible motives.” First, as I briefly summarized in the chapter *Setting the Scene*, my study of the becoming of good soldiers builds on a variety of empirical material. Through interviews, observations, auto-ethnography, and analysis of reports and documents, I draw on both spoken and written words, as previous studies have suggested this as a fruitful way to proceed with analytical understandings of military culture, e.g. Carol Cohn’s groundbreaking article from 1987 which was discussed as an example of boundary work that happens through language (in *Setting the Scene*). Second, the dissertation builds on bodily experiences, such as the physical training, drills, and marching of both the researcher and others. These are included as a way to further explore the performative nature of becoming a soldier; an approach that is considered extraordinarily relevant in a profession that is highly focused on physicality and the disciplining of bodies (Carreiras 2006; Maninger 2008; Kold 2011; Kilshaw 2011; McSorley 2015). Thus, the decisions made in planning my fieldwork were guided by existing research on this field, but also informed by my own prior knowledge of the military, which reflects the blurry lines of ‘the field’ and ‘fieldwork.’

My initial ambition to do participatory fieldwork with a platoon in the Danish army was supported by a helpful ‘gatekeeper’ working at one of the recruitment centers. But it was also steered by my knowledge about how combat units are considered to be the core of the military. Initially, I tried to get permission to do the four months of fieldwork in a company associated with combat rather ‘support’ (e.g., engineers or logistics). And I did receive permission – but it came with the requirement that I had to participate on equal terms with everyone else or not at all because the company commander was convinced that the cohesion of the platoon would suffer if I stepped in and out of the ranks. However, knowing that full participation would require a lot of energy and make it difficult to observe incidents that I was not part of myself, my ambition was to alternate between participation and standing on the sideline to observe. So I declined this offer and found another platoon commander who was open to letting me do more-or-less as I pleased.

I have been met with only positive responses and openness to my explorative ethnographic participation, which initially surprised me. Not only due to my preliminary assumption that the military would be hesitant to let in ‘civilians’, but also due to the boundary work that I encountered during this time. However, the absence of controversy

and the general perception that conscripts are not ‘real’ soldiers probably allowed me to gain access more easily; whether or not I was allowed to do fieldwork was not a political issue. From a security perspective, the absence of operational or confidential knowledge in my project also facilitated my access, and this has meant that my field notes were not subjected to censorship or control (which has been the case for some colleagues). From my time at the Royal Danish Defence Academy in 2013-2014 (i.e. prior to my participatory fieldwork), I already had security clearance, and I made sure to mention this in all of my inquiries about possible fieldwork, hereby suggesting myself to be a sort of insider.

Returning to an observation I noted in the chapter *Setting the Scene*, my position in the field has changed between being an insider and an outsider. This has been a continuous movement, not least of all due to the different degrees of participation I used and my familiarity with the routines in a given context. I went from feeling like a complete outsider at the recruitment center, estranged by the efficiency and routines of the employees conducting draft examinations every day, to feeling more like an insider who understood the shared choreography (Ehn & Löfgren 2010) and could navigate it – even being mistaken for an employee. During the participatory fieldwork, my position became more similar to that of the conscripts; feeling confused and overwhelmed by the process of having to learn so many new norms and developing tacit knowledge. Still, my position continuously shifted, like when we took off the uniforms and went into the ‘civilian’ sphere outside. These shifts in my position are visible from the following example from a night on the town:

I am sitting outside a club talking with Andersen as 4-5 other conscripts from our platoon come over. One of them whispers something to Andersen, which makes him stand up and start walking away, following the group of conscripts. “Okay, well – bye-bye then,” I yell, somewhat offended that he would just leave in the middle of a conversation. He stops and says to the group: “We can bring, Sløk, right?” which triggers a prompt “No” from one of the others. Andersen approaches me again and explains in a low voice, “It’s just that we are gonna go do coke – you wanna join us?”  
(Based on field notes, week 17)

This situation perfectly depicts the position I was in during these four months; I took part in social events because I wanted to join in, not because I wanted to do more observations. But I was also occasionally perceived as ‘the grown-up’ among this group of young adults (one even asked me whether color TV had been invented when I was young). Although I was not in the exact same position as the other conscripted soldiers, the four articles

illustrate how and why I often felt part of a 'we' in the platoon – not least of all when wearing the uniform.

Conducting two days of observations with a company at a different military camp a year after the participatory fieldwork highlighted how a different position could give me a different perspective. As I was not wearing the uniform and did not take part in the daily routines and challenges, I could easily switch between following sergeants and groups of conscripts. Unlike the participatory fieldwork, this enabled me to gain far more contact with the sergeants, as our relations were not embedded in the hierarchal structure of the military that had positioned me differently at the other camp. In addition, I got the chance to sit in on a meeting during which five female conscripts presented accounts of sexual harassment to their superior officer. This officer offered me the opportunity because I had presented myself as having a background in gender studies; thus, he figured that the matter at hand would be of interest to me. Being able to participate in this meeting – after the five women had given their consent – provided me with very valuable insight into the mechanisms of what Ahmed (2014a) refers to as 'not being in the mood' in a military context; insights that I had not experienced to the same degree during my participatory fieldwork the year before. This illustrates how different empirical approaches can lead to different insights and outcomes. For this reason, I have attempted to combine different approaches – including one that gave me more blisters and sore muscles, however, than the others.

## **Material in motion**

In order to ensure that I generated rich ethnographic material full of detail, I planned beforehand to include various types of impressions and observations in my field notes (see Appendix 2 and 3). For instance, my observation guide for the four months of participatory fieldwork (see Appendix 3) included the following headlines:

- Setting (physical surroundings, soundscape, smells, etc.)
- Discipline and routines (what are the daily routines, how is military discipline 'done,' how do conscripts react to disciplining measures, etc.?)
- Talking (what is being said and not said, when is it quiet, when do people laugh, etc.?)

- Physical exercise and strength (have people prepared for this, what reactions are ‘good’ and ‘bad’ performances met with, are there tasks that are given greater importance than others, etc.?)
- Uniforms (what does it consist of, what do people wear when uniforms are not required, do people act differently depending on the uniform of who is instructing them, etc.?)
- Weapons (what does it feel like to handle a weapon, how do conscripts react differently to weapons, etc.?)
- Motivation and ideals (what made them sign up, what is ascribed the greatest importance in basic training, what values are used to describe the armed forces, who is looked up to and down on, etc.?)

As reflected in these initial ideas for what I should focus on during the four months, my intention to understand the military profession ‘from the inside’ was also guided by the theoretical concepts I presented in the previous chapter. But the next step – of noting what was happening, who was saying what, etc., – was somewhat of a challenge. Perhaps not surprisingly, taking notes does not fit well with much military training. Luckily, we also had a fair number of breaks each day and theoretical classes in auditoriums where it was much easier to take notes. Supporting my ‘integration’ in the field, all conscripts were provided with a pen and a notebook on the first day, and we were regularly advised – sometimes even ordered – to use them for taking notes while receiving instructions. I just happened to take a lot more notes than anyone else in our platoon.

However, I was sad that I did not arrive back at my desk at the university with poetic, detailed, and dense ethnographies like the ones I know from so many other pieces of scholarly work. Quite honestly, it took me a while to realize that such works are rarely written as they unfold in the plain eyesight of the fieldworker; they are the outcome of a process shaped by the analytical process. While this might be silent common knowledge, it initially made me insecure about my own empirical material. Thus, I want to counter this silence by addressing it here. My field notes have traveled a long way from small red notebooks distributed by the Danish Defence to this dissertation. The brief field notes I scribbled down during each week of fieldwork were later typed into my computer, either in the evening or on the train and bus rides to and from the camp. Here, I expanded on the descriptions of what I had already noted during the week. This resulted in a very extensive Word file that I coded months later; coding that I mostly used to think about and identify patterns. The codes I used (see Appendix 7) were more specific to analytical questions, e.g., “The line of fire as focal point” and “The good soldier,” and they have not shaped the

empirical content of the four papers as such. Rather, these codes have functioned as my reading glasses while going through all of my field notes and interview transcripts. During coding, even more details became clear in my memory; I could vividly see many of the described scenarios in my head, yet these memories were not necessarily in my notes. At this point, I added comments and details but in a new coding color. Not because this was less valuable input, but because it was shaped by later experiences and, not least of all, a heightened analytical focus that made some events rather than others pop out in my memory.

Besides creating transparency in the process, this description should make it clear that – based on an understanding of knowledge that I already mentioned (Haraway 1988; Stormhøj 2004) – field notes are not an ‘original source’ that presents a true or objective in-the-moment picture of the social interaction that takes place during fieldwork. For this to be true, we would first have to believe that knowledge in itself can be true. Second, this would require that my observations could be defined as ‘unspoiled presentations’ of a unequivocal reality at some stage in the research process. As sociologist of science Stephen Hilgartner (1990) illustrates, a precisely defined boundary “between genuine scientific knowledge and popularized representations” cannot be drawn (1990: 524), as it implies an assumption of pure and genuine knowledge. However, as the reader has perhaps already noticed, references to my empirical material say either “field notes” or “based on field notes”. This is done in an attempt to ensure transparency and temporality in the research process. Furthermore, marking this difference can be read as a comment on the often-unspoken processes of editing and expansion that occur in much ethnographic work.

Finally, in the process of transforming field notes to articles, language has also been an issue. A consequence of doing fieldwork in Danish while writing in English entails a risk of a slight distortion of arguments as they were put forward by the people being interviewed and observed. I have attempted to translate based on recognition of the overall meaning and context that arguments were presented in, while also ensuring that potential puns or cultural references remained in the quotation despite translation (this is in particular relevant in the article “The butt of the joke?”).

Many of the quotations are excerpts from the qualitative, semi-structured interviews I conducted with 36 of the conscripts, sergeants, and officers at the end of the conscription period (for a full list of interviewees, see Appendix 6). Conducting fieldwork with a

company in which I was allowed to alternate between ‘full participation’ and observing from the sidelines enabled me to do these interviews, which would otherwise have been difficult to carry out. In particular, it would have been a challenge to conduct interviews with sergeants and officers, who were not present at the military camp in the evenings when we had time off. However, since many of the interviews ended up taking place within our schedule of regular activities during the day, they were very difficult to plan; like all the conscripts, I had little prior knowledge about what each day would bring, what sergeants were doing when they were not instructing us, and who would be present when and where.

Because it was quite difficult to get hold of sergeants and officers, I did not have strict selection criteria for whom I would interview; I simply interviewed anyone who consented and had time. Deciding which conscripts to interview, however, was based on an ambition to include a wide range of conscripts according to their socio-economic background, age, gender, expressions of sexual activity, assigned responsibilities, and my sense of whether or not they were recognized as ‘good.’ Most of this insight had been gained during my prior months of fieldwork; the rumors I heard, the stories they told, the reactions their behavior prompted, etc.

As will be evident from my interview guides for the conscripted soldiers (Appendix 4) and the sergeants and officers (Appendix 5), the questions I asked during these interviews were informed by the state-of-the-art presented in *Setting the scene*, the analytical framework presented in *Analyzing the good soldier*, and the observations I had made thus far. At the point in the process when I was conducting interviews, it was difficult to tell one from the other, which illustrates again how the material and the analytical approaches were constantly in motion. However, because the interview guides had been designed prior to my participatory fieldwork, I adjusted them before conducting the interviews. In the next section, I address the centrality of another element that was also in motion throughout the research process; specifically, my own body.

### **An ethnology of flesh and blood?**

At the draft examinations, almost half of all Danish men are currently classified as non-eligible for military service (*Statistical Information*: 4). The percentage has been increasing over the past several decades, having gone from 32 to 47 percent over the last 20 years

(ibid.). Looking further back, only 6 percent of the cohort of young men were rejected in 1969/1970 (Sørensen 2000: 319). This indicates that either the physical and/or mental state of young Danish men has gotten progressively worse over the last 50 years, or perhaps that these assessments have become more harsh – or loose, depending on how you see it. A combination of the two factors might be the case.

In a comparison of conscription systems in the Scandinavian countries, military sociologist Henning Sørensen speculates that the higher rejection rate in Denmark compared to Sweden and Norway may be due to examiners who “anticipate animosity on the part of the military towards conscripts with even minor imperfections that lead to their disqualification” (Sørensen 2000: 320). Put another way, Sørensen suggests that citizens who are not fully able-bodied will be met with great hostility within the military if they do serve. In light of these insights, it is perhaps not surprising that I was anxious before starting my participatory fieldwork – I had a clear sense that, if anyone required me to go through the draft examination, I too would be rejected due to the recurrent migraines from which I sometimes suffer, which are often triggered by physical activities with high intensity.

While I could not fully escape the migraines, I figured that I could at least build as much strength and endurance as possible prior to starting fieldwork. The importance of physical fitness was confirmed during the week I spent at the recruitment center; here, it was suggested that the prospective conscripts should start exercising a couple of months or even a year before serving “because our job is pretty physically demanding” (field notes, Recruitment Center). While this encouragement was generally followed by a clarification that being in shape is not a requirement for doing military service, the emphasis on physical fitness was repeated in the letter that was sent with instructions for preparation a few months before the conscription period started. And, indeed, this form of encouragement affected me:

“Before I follow the platoon of conscripts, I have, however, promised myself to build even more muscle mass – coz I don’t want to be the weakest one. I do not ‘dare’ to be the one falling behind or who is the reason that everyone else has to run extra rounds. That probably says something about my perception of the Danish military and military service: There will be collective punishment from superiors, and physical fitness is key when it comes to completing in an acceptable manner.”

(Field notes, October 2015)



Thus, months in advance, I began to increase my physical-exercise efforts. My insights from previous studies, advertisements from the Danish Defence, and my initial observations were not only affecting my methodological considerations – they were also affecting me. The military was already disciplining my body, as I tried to build strength and endurance in an attempt to avoid being cast as *disabled* (McRuer 2006).

A few days before starting the participatory fieldwork, I travelled to the military camp to present my project and give the sergeants some idea of how to ‘handle’ me. Here, I was met with curiosity and was asked if they could read the results of my work. But most of their questions expressed concern and focused on how much I would be able to participate due to the migraines. Furthermore, as with the first company commander I talked to about doing fieldwork, the sergeants expressed concern about how it would affect platoon cohesion if I did not participate in all the conscripts’ activities. How this evolved in practice is evident in the four articles, but it surely emphasized the importance of being able-bodied.



**Illustration 5. The drill that makes conscripts “feel like a real soldier”**

In a subsequent meeting with the lieutenant who would be my platoon commander, he presented the plans for the four months, and together we concluded that my participation would primarily be limited in two activities; when the company would run a half-marathon, and during a drill that makes conscripts “feel like a real soldier” (field notes, January 2016). The latter was an activity in which we would run with full gear – going through water, being paced by the sound of explosions, and being disoriented by a veil of smoke. This scenario was clearly meant to resemble a real combat situation as much as possible. Unlike running 21 kilometers, combat simulations such as this would apparently make us feel like real soldiers (see also Engman 2013). The lieutenant also stressed that activities with lower intensity can still be tough, like walking with 15 kilograms on one’s back for a long time. I left this meeting with a strong sense of the physical character of becoming a soldier, and what would later appear as an important connection between combat, ‘real soldiers’, and able-bodiedness.

Before these encounters with the military profession, a colleague handed me a copy of sociologist Loïc Wacquant’s *Body & Soul – Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (2006); something that initially made me laugh. How could the story of a sociologist spending three years to become a semi-professional boxer in Chicago say anything about what I would be going through? Moving beyond my initial reaction, however, the book taught me the importance of “performing the phenomenon” as a valuable tool to understanding the research object. In particular, Wacquant argues that:

“To understand the universe of boxing requires one to immerse oneself in it firsthand, to learn it and experience its constitutive moments from the inside. Native understanding of the object is here the necessary condition of an adequate knowledge of the object.” (ibid.: 59)

From this quote, we get a clear sense of the usefulness and even the necessity to embody and include what Wacquant calls “the carnal dimension of existence” (2006: vii) in research. Performing the phenomenon itself is presented as a privileged access to an almost ‘true’ version of the object of the study. This is not a call for studies *of* the body but rather studies *from* the body, as Wacquant emphasizes in his paper, “For a sociology of flesh and blood” (2015). Here, he further argues for “the social ontology and methodology of carnal sociology as a distinct mode of social inquiry” (2015: 1). This “sociology of flesh and blood” emphasizes the raw and almost primitive nature of such an “incarnate investigation.” The potency of such an approach practically emanates from this work, but its appeal is certainly felt when reading *Body & Soul*; my own ethnographic efforts felt

humble next to Wacquant's immersive years as a boxer. During the research process, the disabling effect of my migraines also influenced my belief that I could be a good scholar within the field of military studies; if I cannot participate in the activities that make conscripts feel like a 'real soldier,' then how can I ever really perform the phenomenon? The importance ascribed to able-bodiedness in the military is echoed in these worries, especially as they entangle with the primacy of ethnographic fieldwork within my own profession.

Why is ethnographic fieldwork that takes a very visible toll on one's body more glorified than fieldwork that leaves less visible marks on the body of the researcher? Here, I see a clear – although, to me, somewhat surprising – similarity between the military and ethnographic work, which both exalt the able and potent body. And I find myself somewhere on the spectrum between a refusal of this exaltation of fieldwork that demands blood, sweat, and tears, while also realizing that “performing the phenomenon” generates insights that are difficult to grasp through methods other than auto-ethnography (this concept will be discussed in the article “Researching the body – the body in research”). Only by experiencing the anxieties that built up prior to my participatory fieldwork could I understand how effective compulsory able-bodiedness is, especially as it works through disciplining mechanisms that stretch beyond the military camps.

During the four months, it was my physical presence – as we lined up in file and rank according to height – that made me realize that this aspect of the body might also affect our chances of being recognized as good soldiers. Because I am much taller than the national average for women, the materiality of my own body positioned me at the 'tall end' of the line-up, which provided great insight into the interactions and outbursts among the male conscripts who comprised this end of the ranks. Had I been a lot shorter, I might have gained a better understanding of the struggles experienced by the 'short end,' such as keeping up with the rest of us while marching; something that became evident in the interviews I conducted with female conscripts an entire foot shorter than I. Thus, this became a study both *of* and *from* the body.

Unlike the reluctance to understand the military from the inside that has been somewhat symptomatic among feminist scholars, my “carnal” experience of the military enabled a different knowledge and thus a different potential for critique – not least of all due to the bodily fluids and fleshy experiences that came with this sort of fieldwork. However, it also

involves other dilemmas and considerations; for instance, the sexual dimensions of fieldwork that I discuss next. These were emphasized due to the gender marks on my body.

### **The sexual dimensions of fieldwork in a male-dominated setting**

Sitting down on the ground outside a shooting range, next to the male sergeant who I had spending part of the day with, another two sergeants joined us. I became the center of attention, and I took the opportunity to ask questions about their experience with training conscripts as well as to share some of the stories I had heard from conscripts during the day. The three sergeants almost battled for my attention, saying things like, “You have to experience being hungry, cold, scared and wet!” and stressing how much tougher conscription was when they went through it.

(Based on field notes, May 2017)

The male sergeants I encountered when I did the two days of observations in 2017 were very eager to help me, and I was thrilled that I could enter a new empirical setting and win their goodwill in just a few hours. Yet, as I reflected over the events of the day on my way home, it also seemed peculiar that some of the male sergeants had sort of put on a show for me or even competed for my attention. It reminded me of TV documentaries about animals in mating season; footage of birds flaunting their feathers, accompanied by gender-stereotypical comments about how the males attempt to impress and capture the attention of the females (Juelskjær 2002). Behind the sergeants’ ‘show’ lay the concept of heteronormativity; for this reason, the interaction was marked by mutual assumptions that we were all heterosexual and that my “erotic admiration” (Newton 1993: 15) as a researcher was in play between me as a woman and them as men. And I felt flattered. After having been yelled at, corrected, and disciplined through most of my fieldwork, it was nice to get attention and be recognized as a sexual being. Receiving this form of attention, however, was a contrast that suddenly made visible how hierarchy and discipline (entangled in the uniform that I wore at the other military camp) had been involved in positioning me differently, and also in reconfiguring me in relation to gender and sexuality.

Before embarking on any fieldwork in this male-dominated setting, I have been aware that my appearance and self-identification as a woman would be a matter that demanded reflection along the way. In this case, being a (relatively) young woman surrounded by a

primarily male group of sergeants during the two days of contrasting fieldwork affected my access; it seemed to enhance their desire to open up and share their stories. But the scenario above led me from simply thinking about gender to thinking about the sexual dimensions of fieldwork; a connection that makes sense due to the intricately intertwined categories of gender and sexuality that the heterosexual matrix describes.

These considerations reflect what anthropologist Esther Newton discusses in her paper, "My best informant's dress: The erotic equation in fieldwork" (1993). Here, Newton describes "the erotic dimension of knowledge and power" that is established qua the emotional and erotic relations between a fieldworker and their informants in the field. Overturning the belief that anthropologists always remain detached from their field due to a division between emotions and intellect, Newton states that "fieldworkers and informants do and must get involved emotionally" (ibid.: 5). And Newton further claims that getting involved emotionally has erotic dimensions. Challenging many of the "grand old men" in anthropology, Newton asks: "[w]hy are emotion and sexuality less important or less implicated in what Clifford calls the 'relations of production' (Clifford 1986: 13) of ethnography than are race and colonialism?" (Newton 1993: 5). And while emotions have gained recognition as a relevant dimension of fieldwork, for instance, spurred by what we might call 'the affective turn,' the erotic or sexual dimensions are still reluctantly included in ethnographic work, despite the numerous debates on reflexivity that have taken place since Newton wrote this piece.<sup>70</sup> This is perhaps because "dominant ideas on what constitutes 'good' research and being a 'good' researcher" are still tied to "detachment, objectivity, and rationality" in research (Craene 2017: 454).

The erotic dimension of doing fieldwork – which Newton shows to have been absent in the anthropological canon up until 1993 – does not imply having sexual intercourse with someone in the field. Rather, her work attempts to verbalize and recognize the sexual vibe and categories that might be in effect through e.g. sexual attraction, flirting, or sexual danger. As she writes, we are all "erotic creatures" and the "erotic equation" in fieldwork affects our access to information differently (Newton 1993: 8). As will be more vivid in the fourth article ("The butt of the joke?"), my fieldwork would undoubtedly have been

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<sup>70</sup> The limited recognition of this dimension in research is still more-or-less restricted to studies on issues related to sexuality. So, even if sexuality and desire have gained attention as objects of research – and partly as something to which to position oneself in relation to being a researcher – there still seems to exist a divide between "the desiring body of the informant on the one hand and the non-desiring body of the researcher on the other" (Craene 2017: 449).

different if had I been an openly gay man.<sup>71</sup> As would my relationship to our platoon commander, Lieutenant Petersen. As it were, we expressed mutual respect and consideration for each other from the beginning, and I took a liking to him. It was nowhere close to being a sexual relationship, but it did feel like the affective flow between us was different from any other superior I met in the military setting. This made him easier to approach and made conversations run more smoothly, although it might also have made me more reluctant to go against my initial promise to not cause him problems (e.g., by refusing an order, which I was the only one allowed to do so). As he was in charge of our platoon, it made my fieldwork extremely smooth and helped to position him as a *key informant* (Cohen 1984) in my study – as will be clear in the four papers. However, at other times, any sexuality felt completely repressed or superseded by belittlement and awkwardness; for example, when there was a comprehensive scolding of the platoon.

In the paper “The butt of the joke?”, I elaborate on how sexuality affects the process of being recognized as a good soldier, and the question of gender in relation to the methodological and analytical openings and closings is addressed in all four papers. But first, I will in the following section attend to the ethical considerations that my work have brought about.

## **Ethical considerations**

Within anthropology, engaging with military issues – and especially collaborating with military organizations – has caused heated debates and tension in break-rooms at anthropology departments and at conferences (see, e.g., Rubinstein et al. 2013). Anecdotes from colleagues as well as scholarly publications on the matter suggest this to be an ongoing scholarly debate that has been refueled recently, as military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq have included the ‘embedding’ of anthropologists with combat troops (Lucas 2009; McNamara & Rubinstein 2011; Rubinstein, Foscher & Fujumura

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<sup>71</sup> Implied in the term “erotic equation” is an assumption that the gender identity or sexual practices of the fieldworker as well as the informants affect the outcome; if elements in this equation had been different, the outcome would most likely have been different as well (Newton 1993: 8).

2013).<sup>72</sup> Military scholar Ruth M. Beitler of the US Military Academy, for instance, notes that:

“The relationship between the military and anthropology is not a new phenomenon. Anthropology’s affiliation with the military has always been complicated, with some anthropologists advocating interaction to achieve national objectives and others rejecting all cooperation [...] Clearly the ‘do no harm’ obligation of those who study other cultures has an impact on how researchers use collected cultural data and complicated ethical questions arise for those who work for or with the military.” (Beitler 2013: 1)

Considering these debates, efforts to explore the military with an ethnologic approach have been surprisingly uncontroversial. Ethnology simply does not appear to have such a complicated affiliation with the military, presumably due in part to a history less entangled in colonial power and exploitation; for anthropology, this has required the above-mentioned obligation to “do no harm”. And, while ethnology requires a similar obligation, this discipline to which I feel the strongest bonds does not have the same explicit call. Nonetheless, recognizing the extent to which connections between the military and anthropologists have caused heated debates, I want to address this matter; however, an attention to research ethics should not be limited to such controversial topics.

Research is political, and the results of our scholarly efforts can be twisted and turned in unforeseen ways. But sometimes, more explicit efforts are made to support national or political agendas. This happened within military anthropology during World War II when the American Anthropological Association (AAA) declared the resources and knowledge of its members to be “at the disposal of the country for the successful prosecution of the war” (Eggan 1942, cited in Rubinstein et al. 2013: 1). From a European perspective, scholars and scientists have also contributed to the effectiveness and superiority of national militaries. For instance, British scientists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century “stood ready and willing to assist the state when it was needed”, with both parties driven by national interests (Clinkman 2012: 137).

Regardless of the definition of war to which one might subscribe, the connection between scholarly efforts and ethics is complicated in a field where human lives are continuously hurt, scarred, or eliminated. The very definition and purpose of a soldier is, after all, “to impose his will on others – to deter others from exercising violence or, if necessary, to

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<sup>72</sup> The introduction of social scientists in military efforts has also produced skepticism the other way around, with members of military organizations expressing reservations about the use of these sciences (see, e.g., Fosher 2018).

exercise violence himself” (interview with Col. Johnsen). And so, this inevitably calls for ethical considerations of one’s entanglement as a scholar. But, just as the military is an ‘extreme’ setting in which to unfold the concept of performativity (as I illustrate in “Vomit over tears”), so might it also be an extreme setting for a discussion of research ethics. With a degree of provocation, we might ask whether military scholars who contribute to gathering intelligence about an enemy are in more of an ethical dilemma than scholars who examine how the human brain becomes addicted to cigarettes or fatty foods – are they not both tied to questions of life-and-death? In either case, ethical considerations and precautions must be taken. But somehow, military matters seem to cause greater outbursts. I would suggest that the amount of outrage and moral condemnation that has been directed towards military anthropology is connected to the exceptionality that surrounds the military; thus, the claim that this field of research necessitates greater precautions than others contributes to further establishing boundaries around the military.

However, a matter that arises from the perhaps provocative comparison above is that of distance and application; who or what purpose motivates the study? A frequent criticism is that research in the field of military studies is funded by military and intelligence organizations themselves, which challenges the independence and objectivity of this research (McNamara & Rubinstein 2011). In line with this critique, I have focused on conducting this study not as ‘independent’ from the Danish Defence – because claiming to not be entangled in this setting would be an illusion – but rather remaining as close to scholarly considerations as possible. For instance, this was supported in the collaboration agreement I made with the company where I did participatory fieldwork.<sup>73</sup> Here, it was stated that my observations in connection with this study would not require any form of review or approval by anyone in the Danish Defence before they could be utilized in research-related output. Furthermore, the agreement established that I would not be required to share my observations or any personal knowledge about the conscripted soldiers, including their sometimes questionable behavior (e.g., running into a conscript smoking marijuana at the military camp as well as the aforementioned scenario where I was invited to do cocaine with some of the conscripts – both of which were absolutely prohibited). In return for remaining free from any censorship, I committed myself to *The Danish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (2014), which includes considerations about

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<sup>73</sup> This agreement is not enclosed as an appendix due to considerations for anonymity.



confidentiality, anonymity, and data management. Furthermore, the project has been reported to the Danish Data Protection Agency (Appendix 8).

When dealing with issues like exclusion and minority issues, a researcher has an obvious ethical responsibility. As such, I adhered to the ambition to “do no harm.” With consideration for the anonymity of the soldiers involved, the names of the specific regiments, companies, and platoons that I joined are concealed, and all of the soldiers have been given pseudonyms. However, those familiar with the layout of the various military camps may be able to recognize specific companies or locations based on the photographs and descriptions included in this dissertation. I have attempted to address this by concealing identifying factors related to the specific dorm room, squad, and platoon of which I was part as well as by drawing on material from different military camps and platoons. Acknowledging the fact that the soldiers described in this dissertation may be able to recognize each other, I have further attempted to withhold certain details or to change them enough so that the soldiers involved are less identifiable.

Aside from these more generic issues that all scholars should consider, not having any obligations to the Danish Defence and being positioned on the edges of this empirical setting made it easier for me to discover and unravel the contributions that military scholars make to boundary work. Yet, at the opposite end of the scale, my ambition to stay curious and try to understand the military setting from the inside has also been an attempt to honor the ethical considerations of those inhabiting ‘the field.’ Just as the conscripts and sergeants care for each other, I have attempted to care for this empirical setting by “becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning” (Haraway 2008:36).

### **The visible and the unseen – why these four papers?**

As indicated in the reflections on the sexual dimensions of fieldwork, what we know about the research object is tied to how we get to know it. Within the post-humanism and post-feminism approach that I draw upon in this study, ontology and epistemology cannot be distinguished from each other since what *is* is connected to *how* it is articulated or known.<sup>74</sup> What we may refer to as reality does not obtain a certain meaning before it is

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<sup>74</sup> Barad (2007) has conceptualized this concept of knowledge as *onto-epistemology* to stress how the two ‘traditional’ elements in the foundation of any study are inevitably entangled.

perceived or realized within a specific situatedness (Haraway 1988; Barad 2003; Stormhøj 2004). Thus, we have to acknowledge that in *doing* research, we are also *doing* our research objects. Returning again to the concept of silence/silencing, it could be argued that “all research involves secrets, omissions, and silences of various sorts, and that these mean something but it is not unambiguous what they mean” (*Silence*: 4, my translation), as noted in the introduction to a special issue of a Danish anthropology journal.

In the words of ethnologists Löfgren and Wilk, we need to be attentive to “how some kinds of social life become visible, while so many others remain unseen” (2005: 5). The use of labels, concepts, and metaphors is one way in which some elements in the empirical entanglements that we study become overshadowed. To address this often-unintended blind spot, “we must allow ourselves to experiment with labels and concepts. When you re-label, all of a sudden you see aspects that were previously hidden” (ibid.: 9).

Haraway claims that figurations are “meaning-making figures” (2008: 5) due to the agentic force they have in the world; a claim that has grown out of her opposition to human exceptionalism. In the same way, the figure of the good soldier has shaped what comes to matter in this dissertation. Developing from an emic term, it has brought with it the temptation to echo the importance of physical strength in the military setting; a temptation that I have tried to resist by not adopting this narrative as an analytical argument. A different analytical focus would undoubtedly have made other details and cases more visible to me. But using everyday embodied routines as the analytical focal point of this study has meant that some phenomena and scenarios have appeared more relevant and visible than others, not least of all in relation to gender. Furthermore, with the ambition to explore the becoming of good soldiers as an entangled process, my analysis took the shape of four articles, each attending to their specific material-discursive phenomena. Because my intention is not to map what it means to be a good soldier but rather to explore how such a valuing is done through everyday routines, this focus on four specific phenomena seems like a good fit. The format also emphasizes the mechanisms involved in this becoming through (temporarily) delineated phenomena in the entangled matter that is ‘the field.’

The four articles included here have developed in different ways: I had wanted to write one from the outset of my project (“How good soldiers become-with their uniforms”); one was written based on an invitation from the journal editors, who wanted me to unfold the role of the body in my fieldwork (“Researching the body – the body in research”); one

started as a response to a call for papers in which one of the posed questions was, “What has happened to concepts such as ‘heteronormativity?’” (“The butt of the joke?”); and one was the result of trying to grasp what was ‘missing’ in the first three articles (“Vomit over tears”). In all four articles, as already mentioned, I attempt to bridge a scholarly and military language, hoping to make the material and arguments recognizable in both settings, and thereby also making myself recognizable as an insider to both. In an academic setting, this requires knowledge of current publications, standards for citations, research ethics, etc. In the military setting, it is a question of, e.g., knowing the correct acronyms and expressing knowledge of what really matters in the military.

The specific phenomena with which the four articles engage (the body, uniforms, humor, and will) have been established in dialogue with the work presented in the research review, the analytical resources I have presented, and my observations. For instance, “The butt of the joke?” reflects the extensive use of jokes that I observed during my four months of participatory fieldwork, whereas “Researching the body” was inspired by the existing research that informed me prior to my own fieldwork. Going back to Despret (2005) and her encouragement to approach the field with curiosity, the four phenomena are in part intended to reflect what is of importance to the field. However, at this stage of the research process, I have given the analytical framework and the existing research more emphasis than during my fieldwork.

In addition to the four phenomena with which I engage in the articles, other phenomena were considered both before, during, and after my fieldwork. For example, I considered using the weapon as an entry point; something that was inspired by the recurrent attention to violence in studies of military masculinity. This seemed obvious, as the weapon was cast as the constitutive element of being a soldier. Illustrating how embedded the weapon is in the military profession, one company commander described a deployment he had experienced in which he was unarmed, saying it was “a bit difficult to get used to it at first” (interview with Cpt. Schmidt). Using the weapon as an entry point might have produced an analytical focus on issues such as warriorhood, force, violence, suffering, injuries, death, or the use of technology. And, while the weapon only acquires this meaning in relation to the practices in which it is entangled (Mol 2002), this focus would also support the narrative of exceptionalism and spectacle that comes with military violence. Thus, suggesting that the research process is indeed non-linear (Ehn et al. 2015), the list of articles that comprise the analytical core of this dissertation has been revised throughout the research process.

As will be reflected in the articles, the figure of the good soldier has developed during my writing process; from a matrix-like figure that enables recognition to a less structural concept that emphasizes the multiplicity in this process. Thus, in the papers, “Researching the body – the body in research” and “How good soldiers become-with their uniforms”, the analytical use of this figure does not fully reflect the intentions put forward in this chapter. However, with the dissertation as a whole, I suggest that the good soldier is a material-discursive phenomenon that configures ways of becoming recognizable as a military subject. I do this, not by pinpointing one ideal or hegemonic ideology (e.g., military masculinity), but rather by indicating multiple ways of becoming. Thus, this project takes a critical stance towards the military profession inasmuch as it attempts to bypass established and naturalized assumptions about soldiers – in particular, those based on oppositional divides – and instead claims that “[t]hings could have been otherwise” (Law & Mol 2002: 11).

### **Summarizing the methodological decisions and considerations**

Deciding to do one thing inevitable means not doing another. In this chapter, I have attended to decisions made and reflections necessitated through the research process while expanding on the initial presentation of my methodological approach as presented in the first chapter, *Setting the Scene*. Following the conceptualization of knowledge introduced in the previous chapter, I have attempted to explain how “some kinds of social life become visible, while so many others remain unseen” (Löfgren & Wilk 2005: 5). As I have discussed, what has become visible through the fieldwork and the analytical process is a consequence of not just the methodological and analytical design, but equally the specificity of my own body. As illustrated, the decision to do a fieldwork in which not just the bodies of others but also my own body was assessed and challenged has led to a range of insights that would not have been accessible otherwise. This potential is utilized in the four articles that follow. However, using my own body this way also generates a need for reflection over matters tied to researcher’s body as issues of sexuality, gender, and able-bodiedness appears. These issues have been introduced in this chapter and will be discussed further in the articles.

## **ARTICLE I**

### **Researching the body – the body in research**

**Reflections on a participatory fieldwork in the Danish army**

# Article I

## Researching the body – the body in research. Reflections on a participatory fieldwork in the Danish army

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This article reflects on themes relevant to scholars doing ethnographic work in empirical settings highly focused on bodily practice. Reflections are presented on what type of material the use of the body in ethnographic fieldwork can lead to and what considerations and restraints it entails, includes considerations on what it means to be a woman doing fieldwork in a setting dominated by men. In all, the article illustrates how a participatory fieldwork in the Danish army enabled not only embodied experiences of military discipline but equally vital empirical material about how professional ideals and gendered norms are constituted through and in the body of military subjects.<sup>75</sup>

### Publication status

This article has been published in *Kuckuck. Notizen zur Alltagskultur*, 2017 (2), 28-32.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> References from all four articles as well as references from the rest of the dissertation have been compiled into one bibliography at the end of this dissertation.

<sup>76</sup> A few, minor changes have been made in this manuscript since it was published.

## Introduction

In my attempt to grasp the military norms and ideals guiding the training of Danish conscripts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I carried out a participatory fieldwork in the Danish army in 2016. Specifically, I joined a platoon of conscripts during their four month basic training at a military camp. I was there from day one and until the conscripts were discharged, living in a dorm room, wearing a uniform, getting up at 5 a.m. to clean, learning to give first aid, digging trenches, and occasionally sleeping in the woods. Basically doing what conscripts do – including being yelled at by sergeants, being annoyed by those you share close quarters with, and perhaps feeling sorry for yourself after an exhausting drill that left you with multiple blisters on the feet. Relying on more detached approaches like observing the entire period from a ‘neutral’ position, making conscripts write diaries or do auto-photography would no doubt have provided highly useful empirical material as well. And indeed, cultural and social science scholars have already explored how military ideals and discourses are installed in the bodies of soldiers through other methodological approaches (Damsholt 2000, Foucault 2008, Kold 2011, MacLeish 2015). But what I wanted to contribute was an ethnographic exploration of the conscription system that can grasp the embodied tacit knowledge involved in the becoming of soldiers. So I made arrangements to undergo basic training myself.

Using one’s own body as a way to get empirical insight seems obvious when researching a field that is said to be defined by the very notion of physicality and strength (Carreiras 2006, Kold 2011). Military scholar Ken MacLeish has even argued that the *military machine* – understood as the totality of military practices that make up war – is dependent on the soldier’s body as this is ‘the equipment and raw material for war, the most necessary and most carefully managed component of the good machine, or even the good machine itself in its most indivisible, cellular form’ (2015: 15). This smallest unit of the machine is therefore the object of the analysis; if we want to understand the military, we need to understand the enrollment and management of soldiers’ bodies.

In Denmark, military service only applies to citizens with a male-classified body. And indeed, the body is one of the key topics in discussions of questions of gender in the Danish Armed Forces and many other national militaries. A narrative of biological differences between the male and the female body, emphasizing the ‘weaker’ female body, is recurrently used in debates on the inclusion of women in these male-dominated organizations (Creveld 2002, Maninger 2008). These notions around the gendered body

marked my own female-classified body as non-normative even before starting my fieldwork, but it also supported an analytical focus on both the body and gender in this military context; the body is central to the military practice as well as questions of gender.

As ethnographers, I would argue that we always engage ourselves, and thereby our bodies, when doing fieldwork. As Swedish ethnologist Billy Ehn has noted: 'Whether we are aware of it or not, most cultural analysis means that you use yourself as both a research tool and source of information' (2011: 54). Expanding on the same topic, a group of leading Danish anthropologists have argued that when doing participant observations, the fieldworker will typically make conscious attempts to blend in by learning the field-specific forms of talking and gesticulating, hereby increasing access to participation and material (Hastrup et al. 2011: 72-73). This seemed obvious to me before starting my fieldwork, but after having returned to the office, I am reconsidering this idea of *conscious* attempts of adapting. To be completely honest, I cannot say that my adaption was very conscious. Recurring situations where I was completely exhausted, using all my focus on trying to convince myself to walk a bit further, and a bit further, and a bit further did not leave much room for the ethnographic consciousness that the approach of Hastrup et al. implies. Rather, using my own body so extensively in this fieldwork made me realize that a consciousness outside or parallel to the embodied experience of the military was not possible. So the question is then: What is the ethnographic gain of this type of highly embodied fieldwork?

## Degrees of participation

The decision to undergo military service myself was originally spurred by comments I got at a conference where a couple of military scholars, who were themselves former soldiers, argued that to really 'get it', I had to join up myself. This reflected – I would later realize – a narrative within the Danish Armed Forces that stresses a strong divide between a civic and military sphere, which defines one as either inside or outside.<sup>77</sup> And while this recommendation sparked the idea to do the training myself, the final decision was, however, based on a consideration of the type of material I wanted to obtain. As sociological research has for instance shown, military norms and ideals are (re)produced

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<sup>77</sup> American military scholar Ken MacLeish has showed in his work how ethnographic work can make visible 'the constant policing, performing, and imagining of the boundaries between in and out' rather than an actual 'imagined inside' (2015:17).



with and through the body (Lande 2007, Kold 2011). So to be able to grasp these internalized processes that I figured would otherwise be difficult to access, I took a deep breath and went looking for a platoon that would accept the presence of an ethnographer in uniform.

Cognizant of the fact that I would not be able to observe 'the bigger picture' from a position in the ranks, my initial plan was to alternate between this and observing from the sidelines, as well as doing interviews with conscripts and sergeants. My agreement with the platoon commander was that I was free to do this; I just needed to give notice in advance. My plan of alternating was not put into practice, however, as I did not get around to stepping out of the position as a conscript until one of the final weeks where I – wearing my own 'civilian' clothes – observed the platoon from the sideline. And likewise with the interviews: I had only done two interviews before I started observing from the sidelines, (but from then on interviews were continued up until the very last day). I shall return to why my initial plan of alternating was disrupted, but first some more words about the methodological considerations.

During the duration of my fieldwork, I have moved back and forth between the degrees of involvement that James P. Spradley presented in *Participant Observation* (1980). Specifically, I moved between what is in the book defined as *active*, *moderate* and *passive participation*. However, I was missing a version of participation in Spradley's continuum that defined my experience of learning *with* rather than *from* my fellow conscripts, being in the process of 'becoming' with them (Haraway 2008). This made me turn to literature on the concept of auto-ethnography.

While *auto-ethnography* is enjoying attention within some disciplines, the idea of researchers using themselves as a tool or instrument in the ethnographic process is nothing new. Yet, I would argue that embodying a practice or social phenomenon does entail different insights for the ethnographer than those achieved through other types of participatory observation. The concept of auto-ethnography defines a way to access 'non-verbal experience' and 'silent knowledge' otherwise difficult to obtain (Ehn 2011). Described by O'Dell and Willim, auto-ethnography can be characterized by an 'extreme proximity of the subject (the researcher) and the object' (2011: 9). This proximity also positioned me differently in the field than a 'classic Malinowski' way of participation would have done, (i.e. learning by observing 'the natives', which is also to be found in Spradley's *active participation*). Instead of building intimacy with others in the field through 'the process of apprenticeship', I built it through 'mutual knowledge and shared,

tacit assumptions' as an insider (Jaffe 1995: 44). Based on these considerations, I would argue for an inclusion of auto-ethnography as part of Spradley's *Degree of participation* continuum, as a way to acknowledge the ethnographic experiences of intimacy and embodiment independent of the process of apprenticeship or observed 'others'.

Another very practical consideration affected by the degree of participation was the possibilities to write notes. While this was no problem during the week I was on the sideline, taking notes during the auto-ethnographic parts of my fieldwork was at times quite a challenge. Drills, physical exercise, marching, inspections, parades, and rifle maintenance did not leave much room or time for taking notes. Hence, participation in a field where physical activity is a core focus affects the material the ethnographer returns home to the office with in the form of what has actually been put down on paper. But what I might have been lacking in notes (although I did end up with 15 notebooks full of observations), I made up in embodied experience and memories of conversations muttered among conscripts lined up for inspection. The following section exemplifies what analytical insights this type of empirical material might enable – combined here with material from one of the 39 interviews I carried out.

### **Bodily experiences in the army**

The assumption that emphasis on the body makes sense when studying military basic training was not only confirmed but also challenged and made more complex through my fieldwork. The following snippet from an interview with our platoon commander exemplifies and explains the bodily focus in the army as he argued how repetitions are essential to becoming 'a good soldier':

Me: Repetition?

Platoon commander: Yes, so it's in your body. A good example is that hasty shooting position, for instance. The reason why you practice it so much is that the body gets used to where the stock [of the rifle] needs to be, so it just sits there – muscle memory is what we are talking about. Then you just react instinctively. And then you survive because you know what you should do and it is instinct that is kinda leading your way. At least for the first three minutes before you get control of the situation

(2<sup>nd</sup> interview with Lt. Petersen, Thursday, week 17).

The idea is that the bodies of conscripts need to learn all the small physical practices that in total make up military work, because they will not have time to think before they act in a critical situation. The argument is that the body has to be able to take over control and work based on embodied routines rather than thoughts. This reflects a conceptualization of *routines* where tasks once difficult – such as tying your shoelaces or finding that perfect position for the stock of the gun just beside the shoulder – are automatized and made almost invisible through repetitions (Ehn & Löfgren 2010). This transgresses the divide between mind and body, as the body almost morphs with, or absorbs, the function of the brain. This conception supports a definition of the body as inseparable from the subject, self or mind which guides this analysis (Butler 1993, Foucault 2006). Putting the body front-and-center-stage does not contradict this idea of entanglement, but rather supports it by virtue of an analytical focus on how the physicality of the body is inseparable from questions of subjectivity.

One of the first bodily practices we were taught was *standing at ease* and *standing to attention* – and how to follow orders to go from one to the other. *Standing to attention* means stranding straight, chest and chin up, arms straight down the side, hands clenched with the thumb pointing front and down, thigh muscles activated, heels brought together with a 90 degree angle between the feet, staring straight and being completely quiet. Learning this pose started on the very first day, and was in itself not very difficult to learn. But standing to attention is not merely a static pose; it is also a certain disciplining of the subject via the controlled body (Foucault 2008). Standing to attention is an expression of the hierarchical military order and the asymmetrical power relations it entails: Someone must have given you the order to take this pose and someone has to give you an order before being allowed to move. And that ‘someone’ is always a sergeant, someone with a higher rank in the military system. The pose hereby leaves the military subjects passively accepting whatever comes their way, not being able to react physically or verbally. As two of the conscripts in my platoon were corrected by a sergeant; ‘You cannot smile when you are standing at attention; you should be fucking dead in the face’ (Field notes, Friday, week 13).

As one might guess, standing to attention is not a bodily practice that is directly applicable to combat situations like the repetitions with the rifle that the platoon commander explained above. Rather, it is a way of embodying the military system: Showing respect for rank and hierarchy, showing discipline, taking orders, not opposing nor asking questions – characteristics seen as necessary among soldiers in combat, it was stated in many of the

interviews I conducted. Hence, while the pose itself did not have the same routine-building function as learning where to position the stock of the rifle, the discipline that the pose entailed was seen as equally vital in case of combat.

As implied in the terminology, *standing at ease* could appear as a more relaxed and informal pose. Standing with the feet shoulder-width apart, the right hand grasping the left wrist behind the back so to pull the shoulders back, the butt tipped a bit in and forward, and looking at whomever was talking meant more comfort– at least once the body got used to the pose. Also, this pose allowed a bit of movement, for instance, tilting the feet a bit for them not to go numb or releasing the grip of the right hand for a second. However, this pose required a greater control of the self as the limits of what one was allowed to do while standing at ease were more blurred. For instance, while these small and almost invisible movements were tolerated, punching each other or yawning would be reprimanded.



**Illustration 6. Conscripts lined up in the court yard, standing at ease**

These two poses were used daily, with all assemblages of the platoon starting out with lining up at ease in three ranks (i.e. rows). This formation of the platoon was never fully executed before a sergeant appeared, making vivid how discipline only works if a regulatory *gaze* rests on the subjects (Foucault 2008). While this pattern did not change over time, being ordered to go from standing at ease to attention became less recurrent,

with the exception of parades and weekly mustering (where the company assembled for information updates etc.). Once we had proven to be disciplined, turning us into passive and inferior subjects via this bodily practice was no longer needed at a daily basis.

## **Embodying military ideals**

Being *in* the ranks while these seemingly mundane scenarios unfolded gave insights into the disciplinary mechanisms working among conscripts; how the uniforms of others were discretely corrected while the sergeant looked the other way, what was whispered sarcastically about others, and whose voices were (not) heard when conscripts yelled commands at each other. Hence, participating this way physically positioned me in places and situations that would have otherwise been inaccessible. And, not least, it enabled the experience of embodying military ideals as the following example will illustrate. The scenario is from one of many marching drills, where we would line up in three ranks, and then start marching on the command 'Platoon, march!'

We are marching on the roads between the barracks, turning left, turning right (...) Sg. Riis and Sg. Kleinmann are walking next to the formation, correcting our movements by yelling 'Anderson, remember arm swings!' 'Hajjar, follow the pace!' After having been corrected by Sg. Kleinmann a couple of times, Hajjar ends up being moved to the second rank – the sergeant has apparently given up on making him march at the right pace (...) Moving those who are not good at marching to the rank in the middle means that their errors are not easily spotted from the outside.

My own assessment is that I am doing quite well and showing off more decent arm swings than many of the others, so I am starting to feel that it is almost unfair that I have to be in the 'shameful' rank in the middle. This association with those continuously making mistakes, instead of being recognized for my marching skills by being moved to the front rank, is annoying me

(Field notes, Thursday, week 5).

While I had started out with the intention of doing conscious participant observations, I somehow ended up being frustrated that my skills in marching were not honored by giving me a more visible position in the ranks. I had been so enrolled in military norms and ideology that I *wanted* to perform the role of 'the good soldier' – even if this did not

affect my access to empirical material.<sup>78</sup> I was even thankful that I was not assessed and given a grade like everyone else, as I knew that it would not be as high as I would have hoped (because the practices involved in doing ethnography often collided with those of being a conscript). I could have cared less. But I didn't. Even if the ethnographic occasion for my presence did challenge my abilities to be 'a good soldier', I still embodied the military ideals. The continuous bodily repetitions of standing at ease, standing to attention, marching – not least in combination with a culture of competitiveness – made me urge for positioning myself as a willful and skillful subject. This surprising realization turned out to be highly valuable to my analysis.

Reading "The limits of detachment: A non-ethnography of the military" by Alexandra Jaffe (1995) helped me understand what I had experienced. In the paper, Jaffe writes of a personal experience of four and a half years in the army after finishing a graduate program in anthropology. From the outset, the military experience is seen as a sort of fieldwork, a situation to observe as yet another 'exotic culture' (Jaffe 1995: 42). Before entering the army, Jaffe did not 'believe that the ethical/ideological premises of military membership were as inherently valuable as those of the academic world' which led her to expect a sense of belonging in the army that would be 'guarded and lukewarm' (Ibid: 37) – much like I myself approached the army. And yet, Jaffe got involved to the degree where she would demand respect for the rank of officer that was materialized on the shoulders of her uniform – despite the initial skepticism being based on exactly the hierarchal structure of the military. Jaffe's explanation of this development is that it is not possible to keep a degree of detachment in a military context that requires 'a display of ideological commitment from its members' (Ibid: 40):

[T]he performance of arbitrary rules only served to emphasize the central fact of my military life as an officer: I was the system; I embodied and enacted it. Half-hearted membership is psychologically unpalatable in this sort of system; if I was to accept the sometimes ridiculous demands of everyday military life – and I had to – the only way to exempt myself from the ridiculous without maintaining a constant distance from my role was to legitimize the value of the organization in general, and therefore my part in it (Ibid: 42).

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<sup>78</sup> I would have gone home with somewhat *different* insights had I been a really 'good soldier', as this entailed a different interaction with the sergeants and a different degree of respect from other conscripts – but not more insights.

Hence, Jaffe argues that to be in the military system, one needs to 'give in' and enact the premises it presents. 'Ahh', I initially thought to myself reading this paper, feeling that someone had put my experience into words. But reviewing it more carefully, it appears that Jaffe's argument is based on the assumption that we are able to distance ourselves from the role; detach from the bodily experience as soldiers. As my empirical examples above illustrate, this implied split between the body and mind seems illusory in a context where bodily mechanisms discipline 'the whole' subject. However, Jaffe's examples of how the role of the soldier is enacted through the wearing of the uniform, the regulation of haircuts, and the saluting of colleagues with higher rank does support a central positioning of the disciplined body in this military setting. My awareness of this was heightened due to the engagement of my own body in the everyday routines of conscription.

### **The specificity of the researcher's body**

While many informants in my fieldwork have argued that conscripts are not 'real' soldiers, what makes this military training particularly interesting is the bond it creates between the military and the bodies of citizens. With the introduction of conscription, the disciplining of the body through military training was linked to ideals of active and responsible (male) citizens 'in a healthy and well trained body' (Eriksson 2014: 107, also Damsholt 2000). Today, this focus on active and responsible citizens can be found in ideals for how one is to perform the role of the soldier: Taking tasks seriously, taking initiative, having the energy to help others, and taking responsibility were characteristics that were appraised by sergeants. And this was much easier if one was not struggling physically to keep up with the group or was out with an injury (although these challenges could also be a chance for showing one's commitment to overcome them). Hence, an *able body* (McRuer 2006) was needed for being recognizable as a military subject.<sup>79</sup> This meant that demands were also put on my body as an ethnographer; participation was not possible without me being able-bodied.

And while the able body is pivotal in military work, not just *any* able body will do – it should be a strong body. Yet, this is at the same time one of the main 'discursive weapons targeting gender integration in the military' according to military scholars Helena

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<sup>79</sup> In the second half of 2016, a mere 47 % of the citizens turning 18 were classified as 'eligible' to do military service. Those citizens not classified as eligible due to e.g. physical injuries or mental illnesses are not enlisted (Forsvaret 2017).

Carreiras and Gerhard Kümmel (2008: 30). Defined in their terminology as ‘the cult of the body’ (ibid.), they argue that the extensive focus on physical strength is one of the main narratives build and used in the attempt to exclude women from the military (see also Sløk-Andersen 2014). Thus, the gendered body – mine as well as everyone else’s – carried differentiated value and meaning in the army. And whether or not it was possible for me to access specific spaces in the field was to some degree related to the fact that my female appearance did not reflect the (male) majority of the conscripts.<sup>80</sup> In effect, I could not hear what was talked about in the male-only dorms, see how these conscripts behaved when no women were around, or feel what it was like to shave every single morning. However, it increased my access to women-only spaces and perhaps even made interviewees more likely to share experiences of being at odds with norms in the army. The latter should be seen in relation to the argument that when men study men, ‘the shared gendered experiences and assumptions about masculinity may be left unexamined’ (Pini & Pease 2013: 9). Hence, being classified as female when exploring a male-dominated field might not be the worse thinkable situation. Rather, the non-normativity in me not being male made me more aware of norms and customs shaped by masculinity. How not fitting into the norm affects the possibilities for being recognized as a military subject and how material settings are constitutive of the performance of gender (Star 1990, Damsholt 2012, Neumann et al. 2012) are highly relevant issues that I will expand on elsewhere.

## Conclusion

Aforementioned Ehn has argued that auto-ethnography is a particularly fruitful way to access the ‘intangible and invisible’ knowledge specific to manual work (2011), which the military could be seen as a site for. This claim about auto-ethnography, however, seems to be based on the assumption that the body is more engaged in manual work than other types of work. But taking as point of departure the theoretical understandings of Foucault and Butler, I would argue that the body is never-not-there; the becoming of the subject happens with and through the body (Foucault 2006, Butler 1993). Thus, we should be careful not to overestimate the news value and ideas of an increased involvement of the

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<sup>80</sup> A total of 82 % of the conscripts in the Danish Armed Forces in 2016 were male. This statistic is based on the gender classification that is embedded in the Danish civil registration system (CPR), which relies on a biological classification made at birth, not self-identification.



body in auto-ethnography. Nonetheless, doing such a participatory fieldwork in a setting 'where the formal impetus for involvement was stronger than in many ethnographic encounters' (Jaffe 1995: 45) left me with a somewhat different outcome than I had expected. While I did plan on subjecting myself to the military training, I had not expected to be so caught up. Ideas of ethnographic consciousness or detachment from the embodied experience turned out not to grasp the entanglement of mind and body that the field configured, yet it enabled me to see some of the mechanisms that work in and through the bodies of soldiers. And that was worth all the blisters and sore muscles.

## **ARTICLE II**

### **Vomit over tears**

**The performance of will among conscripted soldiers**

## Article II

# Vomit over tears. The performance of will among conscripted soldiers

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The matter of will has been a recurrent theme in military research and politics: The ambition to enlist soldiers who are driven by an internal will to defend and serve God, King, and Country is considered key to a combatant military and addressed in much literature. Although national conscription systems have radically changed since they were first introduced in many European countries in the wake of the French Revolution, a focus on will seems as relevant today as it was then. This article presents a performative approach to the subject by exploring how the discourse of will is enacted and recognized among contemporary conscripted soldiers.

Examining the Danish case, this article unpacks will based on ethnographic fieldwork at a military recruitment center and among conscripted soldiers in the Danish army. Drawing on observations, interviews, and auto-ethnography, will is approached as both a discursive phenomenon and a 'doing' that conscripts must perform through the body – even if it means pushing oneself to the point of vomiting.

The article argues that, while being 'willing' is still considered essential to being a good soldier, it is neither an inherent nor an individual quality – as it is often portrayed to be. Rather, it is a material-discursive phenomenon that needs to be performed in certain ways for soldiers to become recognizable as willing. As such, will is framed as a multiple and collective doing that can be obstructed by issues such as gender and disabilities. The article thereby suggests that being willing may not be as fully and equally accessible as the current discourse of will would lead us to believe.

### Publication status

In preparation for *Critical Military Studies* or *Conflict and Society: Advances in Research*.

## Introduction

In the afternoon, a sense of relief emerges among the employees at the recruitment center. All of the day's participants have been tested and given the result of their draft examinations: eligible, partially eligible, or non-eligible for military service. The uniformed employee who has been in charge of the presentations and individual counselling during the afternoon enters the draft manager's office with a proud look on his face. He presents her with a stack of papers, which I quickly realize are signed contracts. Nine out of the 45 young men and women who have been through the draft examination today have signed a contract committing to serve. "That's great!" the manager exclaims with enthusiasm, smiling as she reaches for the papers.

(Based on field notes, Recruitment Center)

At each of the six military recruitment centers, where all Danish men are instructed to appear on a specific day the year they turn 18, decisions are made as to who is eligible for military service and who is not.<sup>81</sup> It is the responsibility of these recruitment centers to supply the cohort of 4,200 conscripts who are needed to serve in the Danish Defence every year, based on an assessment of eligibility. Those who are classified as *eligible* or *partially eligible* – based on tests conducted at the recruitment center – then draw a number from a lottery, which determines the order in which the men will potentially be drafted. But ideally, as the scenario above illustrates, there is a widespread aspiration that prospective draftees will decide to sign a contract with the Danish Defence out of their own free will.

The question of will has been a recurrent theme in military research and politics: The ambition to enlist soldiers who are driven by an internal will to defend and serve God, King, and Country has been key to a combatant military and addressed in much literature, also in Denmark (Bjerg 1991; Østergaard 1998; Østergaard et al. 1999; Jørgensen 2004; Jørgensen & Breitenbauch 2008; Pedersen 2017). Although conscription systems have radically changed since they were first introduced in many European countries during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – and in many countries even abolished – a focus on willingness seems no less relevant today than it was then. Exploring the concept of will as an embodied practice, this article unfolds how will is performed among contemporary conscripted soldiers.

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<sup>81</sup> A percentage of young men are assessed as non-eligible without even attending the event at the recruitment center. For instance, if the man can document a physical or mental illness or injury that is considered to make him unable to carry out military service.

During my ethnographic fieldwork with the Danish military, I encountered what I refer to in this article as a *discourse of will*. During the recruitment process, this becomes clear in an ambition to make citizens volunteer for a military service that is, in fact, compulsory. When I later followed a platoon of conscripted soldiers through their four months of basic training in the army, “being willing” was reiterated as key to succeeding in the military, yet the idea of this willingness seemed quite abstract. Many could point to other conscripts who were “willing”, but this did not necessarily overlap with those who uttered expressions of commitment; rather, it seemed quite closely connected to bodily performances. Drawing on my observations, interviews, and auto-ethnography, I approach the idea of being willing not just as a discursive phenomenon but also as a ‘doing’ that conscripts must perform through the mundane and repetitive practices that comprise much of the military’s basic training. The overall argument presented in this article is that, while the discourse of will presents itself as an individual and internalized quality, will appears to have a performative ‘nature’; something that is only made visible if it is enacted in recognizable ways through the body.

### **The attention to will among soldiers**

As one of the few NATO member states that did not abolish conscription after the end of the Cold War in 1991, Denmark has maintained this system of compulsory military service. While men are required to serve, women are given the option to serve alongside them. Roughly translated, men have a *duty* to defend (*værnepligt*) while women have a *right* to defend (*værneret*) their country. The compulsory element of the conscription system is, however, practically set aside because most of the young men and women who go through military training have voluntarily enlisted, reaching a level of 98.8 percent volunteers in 2017.<sup>82</sup> But being able to serve depends on being assessed as *eligible* or *partially eligible* to serve; an assessment that is based on a questionnaire about one’s physical condition, a brief physical examination, an intelligence test, and a screening for

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<sup>82</sup> To emphasize that a share of those who decide to sign a contract are prompted to do so due to the advantages that come with volunteering (e.g., being able to decide when and where to serve), Danish military scholars Henrik J. Jørgensen and Henrik Ø. Breitenbach differentiate between what they call “technical volunteers” and “actual volunteers” (2008: 9, my translation). Furthermore, the large percentage of conscripts voluntarily enlisting has been affected by a lower number of conscripts needed each year as well as a shorter conscription period; most conscripts now only serve four months.

mental illness.<sup>83</sup> Although some other countries with an active conscription system – such as Norway and Sweden – have extended these requirements by also assessing the fitness level and motivation of the potential soldiers, Denmark has maintained what we might call a simpler version of eligibility.

While this topic no longer dominates international scholarship, the existence of conscription systems throughout the centuries has been supported or inspired by a scholarly emphasis on compulsory military service as the solution to how ranks can be filled, how (male) citizens can be disciplined, and how military efforts and expenditures can be anchored and legitimized among citizens (Janowitz 1976; Bond 1983; Ericson 1999; Engell 1999; Carreiras 2006; Kronberg 2014). Yet, the advantages of not having to force soldiers into battle have also been outlined, supported, and discussed in a great deal of research (e.g., Ben-Ari 1998; Damsholt 2000; Højrup 2002; Ahlbäck 2014). Sociologist Juanita M. Firestone, for instance, states that “the primary purpose of a military is to control and use instruments of destruction, and as part of that process individuals must be convinced to subjugate individual values and goals to the good of the organization” (2004: 311). Or, put more harshly by international-relations scholar Joshua S. Goldstein: “All evidence indicates that war is something that societies impose on men, who most often need to be dragged kicking and screaming into it, constantly brainwashed and disciplined once there, and rewarded and honored afterwards” (2001: 253).

From this perspective, it becomes essential for military organizations to cultivate willing subjects as a way to get citizens to risk their lives in the name their nation. Such an approach represents will as something the state or military organization – presented as an entity acting with intentionality – can install or deliberately produce in more or less passive citizens. While theories with a systemic approach such as these have gained a lot of attention, especially in the fields of political science and military sociology, what has not been explored to the same extent is how this constitution of will might look from the perspective of the soldiers themselves, if they were granted more agency.

This is one of the agendas put forward in a recent study by military anthropologist Thomas Randrup Pedersen (2017).<sup>84</sup> In this work, Pedersen explores the becoming of

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<sup>83</sup> Other parameters may affect the assessment of one’s eligibility; e.g., a criminal record. For a few specific services within the armed forces, there are additional requirements regarding minimum or maximum height.

<sup>84</sup> Quite unfortunately, I only a week prior to the submission of this dissertation realized that Pedersen (2017) – whose work is already discussed in this article – also includes an article specifically addressing

soldiers by following a unit of Danish soldiers before, during, and after their deployment to Afghanistan. Based on this ethnographic work, Pedersen opposes how soldiers are often considered passive actors in the hands of a manipulative military, arguing that, “Contemporary volunteering should not be reduced to a present-day product of neoliberal techniques of government” but rather soldiers’ existential desire to become “real” (2017: 204). Within this existentialist framework, being willing is essential to soldierly becomings; i.e., the will to endure and inflict the pain needed in the process of becoming (ibid.). A firm will is, for instance, expressed through a fit body (ibid.: 216). Quoting military sociologist Kevin McSorley, this physical expression of will in Pedersen’s work is tied to the becoming as soldiers, as “[a]ny failure to achieve dominance over the fundamentally intertwined demands of the body and environment is ultimately understood as a failure to become a soldier” (McSorley 2016, cited in Pedersen 2017: 216). Thus, will is argued to be expressed through the body.

While conscripted soldiers in Denmark are rarely recognized as even belonging to the category of soldiers, this article suggests that the concept of will is established before the young citizens put on the uniform. I do this by building on existing research in this field that has taken a discursive approach to the concept of will. Ethnologist Tine Damsholt (2000), for instance, describes how a patriotic discourse in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was utilized to mobilize peasants to join the Danish army. Through patriotism, the intention was “to create citizens who did not only live up to the military demands for bodily control but [who were] also willing to do what they had to” (Damsholt 2001: 47, my translation). In other words, they should not only be *able*, they should also be *willing* to perform military service. Exploring how this discourse was installed in citizens, Damsholt draws on the work of philosopher Michel Foucault to unfold how the disciplining of these subjects was anchored in the disciplining of their bodies. She argues that the will to serve was thereby constituted through bodily practices such as marching.

The embodied aspect of being willing that has been discussed in these previous studies is also apparent in the following analysis. Here, I approach the subject of will among conscripts as neither something that is installed in passive actors nor that is an individual, existential urge. Rather than being the intentional effect of an overarching discourse, ideology, or strategy, I ask instead: How might will be understood as something that is performed in a way that makes it recognizable to others?

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the question of will. A discussion of this specific element of Pedersen's work will be incorporated in “Vomit over tears” before it is submitted.

## A performative approach to the military

My initial awareness of a contemporary emphasis on will was prompted during a week of observations that I conducted at a military recruitment center where the eligibility of young citizens for military service is assessed. Here, I observed the various elements that comprise the draft examination, which I figured would be an appropriate place to start my ethnographic exploration of what it means to be a good soldier in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If nothing else, these events make clear who is allowed to enter the military profession in the first place. Shortly after this week of observations, I joined a platoon of conscripted soldiers during their four months of basic training in the army, participating in the routines and tasks that make up conscription. At the end of this participatory fieldwork, I conducted a total of 36 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with both conscripts and sergeants in the platoon.

In a dialogue between this ethnographic work and several theoretical resources, I have developed the analytical figure of *the good soldier*. This figure initially appeared as an emic term during my fieldwork as a way to communicate professional ideals to the young soldiers during the training. It also indicated what conscripts were valued in relation to, which made me expand my conceptualization, constructing an analytical figure that enables *recognition* of military subjects. Here, I primarily draw on the work of philosophers Judith Butler (1990; 1993) and Michel Foucault (2001; 2008). By building on the idea of subjectivity as inherently connected to the body, the analytical figure encompasses more than any explicit utterances about what a good soldier does. Rather, my intention is to approach military training as a *becoming with* (Haraway 2008) wherein the military subject is in a continuous process of becoming through material-discursive entanglements. As postmodernist scholar Donna Haraway notes: “To become one is always to *become with* many” (2008: 4).

From this performative perspective, being a good soldier or being willing is not seen as a representation of preexisting skills, competences, or conditions. Rather, the focus is on the continuous practices that make being good or willing recognizable to oneself as well as others; in particular, by stabilizing the boundaries between seemingly separate military subjects. In the following analysis, I discuss how the concept of will is entangled with this notion of being a good soldier, making the matter of will part of what makes a conscript recognizable as a military subject. I do this by first unfolding the discourse of will, using an approach in which “[d]iscourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables



what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements” (Barad 2003: 819). Analytically, I interpret the emic terms *will*, *motivation*, *attitude*, and *morale* as expressions of the same discourse. Second, I will unfold how this discourse is performed through the bodies of the conscripted soldiers and, finally, I address the question of whether these soldiers are performing a theatrical role rather than becoming military subjects, and how this performance might be more challenging for some than others.

### **The will to serve**

When asked about their motivation for signing up for military service, the conscripted soldiers I interviewed gave many different reasons. While some mentioned family members or friends who got them interested through their stories of camaraderie and life-changing experiences, others wanted to get fit or learn how to be “more disciplined.” Some had just finished high school and wanted to take a “meaningful break” before pursuing an academic degree or just generally trying to figure out what they should do with their lives. A few related their decision to sign up to matters of national security and international missions in which the Danish Defence was involved. Yet, it seemed most common – particularly among the male recruits – to sign up as a way to figure out if the military might be a career for them. Few of these reasons explicitly correlate with the notion of feeling a duty to serve, yet the military still has an ambition to recruit citizens who are willing to “do what they have to do,” as Damsholt noted about the relation between patriotism and military reforms in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The emphasis on volunteerism that I initially encountered at the recruitment center is also reflected in the latest national defense agreement.<sup>85</sup> This political contract regarding the strategic development of the Danish Defence states that “additional recruitment efforts should be carried out to encourage that as many [citizens] as possible continue to sign up voluntarily” (*Aftale på forsvarsområdet 2018-2023*: 7-8; my translation). In principle, neither the recruitment center nor the political parties behind the latest defense agreement could care less if no one signed a contract at the recruitment center: as long as there is a sufficient number of young men classified as eligible each year, then the cohort

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<sup>85</sup> At the recruitment center, there was a reluctance to use terms like “volunteerism” or “voluntary”. This was an attempt to underscore the fact that, once men sign the contract, they have “taken the duty upon themselves” (field notes, Recruitment Center).

of 4,200 conscripts can simply be drafted. Then why is there such an emphasis on getting citizens to enlist themselves rather than just drafting them?

I argue that this is an expression of a discourse of will that stretches across the political and military fields. In the recruitment process, this appeared as great attention to *the will to serve* among prospective conscripted soldiers. In addition to the focus on volunteerism, this discourse was expressed in statements that stressed that conscription is not only a duty, but equally a right; a right to serve your country. This discourse was present among both those at the recruitment center who were responsible for filling the ranks as well as many of the young citizens who appeared for the draft examination. Here, I observed a strong will to serve.<sup>86</sup> During my observations at the recruitment center, I even overheard one young man say, "Let's hope it's not a free pass!" as he drew a number from the lottery (field notes, Recruitment Center). The will to serve seemed quite profound among these young Danish citizens, and it was not only expressed in words; it was also performed through the act of signing a contract and thereby claiming one's right to serve.

This discourse even seemed to affect the outcome of the draft examination. For instance, one of the physicians who was conducting the brief examinations typically started by asking the young men who entered his office how they would feel about potentially being drafted. This question surprised me because his task was to assess the physiological and mental health of the young citizens, based on the World Health Organization's classification system for disease (i.e., the ICD-10). So, why would he ask about their interest in doing military service? It might be because an assessment of eligibility is entangled in the discourse of will: assessments are not objective but can be affected by the young citizens' will to serve. Take Bisgaard, for instance; he was a 19-year-old conscript in the platoon I would later join. Bisgaard always seemed to forget something: his keys, a glove, or his folding-knife. When I interviewed him, he told me that his forgetfulness was due to his severe attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Surprised, I asked him how he had made it through the draft examination without being classified as non-eligible. With a bit of a laugh, he replied that he had just lied about the severity of his condition because he really wanted to serve. Conversely, men who have no desire to serve might do

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<sup>86</sup> While I do not want to belittle the efforts that many put into avoiding military service, the situation in 2017 was that almost all Danish conscripts chose to enlist themselves.

whatever they can to be assessed as non-eligible – e.g., by reporting that a health condition is more of a problem than it might actually be.<sup>87</sup>

The head of the recruitment center recognized that whether or not someone is eligible for service is “not always black or white”, but they strive to make assessments as accurately as possible (field notes, Recruitment Center). Yet, it appeared to me that the will to serve already makes its mark on the young men and women before they even enter the military. During my participatory fieldwork with the platoon of conscripted soldiers, it became clear that being willing was a matter more complex than merely signing a contract.

### **Will as an internalized and individual quality**

Just as the matter of being willing was front and center during the recruitment, having a certain will also seemed to be essential once the actual training began. During my four months of participatory fieldwork, notions of will came up numerous times: the belief seemed to be that, if you just had the will to do something, you could do it. Through this lens, mediocre performances were often considered indicative of a lack of will; something that could be altered, if only the conscript in question was willing to put in the effort. Alternatively, a mediocre performance was sometimes praised if it was interpreted as will producing an improvement in a previously even less impressive performance. In this way, will almost unavoidably became essential to the valuing of the young soldiers during the conscription period: how good a soldier one was considered to be seemed highly dependent on whether the conscript in question appeared driven by a will to do the best possible job.

The belief that a strong will could make one a good soldier was widespread among conscripts as well as sergeants in the platoon, and it was both implied and explicitly expressed. As we were discussing his potential for a future career and training in the military, one conscript, Kenn, explained to me that a decision to continue on to a military program should not be based on whether one *can* be accepted to the program but whether one really *wants* to complete it. Emphasizing the importance of the latter, he added, “I think you need a strong will, or you won’t be able to go very far” (interview with Kenn). Reflecting on his own possibilities for a military career, his self-assessment was that he did

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<sup>87</sup> Understating the seriousness of a condition or injury is possible because citizens are not necessarily required to present their medical records at the draft examination; as long as they conform to the discourse about will, no documentation is needed. It is only when someone tries to avoid military service that they are automatically required to document their health status via medical records.

not have the mental strength for a military career because he had a tendency to give up too quickly.

During many of the interviews, the subject of will often came up when I asked if one needs to be strong to be a soldier. In response to this question, several conscripts started talking about will and mental strength, relating this to the matter of being physically strong. Frost was one of these conscripts. He really wanted to be recognized as a good soldier; he made efforts to perform his best, and often swore when he thought that others were screwing up collaborative exercises or tasks, which would also make him look bad as a result. In the following interview excerpt, a question about the necessity of physical strength prompted him to discuss the subject of will:

You need a strong will because it gets hard for all of us, and we are all under pressure in certain situations. So there, you need a good and strong will to carry on, even if it might be painful. You don't necessarily need to be able to bench hundreds [of kilograms] or anything like that or lift heavy weights. But you have to be strong as a person, and you need a strong will.  
(Interview with Frost)

This was a recurrent narrative: that one's performance was to a large degree determined by one's will. Exactly what one was supposed to be willing to *do*, however, was somewhat vague. In Frost's case, it was a "will to carry on, even if it might be painful." This statement was similar to what we were told by the sergeant in charge of the first running test we completed. As we were given instructions about how the test worked and how we should push ourselves, Sergeant Weiss said: "You *can* run and vomit at the same time!" (field notes, week 2). In general, the will that was required often related to some sort of physically-demanding performance.

With this discourse, being willing was cast as an individual quality that each of us could deliberately decide to be or not, as implied in the following scenario from a monthly status meeting with our platoon commander (PC), Lieutenant Petersen:

As the first order of the day, PC starts by talking about injuries and sickness. He understands that you might have a bad knee and aren't able to walk 6 kilometers with a backpack. "But then you might be able to walk the distance with just the combat belt on instead." There is a pattern of who is out with injuries, and it typically occurs when tasks get physically challenging. It is understandable that this might be the time when injuries reappear or occur. But PC recommends that we look ourselves deeply in the eyes and consider when we can actually participate. (Field notes, week 13)

Lieutenant Petersen's statement illustrates how will is something that should be embodied and enacted; being willing means going on that march after taking a long hard look at ourselves in the mirror, even if we might have an injury. He wanted us to be driven by and embody a desire to perform our best. The discourse of will, which enabled statements such as these, expects good soldiers to push themselves without being forced. And, while the notion of what it might mean to be a good soldier could vary – sometimes, it meant shutting up and taking an order, while at other times it meant demonstrating critical thinking by questioning an order – will appeared to be a constant requirement. Good soldiers are driven by will; a will to do their best, or at least to know when not doing it is acceptable.

As a *technology of the self* (Foucault 1988; 2008), the individual soldier is expected to *want* to be good, which might mean working hard to improve one's performance. In this way, will becomes the key to improving the self. However, while Foucault's describes how the docile body is disciplined through military training (2008), as I observed, a certain will to improve oneself is not merely installed in soldiers *during* their training. At best, they should already possess a certain will before entering the military.

While enlisting can also be interpreted as an embodied act, the requirement to push oneself with an internalized will emphasizes the disciplining of the body that is part of the performance of will. Yet, the transformative potential of one's will appears to be based on a Cartesian differentiation between mind and body; i.e., that the will is part of a mind that is attached to – but not equal to – the body. Rather, the body is merely docile materiality that the mind can rule through the power of its will. As we discussed during an interview, talking about being pushed to the limit, the conscript Juul quoted a sergeant as saying: "It's often the brain that makes it hard, not the body" (interview with Juul).

This individualized and internalized perception of will is in apparent contrast to the concept of conscription itself; a concept defined primarily through the ability of the state to impose military service on its citizens by way of force. However, once inside the military setting, being willing appeared more complex than the discourse of will would have us think. As I will demonstrate in the following sections, being willing had to be 'done' in a certain way in order for it to be recognized as such.

## Will as a recognizable performance

By voluntarily enlisting, the conscripts had acted willing just by showing up. Yet this expression of will did not always seem to carry one through; as already suggested, it had to be performed through the body. And, as I slowly came to realize, it had to be performed in certain ways. For instance, one way to perform will was to keep marching or running even if you were in pain or vomiting (see also Pedersen 2017). Taking the initiative and demonstrating leadership was another way to enact will. Being very engaged in drills also appeared to be a way of showing that one was willing; acting like it was actual warfare and a matter of life-or-death supported the mantra of “train as you fight” (field notes, week 15). At other times, merely participating was an indication of will, such as when one of the conscripts injured his wrist but still insisted on engaging in all activities. This meant that he did push-ups on his knuckles, obviously in pain, and struggled just to put on his uniform in the morning, which required help from his roommates. Just as our platoon commander had encouraged us to participate despite injuries, doing exactly that made this conscript appear very willing.

However, the perception of will as an individual, internalized quality that we could simply activate on demand only appeared to be *recognized* as will in certain instances. This became clear in the case of Werner, who was greatly disappointed when his application to one of the military’s educational programs was declined. Seeming to be motivated when I interviewed him, this 19-year-old conscript enthusiastically told me that “the military has always been intriguing to me, right from when I was a kid. It’s always been something that I’ve wanted to do” (interview with Werner). And it appeared that he had performed in accordance with the discourse of motivation – i.e., by not giving up, but rather pushing himself through difficulties. Relating his expectations of what conscription might be like as opposed to how he actually experienced it, Werner told me:

“I was probably just stupid to think, ‘Oh, it probably won’t be that hard’ because it fucking has been. It is fucking hard! [He gives an example of going through an obstacle course] ...where we are pushed so hard physically and mentally that, well, I completely panic sometimes. It’s an uncomfortable feeling, but afterwards, you’re fucking exhilarated. I almost cried when we were done just because I had actually completed it.’

Sløk: “After the last obstacle course?”

Werner: “Both of them, actually.”

(ibid.)

Werner's statement that conscription is "fucking hard" is not representative of what was said in most of the interviews I conducted with conscripts in the platoon. In fact, it was the opposite – many expressed disappointment because they had assumed that it would be tougher, both in regards to the physical requirements as well as the sergeants' treatment of conscripts. Yet most admitted that they had had moments where they were pushed to the absolute limit of what they were able to perform.

For Werner, however, his efforts to push himself to the limit did not guarantee him recognition as a good soldier, which he needed in order to continue a career in the military. Having observed and interacted with Werner over the course of the previous three-and-a-half months, I was not surprised that he had not been accepted to the military's educational program, but it was difficult for me to narrow down exactly why. Speaking with him, he clearly reproduced the discourse of will that we were all encouraged to use as a driving force through the training.

I did not succeed in performing as willing myself, either. Actually, I failed on the very first day when I arrived late due the length of my journey and challenges in going the final distance from the train station to the military camp. Normally, I would not have given the time of my arrival much thought as long as it was within the specified timeframe. But later, I recalled what an administrative employee had told me when I visited the military camp for an introductory meeting a few days earlier: conscripts are divided into platoons based on their citizen identification numbers, but the platoon commanders wish they could select which conscripts end up in their platoon. According to the administrator, the platoon commanders believe that those who show up first are the most motivated – and they would choose these conscripts for their platoon if they could (field notes, week 1). So being one of the last conscripts to arrive that day did not get me off to a good start.

Through the everyday events and routines of the conscription period, the discourse of will became less straightforward. It was performed and negotiated in ways that seemed to render some conscripts more likely than others to be recognized as good soldiers. I argue that this requires a certain *silent* or *tacit knowledge* (Ehn & Löfgren 2010; Ehn 2011); a sense of the unspoken and changing ways of how will should be enacted in different situations. And not everyone possessed this sense or required knowledge; just as I had not known that my arrival time indicated how willing I was, or Werner crying rather than vomiting as he pushed himself to the limit. Although being willing was portrayed as a reflection of the individual's determination and active decision to push themselves to the limit, I argue that it is not only a matter of the individual's will, which is understood as an

internalized and intentional, transformative power. Rather, conscripts need to perform their will in a certain way for them to be recognizable as a good (and thus, willing) soldier. To do this, they need to access the tacit knowledge that contributes to how willingness should be done. Furthermore, I argue that it is not only up to the individual to be recognizable as willing, as illustrated by the example with the conscript who had injured his wrist; he was dependent on the help of others to appear willing and able to participate.

### **Will as constituted through others**

Another way a conscript could express will was to take on more responsibility, such as by volunteering to do extra tasks or living up to (or exceeding) expectations after being assigned tasks. During my fieldwork, these tasks ranged from being appointed as the conscript second-in-command of a unit (referred to as an *alpha*) during drills, taking charge of the rest of the platoon when sergeants were absent, keeping an inventory of supplies, or representing the company in competitions against other companies. While jumping to the task was a way to present oneself as willing, this was a self-perpetuating process, as those who expressed will were then given more tasks, thereby gaining more opportunities to perform as willing. As Madsen said about one of the other conscripts' relationship to our platoon's second-in-command, Sergeant Bolt: "Well, she's his favorite. I mean, she gets a few more tasks because he probably believes that she can handle it" (interview with Madsen).

In this way, patterns were established. If conscripts could not manage the responsibilities they were given, they might not be assigned tasks in the future or they might even be stripped of their responsibilities altogether. This was the case with one alpha who appeared less and less willing as the four months went on. As part of the unit he was supposed to lead, I noted that we started to pay less attention to him, and we started to take over some of the tasks that he was expected to do. Taking these tasks from him meant that his lack of will was even more obvious. Eventually, he was replaced as the alpha. Although will is presented as something that the individual conscript can choose to express or not, other conscripts and sergeants were co-constitutive of one's possibilities to perform as willing. The performance as well as the recognition of one as willing thus seem to be dependent on others.

At the same time, the performance of will is entangled with the constitution of a collective self among conscripts. As I argue elsewhere (Sløk-Andersen 2018), the disciplining of



conscripts through a requirement for uniformity is involved in establishing a collective self as well as constituting individual military subjects. This collectivity appeared in an interview I conducted with Stender, a conscript who made great efforts to enact will himself, and also tried to motivate and help others. Stender was appointed alpha in his unit and performed so satisfactorily that he earned the title *Best conscript*. Stender had entered the army with an intention of applying to the police academy afterwards, but he became attracted to the idea of becoming a sergeant during the conscription period, as he considered this a better opportunity for personal growth. Reflecting on the fact that everyone in our platoon had signed up of their own free will, he was surprised that some seemed reluctant to obey orders and try to perform their very best:

“Not everyone feels that they need to commit 100 percent, and perhaps they don’t reach [the realization] that they *are* capable of more than they think either. [...] They might have a tendency to give up too easily. At least, that’s what I’ve seen sometimes, I think. That you don’t really *want to* or kinda give up, whereas I’m thinking: ‘You could probably have made it, actually’.”  
(Interview with Stender)

Stender had himself experienced improvement and success precisely because he kept pushing himself to keep going. He explained that he did this out of consideration for his fellow conscripts. Expressing will by *not* giving up meant that the rest of the group would not have to make up for his lack of will. They did not have to carry his backpack, physically pull him to the finish line, push him over a fence, or be yelled at by a sergeant because he was not willing or ‘capable’ of doing what was expected of him. Thus, the *techniques of the self* that were installed with the discourse of will acted on both the individual conscripts as well as the conscripts as a collective self. This also extended to some of the sergeants, who mentioned in interviews that their sense of success was dependent on the will and performance level of the conscripts for whom they were responsible. In this way, our willingness was embedded in their self-assessment of how good they were as soldiers. Hence, while being willing is considered to be an individual characteristic, it is also highly dependent on others.

## **The performance of will**

Observing this multiplicity in what is considered to be an expression of will, we might consider the different positions from which conscripts are valued. Formal requirements differed from one position to another in this field: e.g., the recruitment center had to get as

many citizens as possible to voluntarily enlist; the company commander had to ensure a high performance level, especially among those continuing on to a military career; and conscripts had to obey military law as well as demonstrate this abstract concept of being willing. While this was still entangled in other conscripts' recognition of someone as a good soldier, the sergeants' and platoon commanders' assessments carried more weight because they could make or break a conscript's dream of being accepted into a military educational program. In this interaction between conscripts and sergeants, some conscripts detected the need for a sort of theatrical performance.

As a theoretical term, there is a difference between *performativity* as described in the first part of this article and *performance*; this refers to the theatrical enactment of a particular social role as described, for instance, in the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1972). My own initial hesitancy to explore the latter is related to the concept's association with a person's ability to 'just stop acting the role'; a misconception of performativity that many post-feminist and post-humanist scholars have been on the fences about (see e.g., Butler 1997). As a concept, *performativity* suggests a far greater impetus for a certain way of acting, behaving, and thinking; it entails an aspect of power that is not associated with the term *performance*. Yet, the two concepts did indeed overlap in my empirical material.

When I interviewed 26 of the conscripted soldiers, many of them noted an observation of sergeants "playing a role." This meant that it was not necessarily their actual persona that was yelling at the conscripts. Rather, this was a show they put on; a role that came with the uniform and the rank. Many conscripts mentioned that Sergeant Bolt played this role particularly well. And indeed, he seemed like quite a character. He reminded me of sergeants that I had seen in movies and on TV shows: smoking a pipe, using a formal tone without much chit-chat, and not batting an eyelash when conscripts made a fool of themselves. His superior, Lieutenant Petersen, told me in an interview that he had decided to divide their leadership of the platoon into two positions: a "good cop" and a "bad cop". Positioning himself as the good cop, this meant that his second-in-command, Sergeant Bolt, was cast as the bad cop. Thus, Lieutenant Petersen had specifically planned these roles. To this extent, the conscripts were correct in sensing that there was a bit of role playing involved; to borrow an analogy from Goffman, it all seemed like a sort of *front-stage* on which the actors perform their assigned roles.

At the same time, these performances affected the process of recognition, which is illustrated in the following excerpt from an interview with Juul. When I asked what is important to be good at as a conscript, he answered:

Juul: "In general, being a bit superficial. You know, yelling something like 'Remember your pockets' [which need to be closed] or something like that. I think stuff like that gives a good impression."

Sløk: "You mean, on the sergeants?"

Juul: "Yes. Just yelling a bit louder and stuff like that. [...] And it's a question of whether you should throw away your personality and take on this role. I think they [the sergeants] like it if you do that. But I don't think they have a great impression of me, because I am... I would say that I'm still myself. I don't show that much commitment.

(Interview with Juul)

Here, Juul is referring to the theatrical performance that the sergeants also use; i.e., that being a good soldier is a role that one has the option to perform or not. This is an apparent contradiction to the performativity that Butler and others describe and advocate; specifically, performativity as "that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration" (1993: 20). However, these empirical examples illustrate how performances should perhaps be acknowledged as part of a performative analysis. These caricature-like examples of army drill sergeants and obedient conscripts playing along emphasize the somewhat overlooked and perhaps even 'forbidden' claim that part of being recognized is, after all, a somewhat conscious decision to 'play the role'; in this case, to perform as willing.

That being said, while someone like Juul might be able to decide whether or not to act the role offered to him because he has no intention of trying to impress the sergeants, this was not a possibility for all conscripts. Those who wanted to pursue a military career had to play the role as a way to make themselves recognizable as good soldiers. Perhaps the logic here is that, if you can act the role of being a good soldier now, you would be able to act the role of a "bad cop" sergeant later on.

However, as illustrated throughout this article, the performativity that goes into being recognized as a good soldier is more complex than merely deciding to play the role. Following Butler, I argue that it is almost impossible to stand outside of the disciplining mechanisms that the figure of the good soldier enables. Because, while Juul did not perform like a good soldier, he also did not act out. He did not make a *spectacle* of himself, to use a term from feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2017). Something hailed him to act within a certain set of standards and norms. Thus, while the need to perform a role may be discarded to a certain degree – albeit with consequences – the performative aspect of being a good soldier cannot. I argue that this is so intrinsic that one does not necessarily

reflect on it, even though it is entangled in how military subjects think, feel, and move their bodies (see also Sløk-Andersen 2017). As I discuss in the final part of this article, there are also other reasons for why some are more challenged in their attempts to become recognizable than others.

## **Obstacles to being recognized**

Thus far, I have described how being willing is not simply a matter of the individual conscripts deciding to commit or push themselves to perform better; it is a difficult task of performing will in a certain recognizable way in an interplay with those around them. In addition to this already being a difficult field to navigate, due to the tacit knowledge that is required, there are additional obstacles of a more structural nature. In the following section, I explore this through three examples: able-bodiedness, gender, and language skills.

### ***Able-bodiedness***

At the recruitment center, the discourse of will did not only translate into enthusiasm about the number of signed contracts, but also a constant focus on conscription as both a *duty* and a *right*; a right to serve your country. As the head of the recruitment center told me: “Conscription shouldn’t be an elite program” (field notes, Recruitment Center). This was presented as an argument against the introduction of additional tests in connection with the draft examination. Nonetheless, the assessment of the young men and women still involves a substantial limitation, as 47 percent of all male citizens who went through the draft examination in the second half of 2017 were assessed as non-eligible for military service; this percentage has increased over the past few decades (*Statistical Information* 2018: 4). While the outcome as mentioned earlier can be affected to some degree, the rejection of almost half of all Danish men does indeed compromise the idea of conscription as a civil right.<sup>88</sup>

During the week I spent at the recruitment center, I saw many disappointed young men who had been deemed unfit to serve. Some did not have a sufficient number of correct

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<sup>88</sup> There is no compatible percentage for women, as they are not obligated to go through the draft examination. However, according to unpublished statistics that I retrieved from the Danish Ministry of Defence Personnel Agency, 28 percent of the women who went through this examination in the second half of 2017 were assessed as non-eligible.

answers on the intelligence test, some were too overweight, and some were hindered by old injuries. In such cases, their desire to sign up for military service was denied, which made their will to serve redundant. Like the young man who really wanted to serve but was assessed as having a spine that was too crooked to carry a heavy backpack without it causing further damage. Here, his lack of *able-bodiedness* (McRuer 2006) overruled his will to serve. The will to serve could also be superseded by a low score on the intelligence test or a criminal record, yet most young men are rejected because they are outside the category of able-bodiedness; they are deemed too obese, too skinny, or injured – a wide range of what is considered to be *disabilities* (ibid.) as opposed to able-bodiedness. Thus, while the discourse of will establishes a belief that will alone can transform the body to such a degree that one can become a good soldier, this can seem privileged considering the extent to which citizens are deemed non-eligible for military service based on physical conditions.

### ***Gender***

All women who sign up to serve fall under the category of “particularly motivated”; this special scheme, which was introduced in 2012, ensures that anyone who falls into this category can serve within six months, which is much less than the usual waiting period.<sup>89</sup> Although this classification suggests that women should have an easier time being recognized as willing once inside the ranks, being a woman seemed to sometimes interfere with the enactment of will. This became particularly obvious with one female conscript, Johansen, who injured her foot during one of the first weeks. Her foot never really healed, so her participation was quite unstable, and special considerations were sometimes made to accommodate her injury. For instance, after we spent a day at the shooting range, Johansen was ordered to leave early because she would not be able to keep up with the tempo if she marched back with the rest of us. Nevertheless, she participated in most activities, she earned a medal during the first-aid exams, and she sometimes tried to demonstrate leadership. But after ten weeks of trying to make it work, Johansen decided to cancel her contract because she was sad that she could not participate in all of the experiences along with everyone else. When I spoke to one of the administrative employees the following week, she mentioned her surprise that Johansen had decided to go home so close to having completed the training. When I asked if anyone is ever sent

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<sup>89</sup> This scheme for ‘particularly motivated’ citizens also includes men in extraordinarily good physical condition and anyone applying to military educational programs.

home at this stage in the process, she replied, “Only if they die” (field notes, week 15). She laughed and then added in a more serious tone that they can always find alternatives for someone who cannot participate in marching and running (ibid.).

Since women do not have a compulsory call of duty in the first place, they can stop claiming their right to serve and leave the military any time during the conscription period – unlike the male conscripts who cannot change their minds once they enlist. Men are only sent home if the physician at the military infirmary decides that they cannot complete the training. During my fieldwork, this happened to three of the male conscripts in the platoon, while plenty more were out with injuries for shorter or longer periods. Some were out for long periods like Johansen, but unlike her, few of them seemed eager to get ‘back in the game.’ During the final month, some seemed like they were just impatiently waiting to be discharged. However, since they did not have the option to leave, they did not encounter the same expectation as Johansen; i.e., an expectation that she *should* leave. Many expressed annoyance that she was still present, explicitly asking, “What is she still doing here?” This was epitomized by one of the sergeants, who busted out with a loud “Woohoo!” when he heard that she had “gone for good” (field notes, week 14). Despite Johansen’s attempts to enact will with an injured foot, her will was not recognized; rather, it was obstructed by her lack of able-bodiedness combined with the gendered basis of the conscription system. Thus, while the aforementioned male conscript with an injured wrist was recognized as having a strong will as he attempted to complete the training despite his pain, the female conscript was seen as a burden who dragged down the platoon.

Based on her historical exploration of how Swedish women gained access to the military profession in Sweden, historian Fia Sundevall (2011) argues that the mere existence of a male-only conscription system is implicated in a continuous gendering of the entire military profession. However, the Danish Minister of Defense recently rejected the idea of a gender-neutral conscription system in Denmark, arguing that both women and men already have the option to sign up (cited in Korsgaard 2017). Because the annual cohorts of conscripts have been almost entirely comprised of volunteers over the past seven years, the minister added that changes to the conscription system are irrelevant. On this basis, he saw “no need to extend the duty to also include women” (ibid., my translation). However, with reference to the example with the female conscript presented here, I support Sundevall’s argument because the difference between having the *duty* or the *right* to serve still demarcates a line between male and female conscripts in such a way that makes it inherently more difficult for women to perform as willing.

### ***Language skills – or something else?***

In some instances, language seemed to be a substantial obstacle to being recognized as willing. This was the case with Nattapon, a Danish-based citizen of Thailand who had neither the right nor the duty to serve but had applied for permission to serve in the Danish Defence. Supposedly, doing so would increase his risk of being drafted in Thailand afterwards, as any excuse as to why he would not be able to serve there would be dismissed if they knew he had already completed a military-training program. But Nattapon did not want to serve in Thailand, as he had heard that the sergeants there were much tougher on the conscripts, and that military service was two whole years. Nevertheless, Nattapon actively sought out the opportunity to serve in the Danish army. This seemed to be a strong expression of a will to serve, just like the ever-optimistic Rasmussen, who had moved from Greenland to Denmark to serve. While everyone else went home to their parents' or their own homes during weekends and breaks, making use of the free public transportation for all conscripts, Rasmussen did not go home during those four months because flights to Greenland were long and far too expensive to afford on the symbolic wages conscripts are paid.

However, instead of being considered to be extremely willing, Rasmussen and Nattapon struggled to be recognized as good soldiers. While trying to learn the military lingo alongside the rest of us, both were also trying to improve their Danish skills. In the case of Rasmussen, this became too much of an obstacle for the conscript next to her in the combat formation, Hald, during one drill. After getting feedback on the conscripts' collective performance from a not-very-impressed sergeant, Hald explained to him that the intended smoothness of the attack in question had been compromised because Rasmussen did not understand the orders he tried to pass on to her. As a result, the sergeant ordered Hald to communicate 'around' Rasmussen, framing her as the obstacle. Similarly, Nattapon at one point expressed to the rest of the platoon that it was difficult for him to understand everything that was said, presenting this as the reason for why he sometimes fell behind. Thus, the national background and non-Danish mother tongue of these two conscripts, who might otherwise have been considered as particularly willing, turned out to be a severe obstacle to them becoming good soldiers.

Neither of them was recognized as a *good soldier*, which refers to someone who can decode and perform in accordance with the expectations and norms of the ever-changing situations in which we found ourselves. I did not observe either of them demonstrating leadership (or being allowed to lead), performing the best in competitions or tests,

receiving praise from sergeants, or any other explicit forms of recognition. Rather, laughter was *sticking* to them (Ahmed 2014c) more than most others in the platoon. Their mistakes were ridiculed and caused outbursts of annoyance from the other conscripts as well as sergeants who became tired of having to correct them. Thus, the factors that *could* be viewed as expressions of a strong will on their part seemed to become obstacles to them being recognized as good soldiers. While this was articulated as a matter of language skills, it might also have been about something else. Perhaps it was about the processes of inclusion and exclusion that constitute the boundaries around the military, as “the profession itself”, it could be argued, “is defined by the selective inclusion of certain types of bodies (i.e., white, male, heterosexual)” (Butler et al. 2012: 265).

## Conclusion

A research report on possible future scenarios for the Danish conscription system states that conscription-like concepts were known in “antique Athens, where civil rights required both *capability* and a *will to serve*” (Jørgensen & Breitenbauch 2008: 6, my italics and translation). However, as I have attempted to illustrate through examples from my fieldwork in a Danish military setting, being willing and able are difficult to grasp as separate factors. Rather, they appear to be highly entangled in the performance of good soldiers.

Werner, the conscript who wanted to continue on to a career in the military, appeared to be quite willing, even pushing himself to the point where he panicked and cried after completing obstacle courses. But this was not sufficient; his dream to enlist after completing the conscription period was denied. Thus, while the discourse of will makes it seem as though will can carry soldiers through everything, this was far more complex in practice. As I have attempted to illustrate in this article, will is an embodied practice; one of the more extreme examples is pushing oneself to the point of vomiting. However, conscripts have to decode what might be ‘the correct’ performance of will in a given situation because, while vomiting was encouraged, Werner’s tears were not. By enacting his will through a display of the wrong bodily fluids, he made visible his lack of tacit knowledge, thereby not becoming recognizable within the expectations for how good soldiers perform will. Although he may have seemed willing, he was not recognized as such.



Through my analysis, I have argued for will to be of a performative 'nature'. It is a doing; something that is established and made recognizable through embodied performances. It is constituted and materialized through the often routine-based practices of not only the conscripts but also others around them, which supports the constitution of a collective self. Thus, my analysis suggests that will is not a quality inherent to individual conscripts. This is because everyone is dependent on others to recognize their performance of will, and also because more structural barriers (disabilities, gender, language skills) may interfere with this recognition.

Using the term *recognition* has been a way to explore how the military profession privileges some citizens and bodies through both visible and invisible mechanisms. I argue that some of these mechanisms are invisible due to the discourse of will that renders will as an internalized power that individuals can decide to summon if only they push themselves hard enough. The belief that anyone can decide to act the role as willing adds to the individualized and intentional perception of will. Within this discourse of will, all conscripts are assumed to have an equal opportunity to perform as willing. But, as I have demonstrated here, some conscripts experience more obstacles than others in being recognized as good and willing soldiers.

## **ARTICLE III**

### **How good soldiers become-with their uniforms**

**An exploration of uniformity in practice**

## Article III

# How good soldiers become-with their uniforms: an exploration of uniformity in practice

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This article examines the role of materiality in the disciplining of the military subject by taking a closer look at the practical unfolding of an overall goal of uniformity for conscripted soldiers. While much research on the subject of military uniforms has revolved around descriptive and historical mappings, this article explores the role of this specific material object in the becoming of good soldiers. This way, a productive as well as a critical perspective is applied to the subject, which is analyzed based on an ethnographic fieldwork in the Danish army.

Wearing the uniform implies certain practices, ways of talking and presenting yourself. Yet, as the uniform comes to matter in different ways through practice, conscripts are required to read and adapt to the mattering of the uniform to be recognizable as good soldiers. Through a specific attention to the mundane and embodied routines of everyday life amongst conscripted soldiers, the article argues that the uniform enables the disciplining of not only military subjects but also constitutes and disciplines a collective self, made up by conscripts bound together through uniformity. However, the belief that this uniformity conceals individuality and gender is challenged and related to questions of recognition, hereby ascribing agency to the uniform in the becoming of good soldiers. The overall argument in the article is that the materiality of the uniform takes part in performing the military subject.

### Publication status

This article has been published in *Ethnologia Scandinavica*, 2018 (48), 7-25.

## **Introduction**

“Sløk, you look like shit! You’re a soldier, for god’s sake – look like one!”  
(Field notes, week 12)

This was the reaction I received early one morning during a four-day military drill I was participating in as part of my fieldwork in the Danish army. Like the rest of the platoon, I had spent the night sleeping in a simple tarpaulin tent-like construction in the woods and was now getting ready to start a new day. I figured that it would make sense to fetch some water for the daily ‘field shower’ before getting my uniform in order. Thus, my jacket was unbuttoned, I was wearing neither hat nor helmet, and my weapon and my combat belt (containing ammunition and other at-hand essentials) were lying on the ground next to my tent. But as the quote indicates, the platoon’s second-in-command, Sergeant Bolt, did not agree with my assessment of the situation. If I had remembered the words he uttered months earlier – “The first thing people see when they look at a soldier is the uniform” (field notes, week 1) – I would probably not have left my tent without my uniform being in order.

A uniform makes members of the armed forces recognizable. This attire camouflages differences by downplaying marks of individuality and stressing – well, uniformity. In this article, I explore how this is not only apparent in literal terms but also how we might understand the uniform as a materiality that is embedded in a performance that makes its wearer recognizable as a military subject. Based on empirical material from the Danish army, this article offers insight into the uniformity that uniforms are expected to constitute, while it also challenges this very same uniformity by examining the seemingly mundane, embodied routines of conscripted soldiers. The article hereby utilizes an ethnological approach to explore the productive effects of such attire; specifically, by asking how the uniform constitutes and negotiates the becoming of military subjects through everyday routines. The article pays particular attention to the material-discursive entanglement of matter that takes place when the uniform is ‘done’ by these young soldiers.

## **Exploring uniforms from the perspective of everyday life**

When I decided to conduct participatory fieldwork among conscripted soldiers, I had anticipated that a superior might yell at me; however, I had not foreseen the difficulties

that came along with wearing the uniform. I had embarked on this part of my fieldwork three months earlier to explore how young Danish citizens are transformed into soldiers through the entanglement of elements such as physical training, disciplining measures, social interaction, and materiality. At the time I was planning my fieldwork, Sweden and several NATO member states had abolished this compulsory military service, and the outlook for the Danish conscription system did not seem very good. Nonetheless, it has persisted despite recurrent debates on alternative structures and reductions in the Danish Armed Forces – however in a reduced form of four months of basic training for most of the 4,200 conscripts doing military service each year. I was intrigued by the system's perseverance, which was strengthened when Sweden re-introduced conscription and Norway expanded its draft to include women (the latter has brought about new research efforts, see e.g. Lilleaas & Ellingsen 2014).

Scholars before me have been curious about conscription and the ways in which the subject is disciplined within a military context (Goffman 1968; Damsholt 2000; Wollinger 2000; Foucault 2008). In this article, my intention is to expand upon these studies by drawing upon perspectives from post-humanism and post-feminism in order to emphasize the effect of materiality in this process. Specifically, I move beyond the body of the soldiers to explore how the materiality of the uniform is involved in constituting recognizable military subjects. Through this lens, my analysis unfolds how this can be understood as a process of constant work and negotiation, particularly because the conscripts' willingness and ability to be recognizable as a military subject varied, in part due to the uniform. While, at a glance, the importance of the uniform could appear to be a *visual* uniformity, a broader perception of uniformity allows for a more complex exploration of how the uniform participates in the becoming of *good soldiers*; I return to this figure later in the article.

Within the field of ethnology, studies of military issues have been “surprisingly” scarce (Engman 2013: 114), especially when narrowed down to projects with a contemporary focus. In Scandinavia, the main contributions are Jonas Engman's work on the Swedish navy (2002, 2013) and Susanne Wollinger's close detail of conscripts in the Swedish army (2000). Like them, my work takes an everyday-life approach to studying the military setting; however, I pay greater attention to the uniform and the daily *routines* in which it is embedded. In particular, I have been curious about how practices and rationales that at first seemed exotic became new norms during the four months; how ‘strange’ practices became unnoticed everyday routines. In this regard, I draw inspiration from ethnologists

Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren, who have argued that it is through everyday routines “anchored in the body” that tasks and actions become almost invisible to us (2010: 82; see also Ehn 2011 and Löfgren 2014).

Dress scholars also support an analytical approach that focuses on routines. Ingun G. Klepp and Mari Bjerck (2014) have for instance argued that, when gathering empirical material for an analysis of uniforms, methods such as interviews or textual analysis alone should not form the basis of the work, as they are insufficient to capture the automated routines and *tacit knowledge* essential to dressing. Following this argument, my analysis draws upon interviews along with auto-ethnographic experiences and observational studies, primarily from my fieldwork at one particular military camp.<sup>90</sup> Using the empirical material that these methods generated, I explore how we might understand the ‘production’ of military subjects in relation to embodied practices and routines connected to the uniform. Or how, in the words of Donna Haraway (2008), the becoming of good soldiers can be seen as a *becoming-with* the military uniform.

### **Previous studies of uniforms**

The essential role of the uniform in the being and becoming of soldiers has been emphasized in earlier studies. According to historian Karsten Skjold Petersen (2014), the introduction of uniforms in the Danish-Norwegian army in the 17<sup>th</sup> century served two main purposes; a practical and a tactical purpose. The practical function was to protect the soldier against all types of weather, and the tactical function was for the soldiers to be recognizable; e.g., on the battlefield or as an authority. Expanding on this question of authority, anthropologist Erella Grassiani has based on her empirical studies of Israeli soldiers argued that “[t]he uniforms they wear and the weapons they carry materialize the power that soldiers have” (2013: 85). While I recognize the authority that a uniform implies, I challenge the static conception of uniforms that Grassiani presents. In her definition, the uniform becomes an external representation of a pre-existing power relation, and it is interpreted as having one fixed meaning that applies to everyone who

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<sup>90</sup> I am drawing on a total of 35 interviews with conscripts and sergeants who were all part of the same platoon. Interviews were conducted during the last few weeks of the four month conscription period. Additionally, I am drawing on a week of observations from draft examinations (*session*), smaller contrasting bits of fieldwork at other regiments in the army, a few additional interviews, as well as reports and other written materials. All persons mentioned in the article have been given a different name to cover their identity.

wears the uniform. As an alternative, I provide greater detail as to how uniforms come to matter in different ways through practice, and how the implied authority that is typically associated with the uniform is the result of entangled matter and routines.

In non-military settings, uniforms have been described as being entangled with issues of hierarchy, discipline, and the diminishment of individuality (Craik 2005; Larsson 2008; Neumann et al. 2012; Leilund 2015), presumably due to the military origin of uniforms (Larsson 2008: 14-15). And indeed, military uniforms have influenced the design of non-military uniforms as well as fashion trends in a broader sense (Black 2014). This relation between military uniforms and non-military apparel supports a broader skepticism about making clear distinctions between separate military and civic spheres (Enloe 2000). In this article, I focus on the use of military uniforms but also reflect on what happens when these uniforms ‘travel’ beyond the military setting.

Within ethnology and related fields, we have already seen a more practice-oriented approach to the study of uniforms. For example, in her doctoral work, Marianne Larsson (2008) examined the development of uniform practice within the Swedish postal services from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until today, specifically exploring how uniforms work to establish and negotiate uniformity. Utilizing a variety of empirical material, Larsson describes how the uniform creates docile bodies that should contribute to the ongoing durability of the postal services while simultaneously constituting internal power relations. Larsson stresses how the uniform has participated in disciplining postal workers and, related to this, how the wearer of the uniform came to “carry the institution with him” (2008: 12, my translation). My analysis builds upon these findings by describing how the disciplining enabled by the uniform depends on specific situations; the uniform entangles with many other elements that changes its matter from one setting to another. Thus, my contemporary perspective prompts new understandings of uniforms in practice.

Using a similar approach, Helle Leilund (2015) has also challenged ideas about the uniform as an object that is able to “do something specific” to the wearer. After conducting ethnographic fieldwork among nurses, postal workers, and train conductors, Leilund describes how uniforms can be ‘done’ in different ways – despite formal regulations and the uniformity of the design – thus making it a “complex phenomenon that *is* something different, dependent on [the] practice the uniform is done in” (2015: 100, *orig. italics*, my translation). Following this conceptualization of the uniform, Leilund argues that there is a mutual relation between the uniform and its wearer, in which both parties “do” each other.

This reflects the idea of military subjects becoming-with the uniform that I attempt to unfold.

### **Being recognized as a ‘good soldier’**

During my fieldwork, conscripts as well as sergeants<sup>91</sup> articulated the image of *the good soldier* as something to aspire to in everyday situations. For instance, it was often repeated that “a good soldier is a lazy soldier”, implying that a good soldier does things correctly the first time around instead of being sloppy and having to do the task over. But as the quote opening this article suggests, this not only requires an internalized desire to do things correctly but also knowledge of what ‘good’ might imply in a given situation. I should have known and wanted to do the right thing: A good soldier should not need correction but would instinctively know what is the correct thing to do (as also argued in Damsholt 2000). As the company’s second-in-command, Lieutenant Olsen, had told us: “We’re nice when we explain something the first time, but after that, we expect you to know it” (field notes, week 1).

In my analytical approach, I take the good soldier to be more than a mere expression; it is an agentic figure constituted through everyday routines. My initial inspiration for this approach came from postfeminist scholar Judith Butler’s conceptualization of *recognition*. Butler argues that humans can only be recognized as subjects if they live up to certain (gendered) patterns (1990; 1993). As she describes, these patterns are defined via *the heterosexual matrix* in which compulsory relations between one’s sex, gender, and sexual desire are defined (1990). For instance, a male individual should act masculine and desire women – and vice versa for females. This way, the matrix (re)produces gendered patterns by regulating how one’s gender and sexuality should be performed. Following Ehn and Löfgren’s definition of routines (2010), we could see the gender performances as expressions of *tacit knowledge* and a sort of ‘autopilot mode’ within us that organize a *shared choreography*. If the consistency of the matrix is not reiterated through our performances, Butler argues, then we cannot be recognized as someone worthy of, for example, having rights or being treated equal to others. As such, Butler writes that recognition is “a site of power by which the human is differentially produced” (2004: 2).

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<sup>91</sup> To make this an easier read for those not familiar with the military ranking system, the term ‘sergeants’ is used to refer to superiors, who were often non-commissioned officers (NCOs) while a few were corporals or sergeants in training.



I am adapting this conceptualization of recognition in the way that *the good soldier* becomes the matrix through which soldiers are recognized through the performance of acceptable patterns for how to be a good soldier. Through this lens, I will explore how the figure of the good soldier – just like the gender categories in Butler’s case – is practiced and reconfigured through speech, materialization and embodiment. Just as a certain gender uniformity is established via the heterosexual matrix, so too is the figure of the good soldier perceived as participating in the establishment of a certain uniformity among conscripts. However, as Butler has been criticized for neglecting any materiality beyond that of the body (Barad 2003, Mol 2002), I am also drawing on the philosopher Annemarie Mol’s concept of *agency* as a distributed practice arising through the entanglement of (material) actors (2002; 2008b). Reflecting how I intend to approach the figure of the good soldier, Mol and John Law suggest that “[i]n complex, mundane, material practices ‘the good’ tends to figure as something to tinker towards – silently.” (2002b: 85)

Linking Butler and Mol, I will explore how uniforms are done – or become-with – the enactment of good soldiers, as this ties to the *performative* ‘nature’ of recognition that Butler argues for as “that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration” (1993: 20). This definition indicates a processual approach, as the reiterations are constant work; the recognition of someone as a good soldier is never secure. The recognition needs continuous enactments because “a signifier, rather than simply naming something that already exists, works to generate that which it apparently names” (Ahmed 2014c: 92). And while terms like “enactment” and “performativity” might imply a certain optionality or detachment, the very real consequences of failed recognition may emerge as a lost opportunity for a military career, an absence of appraisal, or a negative evaluation. By using the uniform as an entry point, I unfold this process of becoming – or not becoming – a good soldier.

### **A question of uniformity**

On the first morning of the conscription period, we were given orders to remove all obvious signs of individuality: beards should be shaved off, make-up was not allowed, loose hair should be pulled back in a tight bun, bangs should be tucked in under the beret, jewelry was not allowed (except for wedding rings), and visible piercings were to be removed if possible. “You need to be alike,” we were told. Sergeant Wilson, who was training his fourth cohort of conscripts, elaborated on this requirement during the

interview I conducted with him. Arguing for the usefulness of conscription as a way to teach people about cohesion and collaboration, he linked this to uniformity:

“And this is already introduced on the first day, where we kinda rip people’s clothes off and then put all of them in the same uniform. Without earrings and nose piercings and all of those things that constitute the individual and signal ‘who I am as a person’. We tear people away from that a bit and say, ‘You are part of a unit now, and you have to cooperate as a unit. You are not done before the last person is done’.”

(Interview with Sgt. Wilson)

As this quote illustrates, the camouflage pattern of the conscripts’ uniform is intended to camouflage individuality; minimizing overt differences in appearance is thought to enable cohesion, collaboration, and collective responsibility. The belief seemed to be “The less individuality, the stronger the military unit”. And through this belief, the uniform – as well as the entailed absence of markers of individuality – was positioned as crucial to the creation of a combatant platoon. Reflecting the work of Mol, the interview quote supports the argument that “[a] lot of *things* are involved” in the performance of identity (2002: 38).

The transformation of a diverse group of civilians into a homogeneous platoon was pursued by first “breaking down” and then “rebuilding” conscripts, as I was told during my initial meeting at the military camp a few days before I embarked on the journey of becoming a soldier myself (field notes, week 1). And while much has undoubtedly changed in the armed forces since sociologist Erving Goffman wrote *Asylums* in 1961, I could not help but associate this description of breaking down and rebuilding with Goffman’s description of *total institutions* as “the forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self” (1968: 22). Sergeant Wilson’s words are even echoed in the following snippet: “Uniforms are issued on the first day [...] The role of the cadet must supersede other roles the individual has been accustomed to play” (ibid: 25).

The perception of *cohesion* as an essential element in the efficacy of a military unit is widespread in military studies (King 2013). For example, the issue of cohesion has been a recurrent concern in debates about integrating women into combat troops: Opponents have insisted that cohesion would be difficult, even impossible, if the ‘band of brothers’ was disrupted by the presence of women (for an outline of the opposition, see MacKenzie 2015). For Sergeant Wilson, it was precisely the concept of cohesion that attracted him to the armed forces in the first place; something he now honored via his uniform, “making

sure that it is always in order” because, by doing so, he believed that he was “representing all other soldiers, the entire armed forces” (Interview with Sgt. Wilson).

As the following excerpt from an interview with one of the conscripts suggests, the uniform seemed to have the desired effect of creating a feeling of cohesion *through* the uniformity of our appearance. This was brought up when I asked Madsen to explain what she felt when she put on her uniform:

Madsen: “It differs, actually. Because there are times when I think, ‘This is actually pretty cool’. But that’s because I’m thinking about the social aspects [...] this thing where you have a lot of great friends, but you don’t really know them. You know nothing about them, you just become really good friends.”

Sløk: “How do uniforms relate to this thing about being best friends?”

Madsen: “It’s this thing about everyone being similar in some way. There’s no one you look down on or anything like that because we’re the same, y’know, in the context of the armed forces.”

(Interview with Madsen)

To Madsen, the social aspect of doing conscription was important. She was one of the conscripts with whom I spent the most time, as we were both in the same dorm room and the same squad during drills. And although I felt that the uniform did not fully conceal the fact that my presence in the platoon was motivated by a different purpose than the other conscripts, Madsen did not seem to mind. In general, the uniform did indeed make it easier for me to fit into the platoon because it made all of us more similar, as reflected in Madsen’s quote above. By not standing out, either by wearing different apparel or by physically standing on the sidelines, it was mostly forgotten that I was there for different reasons than my fellow conscripts – as long as I enacted in a way that made me recognizable as a good soldier (Sløk-Andersen 2017). Even if some of the sergeants wanted to be cautious around me and treat me differently because I was ‘the researcher’, it was often difficult for them to tell us apart. This became particularly clear on the occasions where I was called the name of one of the male conscripts in my squad (we were the same height, and our small buns of blond hair on the back of our heads apparently made us look similar from behind). In this way, the uniform enabled my becoming as a military subject while it also – as I illustrate in the following – constituted a collective self through disciplining mechanisms connected to the uniform.

## Control and correction

While uniformity may be considered highly important to the creation of a combatant platoon, keeping track of the various uniform parts in a dorm room with 11 other people was a challenge. Each of us had five pairs of khaki-colored socks, which meant a total of 120 similar socks in our dorm room. Imagine the confusion. But while this material uniformity might not have seemed very practical to those responsible for keeping track of the uniform parts, the uniform seemed to enable certain disciplining mechanisms that made us recognizable as military subjects.

At first, the uniform felt neither comfortable nor empowering. As I wrote in my field notes on day two, “it does not feel familiar at all”, followed by comments about all the small details to which I had to pay attention: Are the shoelaces sticking out, are any of the pockets open, is the beret placed correctly on my head? The process of getting accustomed to the uniform was, however, pushed by practices of *control* and *correction* that were a recurrent theme throughout the conscription period. While still in this highly insecure period of feeling estranged by the uniform, some of the sergeants took joy in ‘helping’ us get our uniforms in order:

In the canteen, two sergeants from another platoon are seated further down the same long table as us, having lunch. They are talking across the table but their conversation is interrupted numerous times as one of them calls out to many of the conscripts passing by. He yells at them to point out that their uniforms are not in order and to correct them at once. Unbuttoned pockets, missing nametags on jackets, curled-up collars. The sergeant is clearly enjoying yelling at the conscripts, giving them orders to stop and correct their uniforms. Out of fear of getting the same treatment, the two conscripts I am having lunch with and I stay seated until the two sergeants have left.

(Based on field notes; Tuesday, week 1)

Routines of control were a recurrent part of the day at the military camp. It started every morning at 07:25 when we had our first contact with the sergeants; they would enter our dorm rooms to inspect the room as well as each of us. Besides making sure that we had all of our equipment in order, they would also check the room’s cleanliness, the order of things in our closets, and our individual appearance. This would be done by a sergeant standing in front of each of us, only one or two feet away, while we stood *at attention*, looking to the right. Standing like this, the sergeant would inspect us, making sure that the uniform was in order and no camouflage face paint, earrings, or stubble was visible on the

neck or face. These situations of being put on individual display often resulted in nervousness and silence in the room.

*Discipline*, as Foucault has argued, is often centered on “the detailed control” (Damsholt 2000: 61, my translation), not only by others but also by oneself (Foucault 2008). For us, the sergeants’ external gaze was quickly internalized as we were encouraged to control ourselves and each other before standing in front of the sergeants – as a way of “helping each other”, we were told. Not only before this morning inspection, but continuously throughout the day: When lining up, when entering or exiting buildings, before drills, before parades, and so on. We would ask the person next to us, “Did you remember your helmet?” or yell out in the dorm room “Does everyone have their maintenance gear?”

This control amongst ourselves was further encouraged through the concept of *collective responsibility*; if someone forgot a glove, no one else was allowed to wear gloves because we were all responsible for the actions of others in the platoon. Like when Bisgaard, the quite confused conscript with whom I shared a bunkbed, lost his folding knife during week six, and those of us sharing a dorm room with him became responsible for him not losing any more of his things. After that incident, it became part of our daily routine to ask Bisgaard if he had remembered all of his equipment, especially the folding knife. This became yet another part of our *shared choreography* that was never planned or discussed between us; it just became a pattern of daily routines that were embodied as tacit knowledge. According to Ehn and Löfgren, the advantage of routines lies in their ability to “liberate us from energy-demanding choices such as whether to first put on the left or the right shoe, and whether to boil, fry, or scramble the breakfast eggs” (2010: 91). In much the same way, the routine of controlling each other’s uniforms became part of a collective autopilot that integrated these routines in our daily life without us thinking much about it.

As an almost natural addition to these disciplining mechanisms that installed control as a practice between conscripts, we also *corrected* each other’s uniforms. This was done not just by pointing out that something was out of order but by actually correcting it; straightening a collar, tucking in a shirttail, or closing a pocket. In this way, the clothing on my body, which I would normally consider to be within my personal sphere, became a collective space for control and correction. Not just by sergeants but also by other conscripts. These routines did not only participate in disciplining us as military subjects, they also installed both an individual and a collective internalized gaze (Foucault 2008), which constituted a form of collective self.

Both conscripts as well as sergeants justified these routines of control and correction – which made the armed forces seem exotic to me at first – as a consequence of the potentially fatal outcome of errors when you are a soldier. Following this rationale, Lindberg had no problem making sense of the continuous control of buttons and other tiny routines that were part of our everyday life at the military camp:

“Well, Sgt. DC is my squad sergeant and he doesn’t care much about cleaning and stuff like that. But the pockets on our combat belt [containing ammunition, water bottle, etc.] better damn be closed! Because if you lose something, it might be what ends up costing someone else their life. A comrade.”

(Interview with Lindberg)

As this quote illustrates, uniformity and control related to the uniform was not just a question of creating cohesion or a way of disciplining. It was also a matter of being able to do the best job possible; of being a good soldier who is able to keep your comrades alive. As such, the control enacted through daily routines and shared choreographies of correcting each other meant protecting the collective self in the potential line of fire.

While many conscripts did not consider themselves to be ‘real’ soldiers, the idea of being in *the line of fire* was the backdrop for much of the teaching and doctrines. For example, the hierarchal structure in the armed forces was understood as a completely natural way to organize the military sphere because being under attack does not allow time for an unclear or ambiguous power structure. As the colonel in charge of the regiment explained to me: “We don’t hold back, we tell it like it is. But that has an operational reason: If we debate for too long and [are] too unclear, we will die” (interview with Col. Johnsen). In this way, the disciplining measures related to the control and correction of the uniforms were entangled with being a good soldier in imagined (or, to some of the sergeants, actually experienced) life-or-death scenarios of a real soldier. Through the performance of daily routines of control and correction, most conscripts tried their best to perform as good soldiers – while knowing that they were far from being real soldiers.

### **The entangled matter of uniforms**

With regards to the uniform, the ideal of always being able to save a comrade’s life was not the only aspect of what it means to be a good soldier that appeared. During my fieldwork, I had a couple of one-on-one talks and interviews with our platoon commander, Lieutenant

Petersen. In the following scenario, I was asking him questions about the ranking system, and how strictly it applies to everyday situations. This led to the following reflections:

Lt. Petersen: "We wouldn't have had the same possibility to discipline, I think."

Sløk: "If it hadn't been for the rank system? How are the two connected?"

Lt. Petersen: "There is no doubt about who is in charge because you can *see* it. And you can see how they are ranked in accordance with each other, those who are in charge [...] I think that when you have the ranking system, then you are more prone to accept what is said."

(Second interview with Lt. Petersen)

The lieutenant went on to provide an example of how people outside the military camp would react differently if he gave orders wearing his uniform versus his 'civilian' clothes; the uniform would no doubt make people more prone to follow his orders. We might say that the uniform makes him recognizable as a military subject entitled to give orders; a good soldier that can claim authority.

Through Lieutenant Petersen's description, it becomes clear how authority and discipline are entangled and done through the materiality of the uniform and the routines of which it is a part. While anyone wearing a military uniform might seem alike to those not familiar with the small details inscribing information on the uniforms, these details matter among the wearers. Without the ranking system inscribed in and on the uniform jacket, the authority that is distributed accordingly would entangle in a different way. But the differing matter of the uniform is not merely dependent on the signs on its surface, like distinctions and medals inscribing information about rank and previous deployment experiences. Rather, it comes to matter through the material-discursive entanglement of elements, such as the ranking system, disciplining mechanisms enabled by military law, the fabric of the uniform, the tone of voice in which orders are given, and certain ways of moving and standing (for the latter, see Sløk-Andersen 2017). All of these elements are entangled when Lieutenant Petersen's uniform comes to matter, and the effect of the uniform would be different if even just one of the entangled elements was absent.

This shifting entanglement of matter in the uniform was obvious if we travelled home during the weekend while wearing it. We were granted this opportunity after a couple of weeks; at that point, we were considered to be able to act "properly" outside of the military camp – which meant something along the lines of sitting up straight and being polite to others. And even with the sergeants and their disciplining measures out of sight,

the imperative to have our uniforms in order and to act properly when wearing the uniform was already embedded in us; this was a part of our performance as good soldiers that we carried with us. The embodied routines kept us within the limits of recognition: Taking off the beret when entering a building, rolling it up and putting it into the pocket by the right knee happened without thinking much about it. Even those who grew discontented with doing military service seemed to still act properly when we went to the train station together on Friday afternoons – or they just did not wear the uniform home.

However, the uniformity and the feeling of ‘being in this together’ that were established with the uniform slowly disappeared when we left the military camp. Outside the camp’s fence, we were seen as “representatives of the entire Danish Armed Forces”, as Sergeant Bolt had told us (Field notes, week 5). Here, the hierarchical differences that put sergeants in a position to control and correct our uniforms receded as elements entangled differently in the uniform. Outside the military camp, the uniformity of our attire made us recognizable as soldiers rather than conscripts, which made the military ranking system disappear. The authority that had, up until now, been associated with the uniforms that our sergeants wore was hereby enabled for us to perform – if only for a short while. This concurrently made a shift in what it meant to be a good soldier as obedience at the bottom of the hierarchy inside the military camp was exchanged for authority outside the camp’s fence.

Despite the changing matter of the uniform, it seemed as though it came with a certain way of acting, of moving, of talking, of thinking. A certain pattern for how to perform, which I argue is informed by the figure of the good soldier, even if the routines tied to this performance shifted depending on the elements that were entangled in the uniform.

### **Challenging the ideal of uniformity**

While the uniform did indeed participate in creating uniformity, it simultaneously seemed to make other elements more visible. I discovered that, over the course of the four-month conscription period, good soldiers did not need to be completely similar after all. While a basic requirement for being recognizable as a good soldier was still to have your uniform in order and keep track of all of your equipment, some conscripts seemed to stand out from the crowd more than others.



While promoting the recent introduction of gender-mixed dorm rooms at the camp, our company commander (who was called “Boss”, as he was at the top of the local hierarchy) initially told us:

“We do not evaluate due to gender, but due to competences [...] To me, you are not men and women, but rather competences that I can use to solve tasks. Some are really smart, and others are really strong.”  
(Field notes, week 1)

The uniform was believed to conceal gender differences; it was expected to make us all non-gendered soldiers, which echoes Sergeant Wilson’s aforementioned argument that the uniform removes the elements that signal “who I am as a person”. Competences, however, were seen as differing from one conscript to the next. They were apparently not camouflaged by the uniform – quite the opposite, I would argue, as they affected one’s ability to be recognized as a good soldier. To illustrate the way in which this is entangled with the uniform, I next present an example centered on the highly ordinary act of peeing.

Being a conscript was strongly related to the feeling of being in a hurry: Everything always had to be done as quickly as possible. We were given a specific number of minutes for most tasks, and it almost always felt like too little time. This was also the case when needing to urinate, which was particularly challenging during drills. Here, having to wear a belt with two small buckles as well as pants with both a zipper and a button made peeing a time-consuming task for some of us. Before I had even gotten my pants down by my ankles and squatted, those who could easily just zip down the fly in their pants and pee standing up had almost finished. Having a male squad sergeant meant that breaks during drills or patrols were timed based on how long it took him to pee. And because he peed standing up, he was quite fast at getting it over with and calling on us to line up again. By the time this happened, I would still have to stand up, zip and button my pants, close the two buckles of the belt, and put on the rest of my equipment. And while those standing up to pee often just took one step to the side, I would go looking for a bit of cover before exposing my entire lower body to the world. Needless to say, it was usually a woman who lined up last after these breaks.

Exploring the material-discursive enactment of gender in academia, ethnologist Tine Damsholt (2013) has argued that uniformity in the materiality that covers the body can make other elements visible, including gender, due to the material-discursive entanglement in a given setting (see also Mol 2002). It appeared the same in this scenario, where female physiology, the design of the uniform, and routines designated by a male

squad sergeant entangled in a way that made it very difficult for women in particular to meet the requirements for being punctual. Because being on time was presented as an essential part of being a good soldier, this entanglement made gender appear in the performance of being a good soldier. I could not recognize myself as a good soldier in these situations due to the routines that were established around the recurrent act of peeing. While the uniform was meant to camouflage gender categories, it simultaneously made gender present in these situations.

Yet uniformity also challenged the performance of certain competences. An example of this appeared during drills and exercises when the platoon was divided into four squads, each led by a squad sergeant and supported by a second-in-command. The latter was appointed among the conscripts in the squad and was referred to as an *alpha*. The alpha would help manage the rest of the squad, which included supervising the routines of control and correction; the squad sergeant thus 'lent' authority to these conscripts. It was never explained to the rest of us why some were appointed for this role, so I made sure to ask about it in my interviews with the squad sergeants. As Sergeant DC explained how he used the alpha role to test conscripts' potential for advancement to sergeant after the conscription period, he told me:

"So here we make sort of an assessment of how the person works in relation to this group. Does this person command respect? Or, 'command respect' that sounds quite harsh, but can this person actually get the group to do something without the rest of them going 'Sure, sure, we'll just do it later', y'know?"

(Interview with Sgt. DC)

However, the alphas experienced that it can be difficult to stand out from uniformity. When trying to perform the routines of our sergeants – e.g., ordering us to go through each pocket of our combat belts to ensure that everything was where it was supposed to be – the alphas were often met with arguments, complaints, or even someone giving them the finger. Those who were not considered to be particularly good soldiers by the other conscripts had the hardest job; why follow orders from someone who is not considered to be good at their job? But "commanding respect" was to some degree a challenge for all the alphas, as their uniforms were not inscribed with a change in authority; they showed the same rank as those conscripts the alphas were trying to lead. Shutting up and doing what we were told without arguing or resisting came naturally when sergeants gave us orders, even the sergeants we did not know – like the one who was correcting uniforms in the

canteen – because their uniforms revealed a rank higher than ours. But with these conscripts who wore uniforms identical to the rest of us, the uniformity that was supposed to ensure cohesion now challenged their attempts to perform leadership. The authority that came to matter when travelling home while wearing the uniform was now absent. In the role of alpha, the entanglement of the uniform challenged attempts to prove themselves as good soldiers through routines that were otherwise unnoticed when performed by the sergeants.

However, when gender was added to this entanglement, it seemed as though some alphas were more challenged than others. After already observing how the one female sergeant in our platoon seemed to struggle with being accepted as an authority, the issue also appeared during an interview with Nielsen, the only female conscript in our platoon to be appointed alpha. When I asked what it was like to give orders to other conscripts, Nielsen told me about her struggle to carry out the role of alpha because her male colleagues “might think it sucks being bossed around by a 20-year-old girl”. This impression was based on a sense of not always being “taken seriously” and having to “prove [herself] more” (Interview with Nielsen). She hesitated when explaining this to me, perhaps a bit unsure if this was a valid assessment of the situation, but when I later interviewed one of her male colleagues, Christoffersen, he said:

“I respect her. I think she’s a good alpha, and I understand why she’s alpha instead of me and all that, whereas many might think, ‘Oh, but she’s only alpha because she’s a girl’ [...] It’s not like that. I can sense that she’s fighting for it. She’s passionate about it. She wants it. And that’s why I just have respect [for her] instead. And I think it’s too bad that she isn’t getting the credit that... sometimes should be given.”

(Interview with Christoffersen)

While “commanding respect” was challenged by the uniformity established through the uniform, leadership simultaneously seemed to bring gender to the front. Building on Damsholt’s argument that uniform attire might bring other differences to the front, I question the assumption that a military uniform always camouflages gender. Rather, gender differences were reiterated and brought to the front through the entanglement of uniformity, authority, and leadership. In this way, the alpha role transformed the matter of the uniform. While the uniform made it difficult to stand out, the uniformity it established simultaneously made some conscripts stand out; for instance, by constituting gender differences.

## When recognition is challenged

While the struggle for most alphas to be recognized as good soldiers was primarily tied to their attempts to claim authority, other conscripts were challenged in a broader sense by seeming to do few things 'correctly'. One of these conscripts was Hajjar. As he was often positioned right in front of me during marches and line-ups, I knew about the continuous corrections, yelling, and sighing that he encountered from sergeants as well as other conscripts (including myself). Hajjar had signed up for military service to make his father proud but had discovered that the job was "too tough" for him. Nevertheless, he persisted in his attempts to be a good soldier, thus illustrating the processual and performative nature of military subjectivity. During my interview with him, Hajjar also pointed to the felt experience of (his attempted) becoming-with the uniform:

"Well, you have to look good when you're a soldier and travel home [for the weekend] in your uniform. Then you need to look nice and be an adult. You shouldn't *act* like an adult; you should actually *be* an adult."

(Interview with Hajjar)

The quote suggests that the military subjectivity enabled and enacted through the uniform is not just a detached persona that can be switched on and off; rather, it is a question of the self. The performance of the good soldier is about becoming a specific self through the entanglement of elements such as disciplined bodies, life-and-death scenarios, and uniforms. For Hajjar, this feeling of recognition failed to appear: Neither he nor others in the platoon recognized him as a good soldier, despite the fact that he wore the uniform throughout the four months. As such, his hope for a career in the armed forces slowly disappeared.

For others, the desire to be recognized as a good soldier was not as present as it was for Hajjar. Some conscripts ended up regretting having signed up for military service and tried to avoid the uniform as much as possible; one conscript attempted to be classified as a conscientious objector halfway through the four months, while others seemed to push the limit of how many sick days could be accepted.

Dalgaard, who was in my dorm room, had given up on the idea of a military career after the first two drills in the woods. Being cold, exhausted, and far away from any fast-food vendors had made him realize that maybe being a soldier was not his dream job after all. Following this realization, Dalgaard seemed to use any excuse to make a minimal effort or

to not participate at all, while avoiding any formal punishment. Being sloppy when it came to keeping the uniform in order could be an example of this. As I wrote in my field notes:

Meanwhile, Sgt. Kleinmann controls our attire. He always finds mistakes. "Come on, look yourself up and down before I do", he yells. In a sharp and loud tone of voice, Dalgaard is told that he is "a fucking loser without any self-respect". I find out later that this outburst from Sgt. Kleinmann was a reaction to Dalgaard not having buttoned his jacket.  
(Field notes, week 5)

From his performance, it was clear that Dalgaard did not want to be a good soldier, and the sergeants picked up on that. And while this is one of the harsher reactions from a sergeant, it is a vivid example of why most of us eagerly tried to avoid being corrected; we felt embarrassment and discomfort when a sergeant scolded us for not performing in a way that aligned with being a good soldier. But Dalgaard did not change his behavior accordingly. Rather, he seemed to care less and less – which was somewhat frustrating to those of us who shared a dorm room with him, as we were still bound to the concept of collective responsibility. By not wanting to be recognized as a good soldier, Dalgaard stopped being part of our shared choreography, which then challenged *our* chances of being recognized as good soldiers.

Reflecting on the theoretical basis for this analysis, the question then becomes: What happens when someone is not interested in being recognized as a good soldier? When someone does not practice the routines that were initially motivated by a desire to be recognized? This might indicate a shortcoming in the theoretical approach applied in this article, while also underscoring the emergence of a military self that goes beyond the individual.

### **Not being a 'real' soldier**

Enacted the right way, the uniform participates in making conscripts recognizable as good soldiers. Yet the uniform can also become a source of annoyance when it obstructs the desire to be recognized as a *real soldier*. At the time of my fieldwork, the army was changing its uniforms from a green to a khaki camouflage pattern.<sup>92</sup> The reason was said to be due to the Danish Armed Forces' engagement in missions to countries such as

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<sup>92</sup> The new uniform was described as 'beige' in my first draft which met strong reactions from some military scholars; beige is apparently not a color to be associated with the armed forces.

Afghanistan and Iraq where the environment is warmer and less fertile than the green and often cold Danish woods for which the old uniform seemed to be designed. The introduction of the new uniform thus materialized a change in Danish foreign and defense politics, while also marked differences in hierarchy, as the new uniform was implemented in a way that prioritized those soldiers closest to 'the front'. As a result, conscripts and volunteer members of the Danish Home Guard were the only service members whose uniforms were still green when I did this participatory fieldwork in the spring of 2016.



**Illustration 7. The conscripts green uniform and the sergeants' khaki-colored**

While many of the conscripts at first wore their uniform home on weekends, the excitement in this ultimately wore off for most of them. A few weeks before being discharged, I asked Christoffersen if he travelled home in his uniform, and he explained that he did not feel pride in “wearing a uniform that anyone gets to put on if they just pass the medical check [at the draft]” (Interview with Christoffersen). The previous three-and-a-half months in the armed forces had taught the conscripts to decode (and reproduce)

this entangled matter of the uniforms: Our green uniform became less prestigious, as it reflected holding the lowest possible rank and revealed that we had not been anywhere close to the line of fire.

While the uniform had participated in the becoming of these young soldiers, it was simultaneously pushing back through the entangled elements that were made visible to the conscripts themselves. Explaining why he had stopped wearing his uniform while travelling home, Buster told me:

“At first, I thought it was cool [...] But it’s just that now *I know* that to be a real soldier you wear that [khaki] uniform. And the rest of the world doesn’t know that, but I know that now when I look at us. I know that this [green] uniform... You might as well be part of the Home Guard to wear this. And I’m not that big of a fan of the Home Guard.”

(Interview with Buster)

References to the Danish Home Guard were made numerous times throughout the four months and did not have positive connotations, likely because members of this volunteer service were perceived as being even further from ‘real’ soldiers than the conscripts were. Thus, having the same uniforms as the members of this service was considered to be a drawback, decreasing the pride that many had felt when first wearing the green uniform. Here, the uniformity established through the green uniform became an obstacle to recognition. In this way, the uniform not only functioned as an element in the enactment of recognizable military subjects but equally as a materialized obstacle to these conscripts being able to recognize themselves – because being *a good soldier* did not necessarily mean being *a real soldier*.

*A good soldier*, as illustrated throughout this article, is someone who has the tacit knowledge of unwritten or unspoken expectations and rules, and who can instinctively apply them in changing situations; someone who can quickly read situations and translate them into an acceptable performance. The figure of the *real soldier* appeared during the conscription period as a sort of abstract potential lurking on the horizon. When asked during interviews if they would define themselves as real soldiers, most conscripts distanced themselves from this category, as it was associated with the possibility of actually being in the line of fire (see also Pedersen 2017). Yet, while being in the line of fire was considered to be miles away from being a conscript, the daily routines of control and correction still entangled the military uniform with this prospect of becoming a real soldier. Being a good soldier meant always being ready for the line of fire – just in case this

possibility ever appeared with its promise of reconfiguring us into real soldiers. As one of my roommates wrote on the first page of his notebook: “Be ready, all the time.” (Field notes week 1)

To return to the quote that opened this article, when I was yelled at for looking “like shit” that morning in the woods, it was not only a comment on my unbuttoned jacket or my missing hat. It was a comment on me not being ready, all the time. It was the visible absence of daily routines that should have assured me (and the collective self) that I had everything in order. I would never have walked around in such disarray inside the military camp where the routines were well-established and the collective self would have controlled and corrected me before standing in front of the sergeants. But in the woods, the routines and shared choreography that I knew from the dorm room had changed. And, as it turned out, I did not have the tacit knowledge of how the uniform should be practiced in this setting, which resulted in a moment of failed recognition.

## **Conclusion**

Conscription seems to give the armed forces the possibility to create the good, disciplined soldiers they want and need – at least in those cases where the conscripts are willing subjects who enact recognizable subject positions. The uniforms worn by conscripts as well as sergeants play a key role in this process, as they enable not only a sense of cohesion but also disciplining practices of control and correction. To Sergeant Wilson, this was “just a test of their discipline” (Interview with Sgt. Wilson) but as my analysis has suggested, uniforms participate in a more complex processual becoming of good soldiers.

As I illustrated in the first part of this article, uniformity helps create cohesion between conscripts by downplaying traits of individuality. This showed itself to be further emphasized by routines of control and correction that established not only military selves but also a collective self. The disciplining mechanisms tied to the uniform not only enable the disciplining of individual soldiers, but concurrently constitutes the recognition of good soldier as dependent on a collective self. Being a good soldier is therefore not only up to the individual conscript to perform: Sharing a dorm room with someone who always lost equipment or who had no desire to be recognized as a good soldier affected the rest of us.

Conscripts need to wear a uniform to be recognizable as soldiers, yet simply wearing the uniform is not sufficient; it needs to be practiced in certain ways that makes the conscript



recognizable as a military subject. But as the uniform's entanglement changed, matters of rank, authority, discipline, cohesion, and gender also shifted. The required adaption in the performance of good soldiers would sometimes challenge recognition as a conscript's gender or lack of hierarchal status could appear all too intrusively. Ascribing greater agency to it than much previous research has done, the uniform seemed to push back and participate in the negotiation and work that went into the becoming of military subjects.

Previous studies of uniforms have already shown how their matter can change. Leilund's (2015) ethnographic work on the use of uniforms within three different professions, for instance, suggests that the matter of the uniform is dependent on the practice of which it is a part, and that the uniform and its wearer are mutually co-constitutive. Adding to this argument, I would emphasize that the professional becoming-with the uniform – in this case, within the armed forces – is crucial to the becoming of the profession itself. Larsson (2008) discusses how a uniform makes an employee “carry the institution with him” (2008: 12, my translation), but based on my analysis, I would add that the institution is not only “carried”; it is constructed, negotiated, and practiced through the use of uniforms.

## **ARTICLE IV**

### **The butt of the joke?**

**Laughter and potency in the becoming of good soldiers**

# Article IV

## The butt of the joke? Laughter and potency in the becoming of good soldiers

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In the Danish military profession, humor and laughter play a key role. Along with the strictness of hierarchy and discipline, a humorous tone is essential in the social interaction between soldiers. This article explores how humor is involved in the becoming of good soldiers.

In addition, sexual potency in the form of pornography, jokes, and (hetero)sexual encounters are not merely accepted but expected. Based on four months of ethnographic fieldwork among conscripted soldiers in the Danish army, the author suggests that this is, however, only one aspect of the potency that is expected of a good soldier; another essential element is having the ability to be proactive and take control.

While jokes, teasing, and insinuations may make military service more fun and contribute to the forming of bonds between soldiers, the article illustrates the challenges of not being 'in the mood' for humor. With a combination of affect theory and previous ethnological studies of humor, the article takes a new approach to questions about how sexuality, gender, potency, and humor entangle in the military setting. Adding to existing research on military socialization, the article argues that affective flows – such as those that appear when a joke is told – are matters of subjectivity that mark someone as either an insider or an outsider to the military profession.

### Publication status

This article has been accepted for publication in *Cultural Analysis* with revisions (of which some have already been incorporated).

## Introduction

In a landmark article from 1987, feminist military scholar Carol Cohn notes how, during her fieldwork among defense analysts in the US, she realized “that talking about nuclear weapons is fun” (1987: 704). As part of a more extensive analysis of the use of language in this context, Cohn argues that language becomes a way of bypassing the realness of a subject that may otherwise invoke moral outrage or emotional reactions, thereby making it possible to work in close proximity to death. Cohn’s argument is still relevant 30 years later, as I reflect on my own fieldwork in which the potentially very serious and deadly consequences of military work seemed absent. In this article, I address the significance of laughter at a Danish military camp.

During four months of participatory fieldwork among conscripted soldiers in the Danish army, I experienced how laughter permeated everyday life and created momentary breaks from the seriousness that is part of being embedded in this hierarchal structure. Even the sergeants who were supposed to discipline us often tried to lighten the mood by telling jokes or encouraging others to do so. Humor was used to make military service more fun: it created a positive mood and built a foundation for cohesion that made the tough times more bearable. But it also seemed to tinker towards what was expected of the soldiers in order for them to be recognizable as military subjects; i.e., as insiders. While Cohn did not focus specifically on humor when she concluded “that talking about nuclear weapons is fun,” I would like to approach the matter of “fun” as an essential aspect in the construction of a certain *mood* (Ahmed 2014a), and as something that is entangled in the becoming of a soldier.

My analysis of how laughter is involved in constituting not just a certain mood but also a *good soldier* unfolds from the following scenario, which occurred during a two-and-a-half hour march one warm afternoon:

It’s getting hot walking with about 25 kilos of gear on our backs, so during our first stop, Just, Fischer, and Persson pull down their pants to cool off their legs – which means that they are standing in the middle of the woods in their underwear, pants down by their ankles. On the other side of the trail, about 15-20 meters away and somewhat separate from the rest of the group, Juul and Karlsen are lying down against each other on the ground, enjoying a break in the sun. One of them has their arm around the other, and they are both smiling.

On the opposite side of the trail, one of the guys with his pants down around his ankles notices the two guys and proclaims loudly: “That’s kinda like

*Brokeback Mountain.*" After a few more guys comment on the apparently homo-erotic character of this scenario, several of them sneak up on the two guys and throw themselves in a bundle on top of them. Juul and Karlsen are surprised and look like they are exhausted by the many kilos of human bodies that suddenly land on top of them, while the guys who have thrown themselves on top of them laugh.  
(Based on field notes, week 11)

The two men lying together, Juul and Karlsen, seemed to grow fond of one another during the conscription period. But, as this excerpt indicates, their way of being close was considered inappropriate; as something similar to *Brokeback Mountain*, the 2005 blockbuster film about the forbidden love between two male cowboys. Although it was apparently perfectly fine to pull down your pants while surrounded by the rest of the platoon, it was deemed out of place to show another guy tenderness by holding him. I did not know the intimate details of Juul and Karlsen's relationship – they might have been close friends without any sexual interaction, or they might have been lovers. But this is irrelevant, as they were considered to be 'more' than conscripts with a close bond; they were read as men who desired men. Seeing this display of assumed desire that did not fit the norm, some of the other male conscripts intervened with humor, which illustrates how humor can be an effective mechanism to police sexuality and intimacy.

Of course, this is just one way to interpret this scenario; i.e., to see it as a form of policing that safeguards the norms of heterosexuality. The scenario could also be seen in a broader perspective regarding how to perform as a soldier, and how this is regulated affectively – e.g., through laughter. In this article, I suggest that the tenderness between the two men was interfered with, not just because of their display of intimacy, but also because their individual performances as soldiers fell outside of the recognizable patterns for being a good soldier.

As an analytical approach within cultural studies, examining humor is useful because it negotiates and makes visible the "taboos, limits, norms, and rules" that a use of humor presupposes (Jönsson & Nilsson 2014: 11, my translation). This analytical potential helps me to unfold how an active (male) heterosexual practice is established and policed as the norm, as well as to argue that the performance of a potent heterosexuality is inherent to being recognizable as a good soldier. With the help of Sara Ahmed's concepts of *mood* and *attunement*, I also explore how the affective powers inherent in, for example, the use of humor are involved in the young soldiers' process of becoming military subjects. Here, the

threat of being a *killjoy* silently lurks and takes part in the disciplining of the conscripted soldiers.

With this foundation, I suggest that the need for soldiers to perform *potency* is not merely a matter of them expressing heterosexual desire and activity; equally, it is a question of enacting leadership and taking control. In this nexus between sexual practice and professional standards, subject positions seem to be focused on one's performance as a potent soldier who takes initiative and leads the way – sexually as well as professionally.

### **Empirical setting and analytical approach**

The overarching research project that provides the basis for this article explores what it means to be a good soldier in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a focus on conscripted soldiers, as this basic training is considered crucial to the becoming of good soldiers. In this project, my conceptualization of *the good soldier* is utilized as “a figure or character with agentic presence and force” (Ashcraft 2017: 53), which makes visible certain contradictions, negotiations, and compromises in the performative becoming of these soldiers. In particular, I am inspired by Judith Butler's definition of performativity as “that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration” (Butler 1993: 20). This term enables an analytical exploration of how recognition as a good soldier is a continuous process that is never finalized; rather, it is a continuous becoming.

In order to empirically investigate these mechanisms, I conducted participatory fieldwork in a Danish army company in the spring of 2016. Here, I participated in the everyday life of a platoon comprised of conscripted soldiers, joining them from the first day until they were discharged four months later. I performed the same routines and drills, wore the uniform, and shared a dorm room with a group of both male and female conscripts. With this approach, I could observe the interactions between and practices of these conscripts; this allowed me to become part of their experience, and thereby gain insight into the forms of *tacit knowledge* that are attached to the daily routines that make up much of the everyday life in this setting (Ehn & Löfgren 2010; Löfgren 2014).

During the final weeks of the conscription period, I reduced my degree of participation. First, I dedicated a week to conducting interviews with conscripts and sergeants during the diverse activities planned for the week (e.g., when the platoon learned how to put out fires and evacuate buildings). I still wore the uniform, marching from one place to the

other and taking part in cleaning and maintenance duties, but I was allowed to refrain from most of the scheduled activities in order to conduct interviews. The following week, I took a step further away from being a conscript as I focused on observing the platoon from the sidelines. During this week, I wore my own clothes to avoid causing too much confusion; I was now disrupting the integration that the uniform had thus far facilitated (Sløk-Andersen 2018). I also conducted interviews with conscripts during evenings and weekends, which I continued to do throughout the remaining weeks.<sup>93</sup>

This fieldwork was situated at one of the eight military camps where conscripts can serve in the Danish army. While conscripts can also serve in the navy, the air force, or the Danish Emergency Management Agency, I decided to focus on the army because this is the military branch in which the majority of Danish conscripts serve.<sup>94</sup> To get a sense of the generalizability of my insights from these four months of participatory fieldwork, I also conducted two days of contrasting fieldwork at a different military camp in the spring of 2017. Material from these two days is also included in this article.<sup>95</sup>

While the percentage of female Danish conscripts has increased (to a current level of 17 percent), there remain certain limitations and possibilities for a woman to do fieldwork in a setting often defined qua concepts of masculinity (Higate 2003; Carreiras 2006; Baaz and Stern 2010; Kronsell and Svedberg 2012). I reflect on this at the end of the article. First, I will motivate my approach by discussing the most relevant existing research on the issue of humor.

## **The serious business of laughter**

Returning to the scenario from the woods that I presented in the introduction, I suggest that trying to understand this interaction requires attention to the matter of both humor and affect. From the perspective of the male conscripts who threw themselves on top of the two men lying against each other, their actions were a joke. Comparing the men to the

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<sup>93</sup> During this final month, I conducted 36 interviews in total – 26 with conscripts, and 10 with sergeants at different levels. The interviews were all semi-structured (Kvale 1997), and my questions were based on a combination of insights from my previous three months of active participation as well as my analytical framework.

<sup>94</sup> As of 2017, 94 percent of all Danish conscripts served in the army (*Conscripted soldiers*).

<sup>95</sup> The names of the specific regiments, companies, and platoons that I joined are concealed due to considerations regarding the anonymity of my informants, who have all been given pseudonyms in this article.

main characters from *Brokeback Mountain* and overwhelming them in this way was an extension of the humorous tone that characterized our four months of military service. It was all just for fun; an intention that was confirmed when there were no outbursts of anger or frustration in response, only laughter.

A great deal of research has explored the social and cultural meaning and effect of humor (see, for instance, Radcliffe-Brown 1961; Lyman 1987; Billig 2005). In studies of the military setting in particular, some ethnographers have suggested that humor is used as a disciplining mechanism; a way to exclude that which disrupts efficiency and cohesion; a way to keep one's honor intact within the hierarchal system; a way to build social bonds; and a way to express criticism or complaints without disrupting cohesion (Ben-Ari & Sion 2005; Engman 2014; Godfrey 2016; Bjerke & Rones 2017). Due to the empirical similarity of studies from other Scandinavian countries (i.e., Denmark, Sweden, and Norway), my focus is on how humor has been analyzed in Scandinavian military settings. In addition to many socio-economic, political, and cultural similarities within this region as well as an interwoven military history, all three countries have an active conscription system, which makes the structure and organizational culture of these militaries more similar than those based solely on the work of 'professional' soldiers.

In a Swedish anthology on humor and laughter (2014), editors Lars-Eric Jönsson and Fredrik Nilsson assert that laughter as a phenomenon should be of great interest to cultural analysts, as it gives us analytical access to vital structures within a given culture. According to these two ethnologists, the use of humor presents a risk of ridicule but it also builds social bonds because it challenges and makes visible elements that create order in society; thus, laughter is serious business. Specific to the military setting, this is illustrated in Jonas Engman's contribution to the anthology. Engman, who has conducted fieldwork in the Swedish navy for years, argues that humor – in counterpoint to the otherwise formal and disciplined tone of the military profession – helps to create intimate and informal bonds among the sailors, while its playful and carnivalesque character also provides them with an opportunity to challenge the social and cultural order of the navy.

In another recent Scandinavian study based on their fieldwork among Norwegian conscripted soldiers, Thea A. Bjerke and Nina Rones (2017) explore the use of humor as a way to manage life in a strict and disciplined *total institution* (Goffman 1968). Pinpointing the usefulness of humor in such a setting, Bjerke and Rones note that this is a strategy for handling frustration and disagreements "without being someone who causes problems"



(2017: 15). Drawing on the work of social anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, the authors argue that the soldiers in their study walked a fine line between funny and offensive humor, which suggests that there is a risk that the joke's usefulness could turn counterproductive. As this fine line is difficult for not only the soldiers but perhaps also researchers to navigate (when do we consider a joke to be offensive, and who gets to decide?), I refrain from using such a distinction here and explore instead the practices to which the use of humor is attached. And here, silences might be just as useful to explore; however, they are difficult to grasp through theories about humor. Thus, I turn to affect theory.

The two men lying against each other in the woods said nothing when their fellow conscripts took them by surprise. If we consider the connection between silence and power, then this reaction might be the source of great insight about the silencing that such a use of humor produces. In her paper "Not in the mood" (2014a), feminist scholar Sara Ahmed agrees with the predominant argument of much theory on humor; i.e., that it establishes a collective mood that means "being in relation to others" (ibid.: 15). However, Ahmed takes a more critical approach, arguing that this also makes it difficult for one to stand outside of this mood. Not being "in the mood" means being "out of tune," which affects one's ability to participate in the community, as "attunement is understood not only as being with, but being with in a similar way" (ibid.: 16). Following Ahmed's claim that affects produce subjects (Ahmed 2014c), not being in the mood thus has dire consequences for one's possibilities for being recognized as a subject.

In much of the research on the issue of humor, its use seems to presuppose established and recognized subject positions; the person making the joke, the person on the receiving end, and the audience are often presented as separate entities. These positions might be destabilized through the joke, but in the 'successful' use of humor, the social order is restored after the joke is told, thereby establishing the use of humor as a linear process of interaction between subjects. But what if we do not presuppose coherent subjects? What if we approach humor as an essential element in the becoming of good soldiers, and thus as a continuous process in which recognition is never ensured? With the help of affect theory and a performative approach to soldiers, this is what I aim to investigate. Thus, I do not set out to define what humor is, but rather how it is *done* and how this doing affects a soldier's access to military subjectivity. In my attempt to describe this, *humor* is joined by terms like *laughter* and *mood* as a way to prompt a broader approach in which embodied experiences and the non-verbal use of humor can be included in the process of becoming.

## Becoming part of the laughing band of brothers

In general, there was a lot of laughter during the four months I spent at the military camp. I would even argue that it is something in which many Danish soldiers take pride – perhaps, as suggested by Engman (2014), to counterbalance the strictness and seriousness that comes with the discipline, hierarchy, and order that also defines being a soldier. Humor was so essential to the everyday life at the camp that we even had one week during which the company commander, called “Boss,” decided that the entire company’s focus should be on creating “a good mood and morale.” This resulted in daily competitions of who could tell the best joke, many of which revolved around male sexuality. Following the second suggestion from Engman’s empirical work in the Swedish navy, it could be argued that humor is part of creating intimate and informal bonds (Engman 2014; see also Jönsson & Nilsson 2014). As such, the widespread use of humor supports a desire to establish a ‘band of brothers’ between the conscripted soldiers.

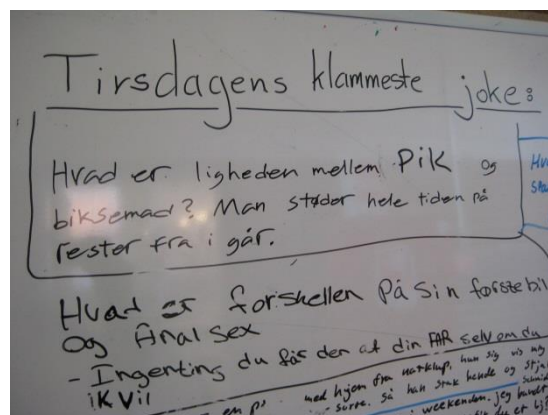
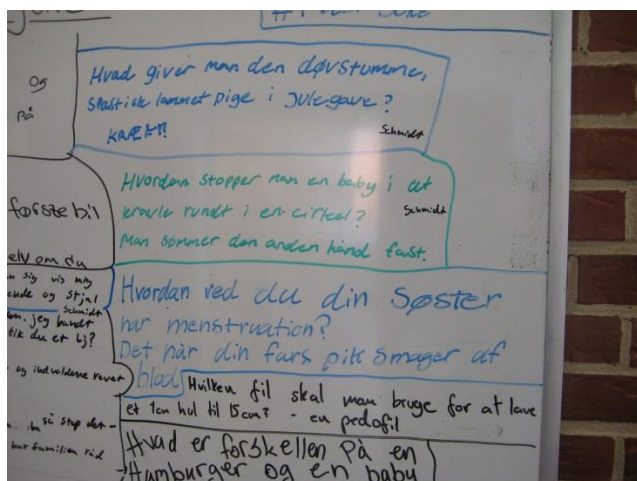


Illustration 8. A few examples of the jokes that were suggested in the category 'nastiest' joke during the week with "good mood and morale"

Expressions such as *band of brothers* and *brothers-in-arms* are often used to describe the intimate bonds that are made between soldiers during their service; within military research, this has been referred to as *cohesion* (King 2013), a concept that is considered essential for the efficiency of military troops (van Crevald 2001; Maninger 2008). The term also allows us to understand some of the rationales *within* and heated debates *about* the military (MacKenzie 2015). Recently, the establishment of such close bonds may have been challenged by the fact that the service period for most conscripts in Denmark has been reduced to four months, yet the issue of closeness still appears to be a priority – among soldiers as well as superiors. As expressed by our platoon commander, Lieutenant Petersen, with regards to his own relationship to the others in the company: “You quickly become more than colleagues. [...] Soldiers find it quite easy to bond” (1<sup>st</sup> interview with Lt. Petersen). The focus on creating bonds and closeness – whether we call this cohesion or something else – not only seems to have a beneficial effect on the capabilities of a platoon; it also appears to make the job more enjoyable for the people who devote a lot of time and energy to the Danish Defence. Thus, becoming a soldier is also about becoming part of a collective in which humor is an integral element.

Furthermore, expressions such as *band of brothers* and *brothers-in-arms* indicate that closeness between soldiers has typically been contingent on a male-only platoon. As suggested with the scenario that opened this article, however, intimate bonds between male soldiers may also have limitations; there are unspoken restrictions regarding this closeness, which necessitates a certain policing of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to be close. Yet it is often the still greater presence of women that has been deemed a threat to this cohesion, primarily due to the sexuality that the women are expected to make present or activate among the men. This active sexuality within the ranks is set in opposition to the previous male-only situation in which sexuality was not considered to pose a threat inwards, as stressed by historian Stephan Maninger:

“When operational, the members of military units are in each other’s presence on a 24-hour basis, involving matters of life and death. Operational conditions are therefore by their very nature intimate, but among heterosexual men never sexual.” (Maninger 2008: 22)

As a scholar, Maninger represents one of the more extreme positions in the debate about the inclusion of women in combat units, yet his position illustrates a prevalent assumption that the bonds between male soldiers are not, or at least should not be, sexual.

This restriction regarding closeness between male soldiers was also made evident in a humorous comment from our platoon commander. As he was quoted for saying by some of the conscripts: “This is not a folk high school (da: *højskole*); we don’t sit in a circle and play the flute. Well, maybe we play flute, but we don’t touch each other’s instruments” (field notes, week 17). Thus, the bond between male soldiers *could* be but *should* not be anything more than a closeness that is brotherly and non-sexual.<sup>96</sup> This was communicated to the conscripted soldiers through the platoon commander’s use of humor. And indeed, his comment was repeated several times by laughing conscripts. In this way, humor and laughter became entangled in the disciplining of conscripted soldiers. It played a crucial role in the policing of sexual practices and desire, thus ensuring that male sexual desire was directed towards women and not other men (see also Sundevall 2014). Through the use of humor, an active heterosexual practice was thereby reiterated as recognizable.

However, with its playful and carnivalesque character (Engman 2014), humor can also be a way to challenge the social and cultural order. For example, during a drill in the woods, the platoon second-in-command, Sergeant Bolt, caused quite a bit of laughter as he – in front of the entire platoon of conscripts lined up for inspection – started moving his hips and singing the chorus of a song that was apparently stuck in his head: Rihanna’s “Work.” As he interrupted his own singing, he cursed and said something about wanting to fuck her (“her” being Rihanna). Our amusement over his actions was no doubt a response to his normally very strict appearance; starting to dance and sing in front of us was a definite break with his typical strictness, and the performance of most sergeants in general. But humor offered a way to play with these expected and recognizable performances. For Sergeant Bolt, however, order was restored when he emphasized his active, dominating position as a heterosexual male who wanted to “fuck” Rihanna.

### **The potency of active heterosexuality**

In prior research, the significance of male soldiers’ heterosexual desire and potency has been presented as a key focus for both national militaries and the nation-states they are meant to defend (Goldstein 2001; Kronsell 2012; Bulmer 2013; Bourke 2016). One

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<sup>96</sup> Some historical studies have described how male soldiers have supported their financial situation during their military service by selling sexual services to other men – without this making them self-identify as homosexual (Edelberg 2011; Belkin 2012). Thus, military service has been closely linked to matters of men’s sexual relations.

argument for this preoccupation with sexuality could be that soldiers are supposed to be “the ideal, exemplary male” (Kilshaw 2011: 182) and, as such, this profession is highly entangled with issues of sexuality and reproduction. Although relations *between* the male conscripts were expected to be non-sexual, an active sexuality *was* expected of them. For example, at the end of a three-day drill in the woods, our platoon commander mentioned that, at this point, we were probably looking forward to going back to the barracks to take a shower, sleep indoors, and “beat the bishop” (field notes, week 4), which referred to a male masturbation practice that he expected was impatiently on hold during the drill.

References to sexual activities were, perhaps not surprisingly, extremely present in the use of language in this setting. For instance, when we were given instructions or standing in a waiting position, we were often told to (or rather, expected to know that we should) “take a knee”; i.e., kneeling down with one knee and one foot on the ground. As we learned this process, those who incorrectly put both knees on the ground were corrected with the exclamation: “Not in the blowjob position!” Similarly, the expression “dick in the ass” was used to emphasize situations in which we needed to be very close to the person in front of us. And when we were praised for having done something well, there were analogies to erections or ejaculation. Especially among the male conscripts, discussions that caused laughter could be on topics such as, “Who in the platoon is short enough to give a blowjob standing up?” or questions like, “If you *had* to choose, would you rather have sex with a scrawny guy like Torsten or a big fat black dude?” (field notes, week 17).

This use of language might have required an initial adjustment from some of us, but I did not take note of anyone complaining or expressing annoyance over this. The only comment came from Olsen, a female conscript who – despite her overall tendency to be highly adaptable and laugh things off – reacted to one sergeant’s particular comment:

“It’s a bit odd, because when they [sergeants] say that something is so good that ‘The Boss will get an erection’ and stuff like that, I just think, ‘Sure, whatever.’ Then this [Sergeant] KM comes along... and we’re standing there, listening, and then he asks us to all just step ‘a pussy hair closer’, and I felt that it was super inappropriate and... ‘Couldn’t you just have asked us to take a step forward?’ [...] I was like, ‘Ugh, that was a gross statement’.” (Interview with Olsen)

While Olsen had gotten used to images of sexual practices being an integral part of the language, something stood out for her in this case. What Olsen’s reaction makes clear is how almost all of the sexualized references implied a sexually-active *male* body; men

giving blowjobs, men masturbating, men penetrating or being penetrated, men getting erections and ejaculating. With Sergeant KM's utterance – which was no doubt meant as an attempt to be humorous – the female genitalia suddenly appeared, which interrupted the expected pattern and made it visible (Star 1990; Bowker and Star 2000).

Within queer studies, criticism has been raised over the often “excluding assumption about the subject's sexual existence” in queer theories, as this neglects those who are not sexually active; e.g., asexual or celibate people (Johansson 2013: 45, my translation). However, I am trying to illustrate that an active sexuality and potency was assumed among the male conscripts, regardless of their individual practices. An example of this presented itself during another drill. While some drills left most of us worn out and created a mood that was tense with frustration and exhaustion, in this case, we still had the energy to crack jokes and take lighthearted punches at each other. And Hald was on the receiving end, as someone had heard rumors that he had hooked up with one of the other conscripts:

During our breaks, there is talk about tree stumps, holes, moistness, and all sorts of other things [in the woods] that can be misinterpreted as being related to sex. Each time, it leads to laughter. And then there is a long interrogation of Hald; whether he had sex with Nielsen, or if he “couldn't get a boner?” as Buster asks with a cheeky smile. Hald tries several times to diplomatically shut down the conversation, but Fischer, Buster, Madsen, and Andersen keep the interrogation going.

(Based on field notes, week 16)

Among the conscripts, gossip about sexual encounters always prompted great curiosity and enthusiasm. In this case, even Madsen – one of Nielsen's best friends – was cheering and pushing for more intimate details. Although the rest of us found the interrogation amusing, Hald did not seem comfortable in the situation. When I talked to him later that day, he told me that he and Nielsen had not had sex but “just kissed” and slept next to each other. Either way, he did not want to ‘spill the beans’ out of consideration for Nielsen, who might feel betrayed. Remaining silent about the details of their encounter worked to his advantage, keeping Hald within the boundaries of an active heterosexuality. His silence meant staying inside the norms of a male soldier who *wanted* to have sex with this (or any) woman; thus, he continued to be recognizable as a sexually potent soldier. The jokes and questions from the others suggest that he certainly *would* have had sex with her if he was potent enough to “get a boner”. Thus, the use of humor not only policed the types of sexual practices or intimacy that were considered to be a threat to the band of brothers; it

also pointed to the importance of the heterosexual desire and potency that is typically expected from soldiers.

My empirical examples from drills may suggest that the connection between sexuality and humor was primarily present when we moved outside the military camp, but it was indeed present in most situations in which formality or exhaustion did not rule out the use of humor. But different settings made the expectation of an active sexuality play out in different ways: while heterosexual couples kissing and sleeping together were highly visible, as we were all living in very close proximity to each other, we were told that this behavior was not permitted when we were on duty. Here, activities that could take part in establishing someone as sexually potent, such as kissing or watching pornography, were not allowed. Thus, the numerous jokes and sexualized humor could be seen as a way of showing one's potency in situations where it was not allowed to be actively practiced – just like Sergeant Bolt's comment about fucking Rihanna.

### **A good soldier is a potent soldier**

As I suggested at the beginning of this article, sexual potency might not be the only form of potency expected from good soldiers. Reading the Oxford Dictionary's (2018) definition of the word, a possible connection presented itself. Here, being *potent* is defined as having two different meanings:

1. "having great power, influence, or effect. *Synonyms*: powerful, strong, vigorous, mighty, formidable, influential, commanding, dominant, forceful, dynamic [...]"
  2. "(of a male) able to achieve an erection or to reach an orgasm."
- (Oxford Dictionaries 2018)

While the second definition refers to the sexual potency that I argue is an expected part of being a male conscript, the first one seems to correspond with my impression of how *the good soldier* should be practiced. This twofold definition of potency seems to encapsulate the expected performance of good soldiers that I attempt to combine here; i.e., they are not

only expected to be sexually potent, but also expected to be able to perform in a way that can be described as being powerful, strong, vigorous, etc.<sup>97</sup>

Juul and Karlsen, the two young men who were enjoying each other's company in the scenario that opened this article, had quite different approaches to conscription. While Juul knew that he did not want a career in the Danish Defence and had primarily signed up for conscription for the social aspects, Karlsen was focused on showing his potential as a good soldier with leadership potential. Juul recognized this potential in Karlsen but felt that few others saw it because of his somewhat hesitant approach:

"Someone like Karlsen, well, if you ask me, I would say that he should be *Soldier of the Month* [an honor awarded to one conscript each month], but he's just not the type. I mean, he's really tough and bad-ass and a good soldier, I think, but he's just not the type who publicly shows that he's a leader. Yeah, he just holds back more and lets others take control, even if he is a really good soldier."

(Interview with Juul)

As Juul expresses in this quote, it is difficult for someone like Karlsen to be rewarded and earn respect if he is unable to take control and enact authority. To be recognizable as a good soldier, it seems necessary that one is positioned as active, influential, and extroverted; as potent. In Juul's opinion, Karlsen "let others take control," even though his skills had earned him a spot in two drills that were for only the most talented conscripts. Despite these achievements, few of the conscripts mentioned him when I asked them during interviews to give an example of "a really good soldier" in our platoon.

During an interview, our platoon commander – who had selected Karlsen for the two drills – stressed the need for soldiers to be extroverted. Describing himself as highly introverted, Lieutenant Petersen knew that this did not work in the military, so he focused on performing as more extroverted; "you have to," he told me (1<sup>st</sup> interview with Lt. Petersen). Regarding the evaluation of the potential of each conscript in the platoon, he noted that "[i]f you're invisible, it's very easy to score a low grade."<sup>98</sup> This statement was supported when another conscript in our platoon, Fischer, was named *Soldier of the*

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<sup>97</sup> In analyzing the interconnection between these two definitions of potency, I have been inspired by both Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix (1990) and Dorte Marie Søndergaard's (2006) reworking of this.

<sup>98</sup> The grades given during the conscription period, which evaluate the accomplishments as well as the potential of each conscript, define their possibilities for a career in the Danish Defence.



*Month*. In the motivation for this decision, which was read aloud in front of the entire company, Fischer was praised for “actively participating in all activities and being proactive when it comes to tasks and questions. He is committed and is [...] good at taking responsibility for the group” (field notes, week 17). To a large degree, this praise reflects the Oxford Dictionary’s first definition of being potent. Regarding the second definition, Fischer was not hesitant in referring to his own potency; he was very open about his own sexual prowess.

Even if one is not sexually potent, one can at least still be professionally potent; but being neither seemed to be a bad fit with the military setting. Professionally as well as sexually – if these can even be separated – Karlsen did not enact potency. So, while our platoon commander and Juul recognized Karlsen’s potential as a good soldier, he failed to perform as such in various ways; in appearing considerate and sensitive, and in being read as non-heterosexual. A combination of potency and *homosexuality* might have been an even greater breach of the norm; as such, this combination was delimited or even tabooed by the humorous policing of sexuality to such a degree that I have not met any openly gay soldiers during my fieldwork.

### **How humor entangles in the becoming of good soldiers**

Returning to Ahmed’s argument that “attunement is understood not only as being with, but being with in a similar way” (2014a: 16), laughing at the same jokes becomes essential to one’s possibility to become part of a collective. While generating a humorous mood may be seen as an innocent and positive way to create bonds, it also establishes a specific way of being in tune. Thus, *not* laughing at a joke means – in the words of Ahmed – being “affectively ‘out of tune’ with others” (ibid.: 17). Ahmed argues that affects “produce subjects and relations” (Frederiksen 2013: 26, my translation), which means that being recognized as a subject is threatened as a consequence of being out of tune. From such a perspective, the use of humor in the platoon not only established a certain affective mood to which everyone was expected to contribute, it also indicated what was expected of good soldiers, thereby enabling military subjectivity.

This is clear in the following example, which addresses the tradition of using the conscripts who are unable to participate in drills and exercises as ‘extras’; i.e., making

them play the role of a person in need of first aid, an enemy soldier, or a civilian in order to make the scenario more realistic for the other conscripts.

While standing outside the auditorium, lined up *at ease*, waiting for a sergeant to come out and give us orders to go in, a male voice in the crowd – I can't hear who it is – repeats a joke that Sgt. Kleinmann told yesterday: 'What do you call Peter in the military? An extra!' The crowd laughs.  
(Based on field notes, week 13)

The conscript Peter had been an extra a number of times due to an old injury. Thus, the sergeant's joke was inspired by a recognizable situation, albeit one that was exaggerated to be more humorous. This joke was repeated numerous times over the course of the following weeks and, while Peter also laughed at the joke, he revealed to me that he was annoyed that he could not participate in the drills. As he mentioned during the interview, he felt that he was missing out on "some of the most fun and cool things in the military" (interview with Peter). In this case, laughter made visible something that was not part of being a good soldier: disability. A good soldier is at least *able-bodied* (McRuer 2006).<sup>99</sup>

Each one of us was the butt of the joke once in a while. But being caught in this role too often, as was the case with Peter, was not a good sign. Yet laughter seemed to *stick* to some more than others (Ahmed 2014c), especially those who were not performing as good, potent soldiers. Realizing that the humorous *tune* of the military might sometimes walk a fine line that ends up being 'over the line,' an advisor told us during the first month that "of course, it is not prohibited to tell a naughty joke, but try to be considerate of each other. [...] The tone can be rough every once in a while; we have a certain jargon here" (field notes, week 4). In the company in which I participated, this jargon was considered to be part of creating a good mood. An indeed, it did – if you were not the butt of the joke. Returning to Engman, he notes that "[w]ith gesticulations that seem light as a feather – gazes, gestures, smiles and posture – people point out where there is order, [where it] should be found or should not be found. Humor makes us act and reflect on the state of the world" (Engman 2014: 19, my translation). In this way, it can be argued that laughter contributes to shaping good soldiers through the seemingly innocent attempts to use humor to create a positive mood.

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<sup>99</sup> Working in the intersection of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality, McRuer argues that the two are intertwined in a way that "works to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality" (2006: 31).

Language and humor that are infused with references to male sexual activities may be common among young adults in general (most of these conscripts were 19-20 years old), but older sergeants with a higher rank also participated in making sexual activity a recurrent theme. Although this may be seen as just “a certain jargon”, it worked to establish a clear expectation for a potent (hetero)sexuality – such as when the platoon commander assumed that an opportunity to masturbate was a highlight of returning to the barracks or when Hald was expected to take advantage of any chance to have sex with a woman. The military may not be the only profession in which this is the case, but what is particular here is how potency seems to be connected to being recognized as a good soldier. As such, it is entangled in one’s possibilities to continue in the military after the conscription period ends; it thereby affects how one is able to “be” in the military.

### **Not in the mood**

While humor makes the military an enjoyable place to work for many, the use of humor appeared so fundamental that it seemed almost inappropriate to take offense or oppose sexual jokes or comments that were meant as “just a joke”. According to Ahmed, someone who has “ruined the atmosphere by turning up or speaking up” is a *killjoy* (2013). This figure reflects the aforementioned idea of being *out of tune* or not being *in the mood*. A feminist killjoy is defined based on a number of possible criteria, such as: one who “will not laugh at jokes designed to cause offense” (Ahmed 2013), or will “refuse to laugh at the right points” (2014b: 2), indicating that the right point is probably when everyone else is laughing.

Returning to Juul and Karlsen’s silence after the group of conscripts threw themselves on top of them, their response could be interpreted in terms of the silencing effects that come with the threat of being a killjoy. If they had not accepted the other conscripts’ behavior as a joke, then they would have revealed themselves as being out of tune; as killjoys. This would also have been the case if Karlsen had filed a complaint after one of the other male conscripts punched him in the testicles, causing Karlsen to curl up in pain, almost unable to move. This was not the only time a male conscript was punched in the genitals; these incidents seemed to function as a way to test whether the receiver could ‘take it’ as the butt of a (physical) joke while simultaneously amusing the immediate bystanders. In accordance with the formal regulations, such an incident could be reported. But, because Karlsen neither opposed, screamed, nor reported this, I argue that this was a consequence

of him not wanting to ruin “the good mood.” As Ahmed notes: “Sometimes we might keep laughing in fear that otherwise we would cause a breakage” (2014a: 17). Karlsen accepted being the butt of the joke in order to stay in the band of brothers; he performed potency through his ability to physically and affectively ‘take it.’

During the two days of observations I conducted at a different military camp, it once again became clear how humor can make it difficult to oppose the others. During the second day, I sat in on a meeting in which five female conscripts were asked to expand on accounts of sexual harassment that had been mentioned to one of their sergeants the day before. The conscripts themselves did not refer to the matter as sexual harassment; this was the term used by the company commander who wanted the conscripts to decide whether or not this should be raised as a legal matter. As the conscripts started to describe what they had experienced, they mentioned how they had gotten used to daily comments like “This guy could fuck you, right?” However, certain incidents over the preceding few weeks had been “the last straw” (field notes, MC 2, day 2). While their male peers seemed to consider their actions as merely playful and humorous, being surrounded by male conscripts only wearing underwear, being pulled into someone’s dorm room, or being surprised in the shower had made some of the female conscripts snap. But they were hesitant; they seemed unsure whether they were even allowed to complain, let alone whether they wanted to take the next step and file a formal complaint. The rumors of their reporting had already made some of the male conscripts approach them with spiteful comments. When the company commander suggested that the farewell party the following day might be cancelled as a consequence of these accounts, one of the conscripts protested, stating that, if that were the case, she did not want to report anything. Having already interfered with the good mood in the company by speaking up, the women would most definitely become killjoys if they were seen as the reason that the farewell party got cancelled. In this case, the women turned something that was supposed to be humorous into something serious because they were not ‘in the mood’ – and they were aware of the breach they had caused to the humorous attunement within the platoon.

An interesting aspect of this story was that the company commander assumed that it was the recent introduction of gender-mixed dorm rooms that caused these unpleasant situations; that it was the closeness between men and women in small dorm rooms that derailed their interaction. However, the conscripts corrected this assumption, stating that the men with whom they shared close quarters were actually the least of their worries

(see also Ellingsen et al. 2016). Rather, it was male conscripts from other platoons that were causing them trouble.

This case illustrates another interesting point as the company commander stated that he would take the complaint just as seriously if it were men making it, but it seemed just as difficult for men to oppose this sexualized humor. Perhaps because they were considered to be active and potent, both sexually as well as humorously – thus, they were not seen as non-potent subjects that need to be protected against sexual harassment.<sup>100</sup>

Following up on these observations, I called the company commander a few days later to ask how the case had evolved. He told me that he had discovered that one conscript in particular had initiated most of the incidents; this might have been a way for him to signal to me that sexual harassment was not a widespread phenomenon in his company. Regardless, pinpointing a single offender connects the incident to my argument that being a good soldier is entangled with being potent – particularly because this male conscript was not only supposed to continue on to a military career, but was also a candidate for the honor of *Best Soldier*. Although the company commander said that he would have to wait and see if the Military Prosecution Service would press charges, he doubted that the conscript would be honored or become a sergeant now that this matter had come to light. Because, while this conscript had impressed his superiors by performing as a potent soldier, he had perhaps been overly potent towards his female colleagues.

### **An embodied experience of attunement**

While my presence among the conscripted soldiers was motivated by a scholarly purpose – which may have affected how sergeants and conscripts acted around me – I was also involved in the reiteration of potency through the use of humor and laughter. For example, as I was about to sit down to have breakfast in the canteen one day, I was asked a question. With a smirk on his face, the male conscript next to me asked: “So, Sløk, did you pop any anal sphincters this weekend?” (field notes, week 13), which ignited a conversation about anal sex in which I felt no need to engage, especially not while eating oatmeal at 6:05 in the morning. However, this particular scenario stuck in my head; I was curious about the penetrative role in which such a question cast me. The comment somehow challenged

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<sup>100</sup> This was also indicated by an internal investigation regarding the extent of sexual harassment in the Danish Defence in which only women were asked to participate (Øhrstrøm et al. 2003).

both the gender and sexuality roles that I had otherwise observed female conscripts being assigned. I assume that, due to my additional role as ‘the researcher,’ my position in this setting was different from that of the other female conscripts.

During five days of observations a few weeks later, the following scenario occurred and positioned me quite differently. I had been following the platoon around all day as they rehearsed various tactical moves in the terrain adjacent to the military camp. Now, they had returned to the barracks and were polishing their weapons; a group of them were sitting on rickety benches around a long wooden table in our maintenance room.

Andersen needs help disconnecting the shoulder strap from his weapon. Krebs gives it a go while Andersen proclaims to the rest of the group: ‘You’re not done before I’m done’ – which is technically correct, since no one is ever dismissed before the entire platoon is done with a given task. Kirkegaard and I joke about this comment also being applicable at home. But, unlike what I was referring to, Kirkegaard was talking about sex and proceeds to discuss this subject with the guys sitting across the table from him.

As I move on to talk to Andersen and Torsten instead, Torsten locks eyes with me and starts gesticulating a hand-job, using the lock of his weapon – which he was in the middle of polishing – as a sham penis. After a couple of seconds, I tell him, ‘You can do that all day without affecting me.’ He stops gesturing and goes back to polishing the lock, turning his gaze to the weapon instead of me. At the other end of the table, Jimmy finally gets Andersen’s strap disconnected from the weapon after several other guys have given it a shot without any luck. Gloating, Jimmy asks, ‘Who are all those faggots who couldn’t get this off?’

(Field notes, week 15)

This type of scenario often prompted more-or-less conscious decisions on my part to not be a killjoy. I never called out someone for overstepping my boundaries or asked them to refrain from “jokes designed to cause offense” (Ahmed 2013) because I figured that this was just the tone that came with being in the army. Since it was all just fun and games, did I really want to disrupt the good mood and the bonds I had built by saying ‘stop’? The months of participatory fieldwork had ensured that I was just as caught up in the naturalization of this humorous tune as everyone else – if not fully adjusting to the *tune*, then at least I was reluctant to become a killjoy.

Had I been in a different setting, I would most likely have expressed disgust or turned away if someone gesticulated a hand-job while locking eyes with me. But here in the maintenance room, expressing my ability to ‘take it’ seemed like the best possible reaction

while neither actively adding to the sexualization of the scenario nor being a killjoy. However, I could not help but wonder what Torsten's agenda was. What was he trying to achieve? Did he want to see me disgusted? Was he trying to make me laugh – or make Andersen laugh? I could not help but feel the gender marks on my body suddenly become more visible and sexualized in a room with only men present. Noting how my body was indeed part of the humorous attunement, 'taking it' became an embodied experience of engaging pride and will, followed by an awkward awareness of my own gendered body. My body was a vessel for gathering empirical material, picking up affective experiences along the way.

The reading of my body as feminine could be said to have both enabled and challenged my participatory fieldwork (Horn 1997; Pini & Pease 2013). Either way, it affected the empirical material that I gathered through bodily experience, interviews, and observations. For instance, Olsen sharing her distain when a sergeant asked the group of conscripts to step "a pussy hair" closer seemed to rely on a certain complicity between us as members of the gender being called out in this specific situation. While appearing female and thus 'harmless' may have increased my access in the military – as suggested in psychologist Rebecca Horn's study of the police (1997) – my gender also prevented access to certain settings where humor played out; e.g., in the male-only dorm rooms in which half the platoon was living. Horn argues that "when conducting research in a male-dominated environment, such as a police force, gender assumes a greater significance than it might do in other environments" (ibid.: 306). I would argue that its visibility and the practices in which its performance is enrolled may differ (Mol 2002); and in my case, it is closely tied to practices of humor.

## **Conclusion**

Taking a performative approach to my empirical material, I have argued that humor *does* something in the military setting. In addition to potentially bypassing the very serious consequences related to being a soldier that Cohn describes, humor creates a certain mood that seems to support cohesion and the establishment of close bonds. However, drawing on the work of Ahmed, I have argued that this mood could be seen as *attunement* among the soldiers; an affective regulation of "not only as being with, but being with in a similar way" (2014a: 16). Laughing at the jokes – because it was, after all, just a joke – is a way of

showing that you are *in tune* and, as such, not only part of the collective but also recognizable as a military subject.

Entangled in this use of humor is an implicit expectation of an active male heterosexuality; a male *potency* directed towards women. The reiteration of this expectation – and corrections of those who seem to break with it – through the use of humor worked as a form of policing. Although there were also plenty of jokes and humorous comments in which sexual encounters between men were the punchline, they were not a threat to the male heterosexual potency as long as this discourse stayed within the carnivalesque sphere of humor. Adding to this safeguarding of heterosexuality, I have argued that the use of humor concurrently took part in indicating other ways in which good soldiers should be potent; that is, by “having great power, influence, or effect” (Oxford Dictionaries 2018). The dictionary’s two definitions of potency – which are quite entangled in practice – seem to comprise significant elements in the performance of good soldiers.

This article has focused on an assumed *male* sexual potency, as this is what seemed to define the humorous *tune* in the company in which I conducted participatory fieldwork. As a result, women are placed in a difficult position within the military profession, and it creates a difficult space for women to perform within. As illustrated with the case of sexual harassment, they sometimes “cause a breakage” by speaking up. But most of the time, the sexualized humor made it difficult for anyone to speak up, due to concerns that this would ruin the good mood; the fear of becoming a killjoy thereby silenced ruptures to the expected potency of good soldiers. For example, speaking up when the platoon commander stated that “we don’t touch each other’s instruments” would have been an indication that one was “out of tune” by not being able to take the joke, but also by challenging the assumed potency of heterosexuality.

The camaraderie and laughter that is part of doing military service is undoubtedly a motivation for many of the Danish citizens who sign up each year. But through the flows of affect, those who keep ending up as the butt of the joke become positioned as being outside the recognizable performance of good soldiers. Thus, the use of humor enables conscripts (and their superiors) to discover whether or not they are in tune – and thereby have ‘what it takes’ to pursue a military career.



# The difficulties of becoming of good soldiers

## Conclusion

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In this dissertation, I have followed the ethnological tradition of studying everyday life in order to describe how 'good' is performed in the military borderland. Taking the body as my analytical point of departure, I examined the routines and performances of conscripted soldiers in the army in particular to explore the process of becoming within the military profession, which is often presented as anything but ordinary. As something that works both through and on the bodies of soldiers, I argue that 'good' is performed discursively, materially, and affectively in ways that silently establish boundaries with regards to who can be recognized as a military subject; this is a continuous process of policing and performing the boundaries established around the military profession. So while the Danish military have become less focused on defending the territorial borders of the nation, I suggest that the defense of these professional boundaries is in full effect.

The process of becoming a military insider is a challenging process for those who have to navigate it, as the valuing of soldiers is multiple and contradictory. As such, I have suggested that being recognized as a good soldier requires a sensitive balancing act in which both the individual and the collective continuously establish and decode 'good.' Thus, being a good soldier does not mean one specific thing; it is not a final and complete set of skills, bodily characteristics, competences, or personality traits. Rather, I have shown that the good soldier is a force that *does* something in the process of becoming of military subjects; a force that sometimes makes conscripts push themselves to the point of vomiting, and sometimes invites them to joke around and not take everything too seriously. Being a good soldier is thus not a matter of always performing to the absolute limits of one's abilities but rather knowing *when* this is necessary; a tacit knowledge that conscripts learn, not just through explicit rules and regulations, but also via punches to the crotch delivered by other conscripts, by being laughed at, and by being unable to wear the uniform with pride.

In the extensive field of military studies, it is a common assumption that joining the military automatically transforms a person into a soldier; that the camouflage fabric of the

military uniform confers a professional identity and membership to the military profession, or at least grants some degree of authority. If nothing else, the process of socialization that occurs during basic training is believed to create soldiers. However, with this dissertation, I challenge such assumptions by illuminating the difficulties involved in becoming a military insider. In particular, I have brought attention to certain obstacles – in the form of disabilities, ethnic background, gender, and sexuality – that may challenge recognition, thus disputing the assumption that military uniforms camouflage differences inscribed on the human body. In this final chapter, I summarize and discuss the findings of the four articles and the dissertation as a whole, while also outlining potential areas for future research efforts. In the following section, I revisit the steps of my study.

### **Studying the military borderland: Steps along the way**

Based on an ambition to unfold the difficulties of becoming a soldier, this dissertation has empirically focused on conscription, as this institution functions as the main entry point to the military profession in Denmark. Here, at the boundaries of the military profession where the routines of everyday life have not yet turned shared understandings into reflexes, the phenomenon of the soldier is still open. In this military borderland, I have been able to investigate how one becomes recognizable as a good soldier as this has been negotiated and performed.

Military service is often portrayed as a transformation of boys into men or good citizens through specific trials and tribulations, or even as a *rite of passage* that takes place in a separate time and space (Arkin & Dobrofsky 1978; Wollinger 2000; Eriksson 2014). However, as it unfolds at Danish military camps today, conscription does not seem to conform to the typical characteristics of such transformative rituals. Other than the conscripted soldiers not being separated from the surrounding society, the now usually four-month military service is often just another way for the 4,200 citizens serving each year to challenge themselves, get more physically fit, or take a break from studying. For most of those who contributed to my study, a sense of having ‘become’ anything in particular seemed to fail to appear.

Nevertheless, this dissertation has analytically examined the ambiguity, anxiety, and disorientation that define the liminal phase of a rite of passage. Here, in the borderland of the military profession, the *soldier* is still an open phenomenon; shared assumptions and

choreographies have yet to sink into the body and become *tacit knowledge* (Ehn et al. 2015). I have performatively explored this phenomenon by submerging myself in the military setting, completing basic training in order to gain an embodied understanding of how citizens are transformed into soldiers through, e.g., disciplining measures, flows of affects, and wearing uniforms. My ethnographic approach was first motivated by claims that the military and war happen through bodies (MacLeish 2015; McSorley 2015). Second, it was motivated by my ambition to gain insight into the everyday life of soldiers, thus challenging the *narrative of exceptionalism* that positions the military as profoundly different from any other profession; not just among soldiers, but among politicians, civilians, and military scholars as well. I supplemented these four months of participatory fieldwork with additional fieldwork that had a lower level of participation: Observations at recruitment centers, interviews with soldiers holding various ranks, comparative fieldwork at another camp, as well as analyzing relevant policy papers and other documents. I did this to ensure that my conclusions supersede observations tied to the specificity of my own body as well as an intention to gather diverse types of empirical material.

Following in the footsteps of other scholars who have done ethnographic inquiries in contemporary military settings, I have explored military service as a process of *becoming* without any final result or destination. Pedersen, for instance, argues that soldiering is “a continuous process of self-becoming,” both as a soldier and as a human (2017: 216) based on his comprehensive work with Danish soldiers. Similarly, MacLeish (2013) illustrates how veterans are continuously positioned both inside and outside the military profession, which highlights the constant uncertainty of their belonging. Being a soldier seems to have little certainty; as I suggest, there is a continuous policing and performing of the boundaries. This *boundary work* negotiates one’s position as either an outsider or insider. I have emphasized the importance of conscription in this process, thus including an institution typically overlooked in more recent research efforts.

Critical military studies and ethnographic accounts have illustrated that combat is not just a defining element in military culture but also crucial to the degree to which one can be considered to be a (real) soldier (Persson 2011; Tidy 2016; Pedersen 2017). In particular, Tidy (2016) introduced the term *ground truth* to refer to the ‘real’ accounts of war to which combat soldiers have access; this is a way to emphasize the authority ascribed to the perspective of those who are or have been ‘on the ground.’ This creates a boundary between those who represent reality versus those who can only represent assertions of it.

Through such mechanisms, proximity to combat becomes essential to military boundary work; the further someone is from the combat 'core' of the military profession, the more unstable their position is as an insider. This is an essential argument for why conscripts are on the 'periphery' of the military profession: The privileged position of combat and the uniformed bodies associated with it both work to demarcate conscripted soldiers as not-really-insiders.

During my fieldwork with the conscripted soldiers, war and combat did indeed seem quite absent. Surrounded by young people who were busy not just learning military maneuvers but also getting in shape and hooking up with each other, the deadly seriousness of combat was overshadowed by competition on the running track, gossip, and laughter. How else could I make sense of the two self-proclaimed pacifists in the platoon? Due to the conscripts' physical distance to combat, it is no wonder that they are not recognized as 'real' military insiders – by either themselves, other soldiers, or military scholars. However, although combat as the core of the military profession was absent, it was still entangled in everyday life at the military camp. It appeared through the somewhat abstract concept of *the line of fire*; the backdrop to which much of the training was targeted. With recurrent references to potential life-or-death scenarios that lurked on a distant horizon, the line of fire added to the narrative of exceptionalism that constitutes the military as profoundly different from the civilian society that surrounds it. My work in this dissertation demonstrates that this narrative is part of the military boundary work that frames the entire profession.

Thus, I suggest that it is not only the trial and tribulations that soldiers endure or their proximity to combat that defines their becoming. It is equally the boundary work that they encounter and in which they engage. I have approached this phenomenon with a performative lens, which has enabled me to describe how this becoming can be seen as a material-discursive *becoming-with* (Haraway 2008) of military subjects. Among the conscripted soldiers in my fieldwork, it was not a matter of becoming 'real' soldiers but being recognized as military subjects; as insiders to the profession. Being a soldier is not something automatically ensured by signing a contract with the Danish Defence or wearing a uniform. Instead, it is a matter of performing in a way that makes one recognizable as a good soldier. In the next part of this final chapter, I present the sub-elements to this argument in the form of the findings from my four articles.

## The main insights from the four articles

In the following, I summarize the main arguments and contributions of each of the four articles, specifically describing how each of them contributes to addressing the overall research question that has guided this empirical study: *How is the figure of 'a good soldier' performed in everyday life among army conscripts, and how does this figure affect the embodied becoming of military subjects?*

### 1. The embodied process of becoming a good soldier

In the first article, "Researching the body – the body in research," I demonstrate the usefulness of embarking on an embodied exploration of a profession that is said to be defined qua physicality. Making use of various degrees of participation, I was able to gain insight into the tacit or *silent knowledge* (Ehn 2011) that enables the becoming of a soldier. This was the main outcome of the auto-ethnographic elements of my fieldwork, which allowed me to "perform the phenomenon" (Wacquant 2006) while also permitting close proximity to the object of my research (O'Dell & Willim 2011).

However, as I experienced the very bodily process of military discipline, it became difficult to separate my 'researcher self' from my new 'military self'; the routines that taught us how to stand at attention and do proper arm swings while marching made me *want* to be recognized as a good soldier. The urge to perform as a good soldier worked through me, and it overshadowed any attempt I made to consciously detach myself from the field I was in or the phenomenon I was studying. In line with Foucault's theory of subjectivity (2001; 2006; 2008), this illustrated how *discipline* is not a matter of either the body or the mind but rather an entanglement of the two, which constitutes what I refer to as *military subjects*.

While there is a resemblance to the *total institutions* that Goffman describes in *Asylums* (1972; see also Wollinger 2000; Sundberg 2015; Bjerke & Rones 2017), the contemporary Danish conscription system does not unambiguously represent these institutions, which are characterized by humiliation, the undermining of any individual thought, and a total disconnect from the surrounding society. Rather, I observed an intense focus on the

cultivation and recruitment of the best possible soldiers for further military education; something that also requires that conscripts are able to think for themselves. But, as I illustrate with an example of standing at ease, this does not make it any easier to navigate through the military setting. While standing at ease is physically a more comfortable position than standing at attention, it was more difficult to master because it requires tacit knowledge of the limits of acceptable behavior. Thus, explicit statements about right and wrong were only part of how we learned to perform as *good*; it was more often regulated or sensed through adjustments or reactions from others.

The disciplining of conscripts' bodies entails an inhabited intention to be a good soldier; i.e., of wanting to improve and to do the best job possible. In this way, discipline is not only what makes conscripts recognizable to others; it also makes them recognizable to themselves. Rather than analyzing military service through the lens of a total institution, which Goffman defines by its strictness, explicit rules, and power relations, I apply Foucault's concept of discipline, which seems relevant for a study of the transformation of citizens into soldiers.

Through my participatory fieldwork, it also became clear how military subjectivity relies on able-bodiedness, as this was a requirement for me even being allowed to perform the phenomenon; an insight that confirms previous studies' claims that a soldier's body is the raw material of "the military machine" (MacLeish 2015). But not just any body will do; it must be a body that can decode the silent knowledge needed to perform as a good soldier, which reconfigures the able-bodiedness that is assessed at the draft into a more complex performance during the subsequent period of military service. Thus, I suggest that it is not merely the body but instead a certain *bodily performance* that constitutes the raw material for the military profession.

The article further illustrates how the concept of "train as you fight" (see also Engman 2013; Pedersen 2017) ties conscription to the same backdrop of life-or-death scenarios as the rest of the military profession. This was exemplified by how repetitions of a hasty shooting position were assumed to build "muscle memory" on which the body could rely if it was caught in the line of fire; a situation, however, in which Danish soldiers will never find themselves during conscription. This illustrates how the line of fire that 'produces' real soldiers informs the training of conscripted soldiers, despite an absence of combat. Although I have encountered the claim that conscripted soldiers are outside of the

category of soldiers, I argue that they are nevertheless enrolled in the profession through this backdrop of life-or-death scenarios.

## **2. The challenge of being willing and able**

In the second article, “Vomit over tears. The performance of will among conscripted soldiers,” I connect the classification of citizens’ eligibility at the draft examination to the subsequent experiences of conscripted soldiers. Following this movement through the military borderland, the article illustrates how a *discourse of will* initially positions the *will to serve* as essential in the recruitment of conscripted soldiers. This will to serve, however, may fall short once the conscripted soldiers put on the uniform. In the everyday life at the military camp, the discourse of will works through requirements of reconfigured bodily performances that are recognizable as expressions of will; e.g., pushing oneself to the point at which one vomits during a running test.

However, I also describe how this performance is a difficult balancing act in which only certain bodily fluids, for instance, are recognized as a testimony to being willing. This was evident in how the tears that Werner shed out of exhaustion – after having pushed himself to complete two obstacle courses – failed to ensure him access to the military career that he had dreamed about since he was a child. Thus, the article suggests that being willing is not an inherent or individual quality that conscripts can consciously decide to perform; rather, it is a complex performance that requires the conscripted soldiers to be able to read what is considered ‘good’ in relation to the diverse contexts in which they find themselves and the tasks they must perform. Furthermore, the article argues that will is a social phenomenon, and that performing as willing is dependent on others’ recognition. Thus, it is entangled in a collective self, and thus, will is argued to be a multiple and collective doing.

I would further suggest that the reason why the *will to serve* becomes insufficient once inside the ranks may be linked to the motivations that drive this will among the conscripts. An ambition to lose weight, make new friends, get in shape, or to get away from a ‘bad crowd’ back home had prompted many of the young citizens to sign contracts. However, getting in shape or losing weight can in principle be done anywhere; thus, such motivations contradict the narrative of exceptionalism to which the entire profession is tied. Thus, I argue that the motivations for the will to serve become “illegitimate

statements” that go against the “unshakeable doxa” (MacLeish 2015) of the military profession. As such, the conscripts’ will to serve needed to transform into a performance as *willing*; an enactment that was dependent not just on their docile bodies but on tacit and seemingly quite complex knowledge of what it means to be a good soldier. This knowledge is not just silent but also *silenced* as it sinks into the bodies of those able to perform as good soldiers through routines (Ehn et al. 2015).

However, the article also demonstrates more systematic challenges to a soldier’s performance as willing. As I also suggest in the first article, McRuer’s concept of *able-bodiedness* (2006) can make clear how the lack of an able body obstructs the assumed equal access to being a good soldier. To be present in the ranks presupposes a sorting of bodies that currently casts half of the male population as *disabled*, to use McRuer’s term. As a consequence, the ‘right to serve’ advocated at the military recruitment center is severely compromised, as it renders a significant number of citizens non-eligible to do military service and thereby take the first steps towards becoming a military insider. Illustrating the historically contingent and unstable meaning of this concept, I describe how able-bodiedness is practiced quite differently at the military camp; here, endurance and strength reconfigure the meaning of the able body. After I gained a sense of the specificities of this compulsory able-bodiedness, I made efforts to build my own strength and endurance before starting my participatory fieldwork, which indicates how the military disciplining of bodies extends beyond the military camps.

However, able-bodiedness is not the only obstacle to the performance of will; the article also suggests that the female gender and non-Danish roots may also obstruct conscripts’ attempts to perform as good and willing soldiers. I address this topic further in the final section of this chapter.

The matter of being willing cuts across each of the four articles; combined, they illustrate how performing will is both material and embodied. It involves sufficiently removing rust from shovels; keeping one’s uniform in order; showing off perfect arm swings; and laughing at jokes meant to offend. These practices express the multiplicity of one’s will to do the best job possible and to be an insider. Being willing means working to make oneself appear as a good soldier, thus implying how ‘good’ is not an inherent quality but an open-ended performance. Hence, the concept of *becoming* that I apply in this dissertation differs from most other studies on military socialization, as a soldier never really ‘becomes’; military subjectivity requires continuous work to ensure recognition. Furthermore, as I



address in the next section, this process is not only dependent on the materiality of the body – which is often considered to be the paramount foundation for becoming a good soldier – but also on the materiality that (be)comes *with* the military profession.

### **3. The materiality of military becoming**

In the third article, “How good soldiers become-with their uniforms: an exploration of uniformity in practice,” I describe the materiality involved in the becoming of a good soldier. Focusing on the uniform, I unfold how this materiality both supports and obstructs their becoming. Specifically, I approach the uniform and its meaning as something that is ‘done’ rather than something that exists prior to its use; a similar argument has also been made by scholars studying uniforms within other professional contexts (Larsson 2008; Neumann et al. 2012; Leilund 2015). Within military studies, uniforms are often presented as carriers of a certain meaning and power that is utilized by soldiers as they wear them (e.g., Grassiani 2013; Petersen 2014). However, I question this and argue that agency is not limited to human beings. By asserting that the materiality of, e.g., a uniform can obstruct the becoming of a good soldier, I contribute new perspectives to the field of military studies.

With this approach, I also challenge the uniformity that is supposed to be established through the uniform’s camouflage attire, for instance. Because, while this uniform might create visual uniformity, the practices in which it is embedded make visible certain aspects that are assumed to be covered and hidden by the uniform, not least of all gender. In line with the insights I present in the other three articles, I challenge the widespread belief that a military uniform conceals social and physical dimensions that otherwise constitute differences and boundaries among ‘civilians.’ This is in line with the few studies that already claim that the materiality that surrounds soldiers is adapted to the average male body, making it difficult for soldiers outside of that standard to succeed within the military profession (Werner 1996; Richman-Loo & Weber 1996).

Unfolding the routines that come along with the uniform, I illustrate how the uniform enables the constitution of not just military subjects, but also collective selves due to the requirements for uniformity that permit correction and control. Participating in the disciplining of other conscripts has a positive effect on one’s potential for being recognized as ‘good,’ as it highlights one’s willingness. However, this also requires a sensitive

understanding of what it means to 'help' others without being on their backs all the time; a conscript who is too focused on correcting the uniforms of others is just as unwelcome as one who do not make any effort at all. Thus, similar to the performance of will, taking part in the collective disciplining is a balancing act of knowing when – and when not – to do the best job possible. Furthermore, underscoring how 'good' is not something that can simply be installed in soldiers, not everyone participates in the routines of control and correction. Some take part in these routines more than others, which indicates that the urge to be recognized as a good soldier is not equally present in everyone; this insight is perhaps one that deserved more attention in this dissertation.

In my analysis of how the uniform also challenges recognition, I address the color of the uniform. For conscripts, 'being green' literally materialize one's lack of experience. Also, because all of the other soldiers are equipped with newer, khaki-colored uniforms, the color green associates the conscripts with the only other wearers of the green uniform; the often-ridiculed members of the Danish Home Guard. This illustrates how the need for boundary work appears as a mechanism to position oneself as an insider *in opposition* to others; in this case, it was members of the Danish Home Guard, who were demarcated as being even further from 'real' soldiers than the conscripts.

However, the matter of the green uniform changes once again when conscripts step out into 'civilian' society; here, the uniform carries a mark of authority that it does not have inside the military camp. This change means that, in a civilian context, conscripts become representatives of the entire military profession rather than not-really-soldiers. Hence, as I also illustrate in article 2, divergent contexts require different performances in order for conscripts to be recognized as good soldiers. This article adds to the argument by demonstrating the importance of material dimensions beyond the body.

Indeed, the uniform is a neat example of how of the becoming of soldiers can be seen as a continuous material-discursive entanglement; a *becoming with* (Haraway 2008). By engaging with the concept of becoming-with, I am able to unfold how ground truths are not only verbally incorporated into the everyday life of conscripted soldiers, but also how they are materialized. Thus, I argue that the uniform is implicated in constituting both the military profession and its insiders. This is not merely done by producing recognizable military subjects through the disciplining of bodies and collective selves, but equally by producing key elements of the profession *through* the becoming of good soldiers. For instance, the inspection of conscripts standing at attention is a 'doing' of the military

hierarchy. From such a perspective, “[t]here is no happy ending to offer, no conclusion to this ongoing entanglement” (ibid.: 39), which indicates that the good soldier as a phenomenon will never have one stable meaning. It is a continuous process of becoming in which, among other things, the discourse of will, the narrative of exceptionalism, and uniforms come to matter *with* the soldier.

#### **4. The affective powers of attunement: The fear of being a killjoy**

The fourth article, “The butt of the joke? Laughter and potency in the becoming of good soldiers,” addresses the affective matters of becoming recognizable as a military insider. While the power of affects was explicitly discussed in only this article, affects play a role in the becoming of good soldiers across all of the articles. For instance, disciplining measures work precisely because of the affective ‘threats’ they hold; conscripts try to avoid embarrassment and discomfort to various degrees, while routines like morning inspections cause nervousness and awkwardness. But in the fourth article, I unfold the work of affects in greater detail through an examination of laughter and the use of humor, thus describing how potency is established as an aspect of being a good soldier.

Many soldiers with whom I have spoken over the years seem to take pride in the humorous tone and constant joking in the military; something that other scholars argue contributes to creating bonds between soldiers and counters the discipline and hierarchy that also defines the profession (Engman 2014; Bjerke & Rones 2017). Through its carnivalesque nature, humor does indeed appear to work as a legitimate way to challenge authority and create a mood that makes military service more fun. But, as with the routines of control and correction that the uniform enables, I argue that laughter also creates uniformity, or what Ahmed refers to as “attunement” (2014a). Like the disciplining mechanisms that become invisible as they become part of a *shared choreography* (Ehn & Löfgren 2010) developed through routines, so does ‘being in tune’ become a silenced pattern; most of us knew the unarticulated limits regarding what was considered ‘fun.’ Thus, telling jokes works to establish an inside based on tacit or silent knowledge. Following Ahmed’s more critical approach, however, not being ‘in the mood’ may cause ruptures, as “being with” is equal to “being with in a similar way” (2014a: 16). As such, I claim that these shared choreographies are also a form of silencing: the fear of ruining the fun – of becoming a *killjoy* (Ahmed 2013) – supports attunement in powerful ways.

The attunement that is established through laughter is also connected to the valuing of soldiers; assumptions about what it means to be a good soldier are embedded in the humorous *tune*. Specifically, I suggest that the valuing of *potency* through this tune creates expectations for how (male) soldiers should perform as both heterosexually active and powerful leaders. Thus, although the Danish Defence has participated in the Copenhagen Gay Pride Parade over the past few years under the slogan ‘Serve with pride,’ doing military service does not seem to easily combine with the pride and openness around sexual or gender identities that are celebrated at this parade. This is also supported in recent studies on the militaries of other countries (Sundevall & Persson 2016; Thylin 2018; Näser-Lather 2018). Furthermore, because it is an active male sexuality that is embedded in the attunement, this article supports the claim that women are more difficult to ‘fit into’ the military profession, as men are still – at least in part – the invisible and assumed objective standard (Cohn 2000) around which the good soldier is crafted. Even though women have been accepted in the Danish military since 1971 (Sløk-Andersen 2014), they are still left with a difficult space within which to perform.

Extending this to related empirical fields, previous studies describe how the becoming of police officers and firefighters is about “much more than simply being hired, formally trained, and protected from overt harassment” (Chetkovich 1997: 10; see also Heidensohn 1995). Instead, it is about making the transformation from outsider to insider. However, in this process, sexual and gender minorities within a male-dominated profession are cast as what we might call “outsiders within”, due to an unfortunate combination of formal acceptance and informal marginalization (Rennstam & Sullivan 2016). I argue that this is also generally the case for sexual and gender minorities in the military profession.

Returning to the *silent knowledge* that conscripts must learn in order to be recognizable – e.g., knowing that you are expected to form intimate relationships but without leaving anyone in doubt of your heterosexuality – I claim that this knowing is more powerful than Ehn and Löfgren describe. Combined with Ahmed’s work, which is more attentive to questions of power and social injustice, the establishment of silent knowledge should be seen not only as a way to economize decisions, as Ehn and Löfgren argue. Tacit knowledge also works as a *silencing* of performances and bodies that do not fall within the limits of ‘good.’ In the case of potency, those who let others take control and do not express an active heterosexuality become silenced, as they are considered to be ‘out of tune’. Furthermore, the example of humor also makes clear how being a good soldier is not just a matter of superiors recognizing one as such; if one’s fellow soldiers do not agree, then

recognition is still challenged because the performance of good is never solely dependent on the individual. Thus, power relations are far from being as simple as the military ranking system would have us believe.

Drawing on affect theory, I illustrate how the affects that work through humor negotiate one's potential for being recognized; in this case, as a military subject. Those who are 'not in the mood' for the humorous tune are thereby not recognized as insiders to the military profession because jokes and humor are considered essential to the profession – despite their apparent irrelevance to one's operational skills. However, this is connected to the importance ascribed to the concept of *cohesion* as being key to military efficiency (King 2013; MacKenzie 2015). Through this connection, the humorous attunement affects the assessment of how 'good' one might be as a soldier; a valuing that extends far beyond the formalized tests and evaluations used in the recruitment procedures.

By addressing the issue of valuing, it has been possible for me to include criteria and mechanisms in the becoming of soldiers that are not part of any formalized assessment. Furthermore, as I illustrate across all four articles, this conceptualization of 'good' enables an understanding of the multiple versions of *good* that a soldier must navigate and perform; versions that are "established along the way" as a collective doing (Mol 2008a: 75). This dissertation thus challenges the notion that becoming a soldier is solely dependent on the body and the performance of the individual.

## Final thoughts about the challenges of being recognized

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated how and why conscripted soldiers may find themselves in troubled water as both insiders and outsiders of the military profession: insiders because they are standing there, rank and file in the uniform, obeying orders from superior officers; yet outsiders because they are far from being ‘real soldiers’ who have had their “boots on the ground” in a warzone (Tidy 2016: 5). As I described, the borderland through which they must maneuver is contested and unstable. The boundary work that constitutes this borderland takes the form of a specific military language, the use of uniforms, routines of control and correction, and many other elements that have become visible through a material-discursive lens. However, the divide between a distinct inside and outside is not only the result of internal work (cf. MacLeish 2013) but also a process that extends to military scholars, politicians, and policy documents that contribute to and validate a narrative of exceptionalism.

While my ethnographic work has been conducted on the outskirts of the profession and primarily among conscripted soldiers in the army, this approach allowed me to address the broader matter of ground truth and combat as the core of the military profession (see also Pedersen 2017). During interviews, I noticed that even having some combat experience did not necessarily ensure recognition as a ‘real’ soldier; as I have discussed, there seems to be no stable end point to the process of becoming. Especially because conscripts, sergeants, and officers alike expressed different ideas about when one has *become* a real soldier; it appears to be a process in which the horizon always shifts. Even the sergeants who had been deployed and experienced combat urged for constant development, or felt that they were no longer ‘real’ soldiers now that they were training conscripted soldiers far from any warzone. With regards to this matter, and referring to the book *Men Against Fire* (1947), military scholar Joanna Bourke notes that:

“[The author] claimed that less than one in four US infantry soldiers during battle in the Second World War actually fired their weapons at the enemy. When the book was published, many infantrymen were insulted by the implication that so many of their comrades were being called ‘ineffective’ and attempted to refute it based on their own personal experiences.” (Bourke 2014: 195)

From this perspective, being able to ‘speak’ ground truth is not an unambiguous finish line; as this quotation illustrates, being recognized as a real soldier is a precarious process that can cause great honor or frustration, aggravation, and distancing. It seems as though one is never assured permanent access to ground truth, even if its materialization through parades or medals supports the process of recognition (see, e.g., Sørensen & Pedersen 2012); the category of “veteran” lurks just around the corner. Based on this, I suggest that the recognition of *good* among soldiers is a way to enact an inside – a way to perform something to which one can belong – in the challenging and often uncertain process of being recognized as ‘real’ soldiers.

In the final section, I address some of the new questions that have been generated by my work in this dissertation, and I discuss potential areas for further research.

## **Future perspectives**

When researching the issue of military service, it seems relevant to investigate the matter of citizenship and the fostering of good, healthy citizens. In “Researching the body – the body in research,” I noted that the introduction of conscription and its disciplining of the body through military training was linked to ideals of active and responsible male citizens “in a healthy and well trained body” (Eriksson 2014: 107, my translation). From a historical perspective, some scholars argue that the classification of bodies at the draft examination has supported ideas of what was considered “normal” and what was “deviant” through the 20<sup>th</sup> century – not just within the military but on a societal level, thus supporting the “hegemony of the function-complete bodies” (Rydström and Tjeder 2009: 96, my translation). Recognizing the productive effects of classifications (cf. Bowker & Star 2000), I wonder whether the classification of citizens at contemporary draft examinations has the same effect, which would thereby connect the military definition of able-bodiedness to a wider societal context.

I want to emphasize the unexamined potential of exploring the connection between military service and the fostering of good, healthy citizens. This is also indicated by the emergence of military-inspired fitness classes. Described in a British context by McSorley (2016), this fitness concept transfers the military disciplining of the body to a commercial and ‘civilian’ setting (such classes have also appeared in Denmark). In his analysis of this concept, McSorley argues for a relation between “contemporary physical culture” and

military discipline that illuminates a more embodied element of the concept of militarization – i.e., the process of disseminating military values and rationale to everyday life beyond the military (Enloe 1983). Making this connection, McSorley’s work suggests new ways of exploring the connection between the military and the creation of good, healthy citizens at a time when most conscription systems have been reduced or even abolished throughout the Western world.

While my analytical ambition has been to stay with the boundaries, my intention to understand the military sphere from the inside has been accompanied by an unexpected desire to be recognized as (more of) a military insider myself. As a consequence, this has steered my attention inward, setting aside many arguments and observations that could have been joined to broader issues and fields of research. Work such as McSorley’s analysis of military-inspired fitness classes indicates the potential in connecting my insights with other recent studies outside the fences of the military camps.

I would also like to briefly address the wider issue of human beings, as the matter of recognition in Butler’s work is understood as equal to being perceived as a human being entitled to rights and a life worthy of grieving (Butler 2016). From such a perspective, the becoming of soldiers is a much narrower scope; even if recognition as a military subject fails to occur, one can still be recognized as a subject in a larger sense. This was actually stressed by a humorous sergeant:

During the drill, we go through a scenario in which Sergeant Wilson and Cure move forward while the rest of us assist their movements [by shooting at the enemy]. Sgt. Wilson stresses that, if anything happens, we have to help him and not Cure because he is “the most valuable.” A second later, he adds, “Most valuable as a soldier, not as a human. I’ve been told to say that.” There is laughter and smiles.  
(Field notes, week 16)

However, I argue that the mechanisms that challenge a subject’s equal worth outside of the military may also interfere with the recognition of good soldiers. While I have already addressed the concept of recognition that Butler suggests, the more visual meaning of the word is, however, also essential to the process of becoming a soldier. Here, I draw on the double meaning of the word *recognition* as discussed by Ahmed in her book *Strange Encounters* (2000).

Building on Butler’s conceptualization, Ahmed argues for recognition as *a visual economy*, as it “involves differentiating between others on the basis of how they ‘appear’” (ibid.: 24).



Ahmed also challenges Foucault's argument that the regulatory outside gaze that is involved in constituting recognizable subjects has become internalized; e.g., as technologies of the self. Rather, Ahmed argues that the outside gaze is still extremely present. And indeed, her skepticism about the change from "public forms of monitoring – where the subject is watched by an anonymous and partially unseen and partially Other – to self-monitoring, when *the subject adopts the gaze of the other*" (ibid.: 30, original italics) can also be questioned based on my analysis. In situations from my fieldwork in which control and correction were recurrent, the outside gaze is still present; indeed, highly focused on the visual appearance of the conscripts.

The visual recognition that Ahmed discusses makes gender and race crucial to matters of recognition, as these marks on the body 'interfere' with the external gaze; we cannot speak of recognition without speaking of these bodily, visual dimensions. Thus, I would provocatively ask: With the constant attention to and focus on visual uniformity, how could the color of conscripts' bodies or the gender signifiers apparent on them *not* have come to matter?

The performative 'nature' of being a good soldier that I present in this dissertation does not suggest that conscripts can 'just act the role differently'. Yet barriers tied to one's physical appearance do come across as even less changeable than, e.g., one's overall performance of will. Being visibly outside the white, male majority of Danish soldiers could inhibit one's efforts to become recognized as a good soldier, just as a visually large body makes one non-eligible to even serve (except if the body's largeness is assessed as being related to extensive muscle mass). Even after half of the male population are rejected at the draft examination, those soldiers who end up serving are not able – nor allowed – to enact 'good' to the same degree; a claim that clashes with the assumed notion of will as equally accessible to all, and the belief that "a soldier is a soldier first and foremost" (Fiala 2008: 49). The possibility of being recognized as a good soldier is far from evenly distributed.

In recognizing that gender was not the only factor that affected conscripts' possibilities for being recognized as good soldiers, this dissertation encourages further explorations of how other social and bodily barriers may obstruct the assumed equal access citizens have to becoming soldiers. As "ethnic minorities" along with "women" have specifically been identified as a focal point for recruitment through the Danish Defence's diversity policy (*Danish Defence diversity policy*), this issue demands greater empirical investigation – not

least of all because there is a prohibition on collecting data about the ethnic background of employees, which makes it very difficult for the Danish Defence to maneuver this policy area.

Finally, by addressing the valuing of soldiers as opposed to masculinity as the main analytical concept, I have unfolded how gender comes to matter through the 'non-events' of everyday life. Challenging the vast amount of military studies that do not discuss gender, this topic seemed to sneak in, despite the presumed uniformity that comes with the camouflage attire. By presenting this alternative to the concept of masculinity, I have been able to demonstrate that: first, gender is not always the most important factor in the valuing of soldiers; and second, there is not just one way to be a good soldier. Thus, concepts of military masculinity as a hegemonic ideal that privileges specific performances over others seem unable to comprehend the multiplicity of 'good.' In addition, some elements in the process of becoming a soldier are difficult to grasp through the concept of masculinity because they simply do not 'fit'; e.g., when sergeants emphasize the importance of military service in teaching young citizens to take care of themselves and others. The powerful message of military masculinities; that men are not born aggressive or eager to defend their country but rather a consequence of socialization – makes little room for an acknowledgement that this socialization might also include something as 'feminine' as caring.

My conclusion that the military profession is gendered should come as no surprise; gender is already inscribed as the most fundamental dimension of its primary recruitment platform, the conscription system. Unlike its neighboring Scandinavian countries, it seems doubtful that Denmark will institute a gender-neutral conscription system; in 2017, only one political party (*Enhedslisten*) was reportedly interested in changing this aspect of the conscription system (Korsgaard 2017). So while the Danish conscription system has proven to be quite adaptable throughout history, there are no immediate plans to change its gendered foundation. On the other hand, conscription appears to have maintained its central role in the gendering of the entire military profession. Not only due to the drafting of only male citizens, but also the practicing of 'good' in this borderland, which challenges the recognition of women as good soldiers. Thus, in order to better understand the gender dimensions of this profession as it has transformed qua new ways of waging wars, I encourage more research on conscription systems in the future. As is clear from the reintroduction of conscription in Sweden and the strengthening of the Danish system with

the last defense agreement, conscription might not be as 'outdated' as the limited number of conscripts in Denmark might otherwise suggest.

Despite the societal and cultural significance of state militaries, little ethnographic work has been conducted by ethnologists within military settings. Perhaps due to continual reductions within Western conscription systems over the past several decades and the subsequent demise of conscription's earlier role as the main institution for fostering citizens and governing the population, this system of compulsory military service has faded into the background. With this dissertation, I hope that I have illustrated the continued significance and relevance of research efforts into this foundation of the military profession.



**Illustration 9. The author (left) with the rest of the squad after a three day-long drill**

## Abstract

### **The Becoming of Good Soldiers. An Ethnographic Exploration of Gender and Other Obstacles in the Military Borderland**

This dissertation addresses the challenges of becoming a soldier. While the military may be ‘just’ another profession within which newcomers have to learn to perform certain tasks and build new knowledge, it is also positioned as out-of-the-ordinary due to its potential proximity to life-and-death situations. While acknowledging the potentially deadly consequences of soldiers’ work, the dissertation attempts to go beyond this *narrative of exceptionalism* by examining the military profession from the perspective of everyday life.

Exploring the *military borderland*, the dissertation builds on ethnographic fieldwork that has followed the process of entering this profession – from the recruitment and drafting of young citizens to their military basic training (‘conscription’). Specifically, the empirical material consists of observations at the draft examinations, interviews with soldiers of various ranks, analysis of written materials, and participatory fieldwork in which the author completed conscription herself. Based on this foundation, the dissertation examines how value is established and performed among soldiers, arguing that the figure of *the good soldier* ‘does’ something in the process of becoming of *military subjects*. Working both through and on the bodies of soldiers, the author argues that ‘good’ is performed discursively, materially, and affectively in ways that silently establish boundaries with regards to what and who can be recognized as ‘good’ among soldiers.

Through four articles that each focus on a particular material-discursive phenomenon (the disciplined body, will, the uniform, and humor), the dissertation suggests that being recognized as a good soldier is a process that requires not just a strong, able body or a certain attitude; it also requires a great deal of silent and silenced knowledge. Presenting examples of seemingly mundane situations from everyday life in the military borderland, the author describes how being ‘good’ is neither an inherent nor an individual quality but a ‘doing’ of recognizable yet ever-changing versions of good. With a critical exploration of obstacles that appear in this process, being good is understood as a multiple and collective doing that can be challenged qua differences inscribed on the human body – e.g., gender and disability – that are otherwise assumed to be concealed by the camouflage pattern of a soldier’s uniform.

Taken together, the dissertation’s four articles suggest that becoming a soldier is a difficult task. With an analytical approach grounded in feminist and critical military studies, the dissertation provides an ethnographically rich account of the power mechanisms and inequalities that may interfere with young citizens’ attempts to become soldiers. The dissertation concludes that being ‘a good soldier’ is not one final and complete list of bodily characteristics, competences, or personality traits; rather, it is a sensitive balancing act in which the possibility of being recognized as a good soldier is far from evenly distributed.

## Resumé

### Tilblivelsen af gode soldater. En etnografisk undersøgelse af køn og andre forhindringer i det militære grænseland

Denne afhandling omhandler udfordringerne i at blive 'en god soldat'. Mens den militære profession på den ene side 'bare' er endnu en profession, indenfor hvilken nybegyndere skal lære at agere og tilegne sig ny viden, italesættes den på den anden side som ekstraordinær i kraft af dens nærhed til liv-eller-død-situationer. Ud fra en anerkendelse af de potentielt dødelige konsekvenser af soldaters arbejde forsøger denne afhandling imidlertid at bevæge sig ud over dette *narrativ om exceptionalisme* ved at undersøge den militære profession fra et hverdagsperspektiv.

Analyserne udforsker *det militære grænseland* med udgangspunkt i et etnografisk feltarbejde, hvor processen fra hervedning af borgere til gennemførelse af den militære basisuddannelse (værnepligten) er blevet fulgt. Mere konkret består det empiriske materiale af observationer ved sessionen, interviews med soldater af forskellig rang, skriftlige materialer, og ikke mindst et deltagende feltarbejde, hvor forfatteren selv har gennemført den militære basisuddannelse. På dette grundlag undersøger afhandlingen, hvordan *den gode soldat* kan forstås som en kraft, der 'gør' noget i tilblivelsen af *militære subjekter*. Ud fra en antagelse om, at værdi tager form både på og igennem kroppen, argumenteres der for, at værdi bliver til både diskursivt, materielt og affektivt; en kontinuerlig proces, der i al stilhed etablerer grænser for, hvad og hvem der blandt soldater kan genkendes som 'gode'.

Gennem fire artikler, der hver især omhandler et materielt-diskursivt fænomen (den disciplinerede krop, vilje, uniformen og humor) demonstrerer afhandlingen, hvordan anerkendelse/genkendelse som en god soldat er en proces, der ikke blot kræver en duelig krop eller den rette holdning, men i lige så høj grad en stor tilegnelse af tavs og tavsliggjort viden. Gennem umiddelbart trivielle eksempler fra hverdagen i det militære grænseland viser artiklerne, hvordan det at være god hverken er en iboende eller individuel egenskab, men en praktisering af genkendelige – og samtidig konstant foranderlige – versioner af den gode soldat. Ved at undersøge forhindringerne i denne proces argumenterer afhandlingen for, at det at være en god soldat er en multipel og kollektiv aktivitet, der udfordres af forskelle indskrevet på den menneskelige krop, f.eks. køn og handicap, der ellers antages at være skjult af uniformens camouflagemønster.

Samlet set viser afhandlingens fire artikler, at tilblivelsen som soldat er en svær opgave. Ved hjælp af en feministisk og militærkritisk tilgang bidrager afhandlingen med en detaljerig etnografisk beskrivelse af de magtmekanismer og uligheder, der intervenserer i unge menneskers forsøg på at blive soldater. Afhandlingen konkluderer dermed, at det at være en god soldat ikke kan reduceres til én endelig eller udtømmende liste af kropslige træk, kompetencer eller personlighedstræk, men er en forsigtig balancegang, hvori muligheden for at blive anerkendt som en god soldat er langt fra ligeligt distribueret.

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## Appendix 1: Health Questionnaire

FORSVARSMINISTERIETS  
PERSONALESTYRELSE



Navn:
Adresse:
Postnummer og by:

Dato:	
Personnummer:	
Telefonnummer:	
E-mailadresse:	

### HELBREDSSPØRGESKEMA KVINDER

Vi har modtaget dit ønske om at komme til Forsvarets Dag.

For at blive bedømt egnet til at kunne starte på en basisuddannelse, skal du være sund og rask og derfor skal du besvare dette helbredsspørgeskema, inden vi sender dig en indkaldelse til at møde på Forsvarets Dag. Det er vigtigt for lægen at vide så meget som muligt om dit helbred inden mødet.

Dine oplysninger behandles fortroligt og danner grundlag for eventuel yderligere indhentning af oplysninger fra andre sundhedsmyndigheder.

Når du udfylder helbredsspørgeskemaet skal du på side 6 oplyse navn og adresse på egen læge. Husk også at oplyse dit telefonnummer og mailadresse.

Til de fleste spørgsmål hører en afkrydsningsrubrik, hvor du skal svare JA eller NEJ. Det er meget vigtigt, at du svarer ærligt på spørgsmålene. Har du ikke alle oplysningerne, kan du evt. spørge dine forældre eller værge, eller logge på [www.sundhed.dk](http://www.sundhed.dk) for at se dine sundhedsjournaler.

Hvis du er blevet behandlet for en eller flere af de sygdomme, der er nævnt, skal du skrive navn og adresse på det sygehus eller den læge (din egen læge eller en speciallæge), som har behandlet dig. Hvis du har lægeattester liggende, skal du sende dem med.

Hvis der er spørgsmål, som du ikke ønsker at svare på i skemaet, kan du i stedet drøfte dem med lægen på Forsvarets Dag. Send venligst skemaet tilbage inden 4 uger, også selvom du kan svare NEJ til alle spørgsmålene.

Du kan kontakte os på mail [fps-vpl@mil.dk](mailto:fps-vpl@mil.dk) og telefon 7281 9000, hvis du er i tvivl om, hvordan du skal udfylde skemaet.

Med venlig hilsen  
Værnepligtssektionen

Helbredske\_Kvinder\_AUG 2015

## Personlige oplysninger

### Skolegang

Hvilken skoleklasse går du i/gik du ud af? \_\_\_\_\_

Har du fået specialundervisning i skolen? \_\_\_\_\_

Hvor lang tid? \_\_\_\_\_

Hvilke fag? \_\_\_\_\_

### Uddannelse

Er du under uddannelse? Nej ☐ Ja ☐ Forventes afsluttet måned  år

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

### Arbejde

Har du arbejde? Nej ☐ JA ☐ Deltid ☐ Fuldtid ☐

Hvilket? \_\_\_\_\_

Hvor mange arbejdspladser har du haft, siden du gik ud af skolen? \_\_\_\_\_

### Fritid

Hvilken sport/motion/aktiviteter dyrker du? \_\_\_\_\_

## SPØRGESKEMA OM HELBRED

Hvor høj er du? \_\_\_\_\_ cm. Hvad vejer du? \_\_\_\_\_ kg.

Nej Ja

Fejler du noget?

☐ ☐

Hvad? \_\_\_\_\_

Tager du lægeordineret medicin?

☐ ☐

Hvor ofte? \_\_\_\_\_

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

For hvad? \_\_\_\_\_

Medfødte sygdomme/misdannelser?

☐ ☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Alvorlig smitsom sygdom?

(f.eks. tuberkulose, leverbetændelse m.v.)

☐ ☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Hvornår? \_\_\_\_\_

Kræftsygdom?

☐ ☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Hvornår? \_\_\_\_\_

## KVINDER

	Nej	Ja	
<b>Hormon- eller stofskiftesygdom?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sukkersyge?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Behandling? _____
Anden hormonsygdom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
<b>Blodsygdom?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
Er milten fjernet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Psykisk sygdom?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Angst <input type="checkbox"/> Depression <input type="checkbox"/> Andet <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Behandling? _____
Afhængighed/misbrug af:			
Alkohol <input type="checkbox"/> Hash <input type="checkbox"/> Narkotika <input type="checkbox"/> Medicin <input type="checkbox"/>			Behandling? _____
Andre psykiske problemer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
<b>Sygdomme i nervesystemet?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Epilepsi?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvornår havde du sidste anfald? _____
Er behandling ophørt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvornår? _____
Migræne/stærk hovedpine?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Antal anfald i de sidste 2 måneder? _____
Anden sygdom i nervesystemet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
<b>Øjensygdomme, herunder synsnedsættelse?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Bruger du briller eller kontaktlinser?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Er dit syn normalt m. briller/kontaktlinser	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Brille-/kontaktlinsestyrke: (anfør +/- foran styrke)</b>	<b>Højre:</b>	<b>Venstre:</b>	_____
Anden øjensygdom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
<b>Øresygdomme, herunder hørenedsættelse?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Har du nedsat hørelse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Bruger du høreapparat?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Er du undersøgt på hørecentral?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvor? _____
Anden øresygdom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____

**KVINDER**

Nej Ja

**Kvindesygdomme?**

Har du eller har du haft tilbagevendende problemer med underlivet?

☐ ☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

**Sygdomme i hjerte og blodkar?**

Hjertesygdom?

☐ ☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Forhøjet blodtryk?

☐

Behandling? \_\_\_\_\_

Behandling?

☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

**Sygdomme i mund, næse, svælg og lunger?**

Har du indenfor de sidste 12 måneder haft astma?

☐ ☐

I hvilke situationer får du astma?

\_\_\_\_\_

Får du anfaldsbehandling/forebyggende behandling?

☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Anden luftvejssygdom?

☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

**Sygdomme i mave, tarm, lever m.m.?**

Mavesår eller sår på tolvfingertarmen?

☐ ☐

Behandling? \_\_\_\_\_

Er der foretaget kikkert/eller anden undersøgelse?

☐ ☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Tarmbetændelse?

☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Anden sygdom i fordøjelsesorganer?

☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

**Hudsygdomme?**

Udbredt eksem eller psoriasis inden for det sidste år?

☐ ☐

Hvilken og hvor? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Anden hudsygdom?

☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

**Sygdomme i nyrer eller blære?**

Nyrebetændelse indenfor de sidste 3 år?

☐ ☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Er kontrol ophørt?

☐

Nyrebækkenbetændelse det sidste år?

☐

Anden sygdom i urinveje?

☐

Hvilken? \_\_\_\_\_

Er en af dine nyrer fjernet?

☐

Årsag? \_\_\_\_\_

**KVINDER**

	Nej	Ja	
<b>Sygdom i ryg?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Tilbagevendende rygsmerter?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Undersøgt? _____
Behandling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
Er din ryg blevet røntgenfotograferet/scannet?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvad viste undersøgelsen? _____ _____
Misdannelse i ryg eller anden rygsygdom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
<b>Sygdomme i hofter, knæ og ankler m.m.?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Langvarig hoftesygdom?</b> (hofteskred, Calve Perthes)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Varige følger efter skader?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
<b>Knæskader / knæproblemer?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Brud <input type="checkbox"/> Menisk <input type="checkbox"/> Korsbånd <input type="checkbox"/> Andet <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Behandling? _____
Er der foretaget kikkert-/eller anden undersøgelse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Ankelskade-/ eller ankelproblemer?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Behandling? _____
Anvender du specialet fodtøj/eller indlæg?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Sygdomme i skuldre, arme eller hænder?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Varige følger efter skader?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
Ledskred i skulder?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Behandling? _____
<b>Andre symptomer/følgetilstande?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Har du, eller har du haft andre sygdomme, der ikke er nævnt i dette skema, og som du mener vil få betydning for din sessionsbedømmelse, f.eks. følger efter ulykker?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hvilken? _____
Ufrivillig vandladning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Antal gange de sidste 2 mdr. _____
<b>Andet?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Er du indstillet til eller tilkendt førtidspension?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Helbredsårsag? _____
Er du eller har du været under revalidering?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Helbredsårsag? _____
<b>Er der i øvrigt andre forhold, du vil tale med sessionslægen om?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

KVINDER

## Husk at skrive under!

Jeg giver tilladelse til, at Forsvarsministeriets Personalestyrelse indhenter oplysninger om min helbredstilstand fra praktiserende læger, sundhed.dk, medicinprofilen m.v., hvis det skønnes nødvendigt.

Med nedenstående underskrift erklærer jeg hermed på tro og love at samtlige spørgsmål er besvaret sandfærdigt og efter bedste evne og intet er fortiet.

Personnummer:	Dato:	Underskrift:
---------------	-------	--------------

### Egen læges navn og adresse:

Navn:	Adresse:
-------	----------

### Liste over sygehuse, læger, speciallæger eller andre, der har behandlet/undersøgt dig (herunder røntgen/scanning)

Sygdommens art: \_\_\_\_\_ Årstal for behandling \_\_\_\_\_

Navn og adresse på sygehus,  
speciallæge, egen læge eller lign.: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sygdommens art: \_\_\_\_\_ Årstal for behandling \_\_\_\_\_

Navn og adresse på sygehus,  
speciallæge, egen læge eller lign.: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sygdommens art: \_\_\_\_\_ Årstal for behandling \_\_\_\_\_

Navn og adresse på sygehus,  
speciallæge, egen læge eller lign.: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Skemaet skal sendes til:

Forsvarsministeriets Personalestyrelse  
Værnepligtssektionen  
Lautruphøj 8, Postboks 345  
2750 Ballerup  
Mail: fps-vpl@mil.dk



## **Appendix 2: Observation guide – draft examinations**

This is an observation guide used during a week of observations in November 2015. The observations took place at a recruitment center where draft examinations are carried out twice a day, five days a week.

### **Observation guide – draft examinations**

How was the way here? Signing, transportation, etc.

What rooms are we in?

How are the rooms decorated? Furniture, posters, signs, etc,

Are different activities or functions separated into different rooms?

How is the atmosphere in the different rooms?

Describe the soundscapes, smells, etc.

Describe the dialogues that occur and the physical interaction

What is talked or told about – by employees at the center and the citizens taking part in the events?

When is it quiet and when is laughter heard? *How* is it quiet, *how* is the laughter – awkward, social, relaxed?

Who is doing what? Are there patterns or a choreography in this?

What objects are involved in the draft examination

What appears to be the routine and when/how is it interrupted?

How is the Danish Defence talked about?

How are the sub-elements of the draft examination explained during the day?

Are things explained in a similar way to everyone, e.g. by the doctor? Or are there patterns in this?

How do differences appear between those who are new to this setting and those who knows the drill?

What tacit knowledge can I pick up on, and when/how does this become clear?

How long does it take me to be aware of this tacit knowledge?

How are people dressed? Employees as well as the young citizens showing up

Are there patterns in how people are dressed?

How is the mood when the young citizens have undressed for the medical examination?

Do they dress and undress as fast as possible?

Do the citizens sit or move around differently at the end of the day, compared to the beginning of the day?

What atmosphere is evoked when citizens volunteer, or when they draw a number from the lottery; either exempting them from serving or making it very likely?

What is missing? What is absent? For instance, talk about citizenship and duties?

Are any other countries mentioned?

Who are excluded – whose participation in the military is inhibited through the various tests?

## **Appendix 3: Observation guide – conscription**

This observation guide was outlined prior to the four months of participatory fieldwork in a conscription company in the army. The guide was constructed after having done some smaller parts of my fieldwork, thus building on not just the analytical framework but also my initial insights to the military profession. The guide was, however, not revised once the four months of participatory fieldwork began.

### **Observation guide – conscription**

#### *Setting*

Where are we – what rooms and spaces do we move around in?

How are the rooms decorated? Furniture, posters, signs, etc.

Are functions/activities separated in spaces and places?

What atmosphere defines the different spaces we move around in?

Soundscapes, smells?

#### *Discipline and routines*

What do the everyday routines consist of?

Rhythms – how do they differ between everyday, weekend, and holidays?

What happens when the routines are obstructed or changed, e.g. during drills away from the barracks?

How is discipline practiced and reiterated?

How does discipline appear? Does it contain contradictions?

How do conscripts react to discipline?

What is the ‘implied soldier’ inscribed in the training? Does it vary from one scenario to the next?

How are formalized tests along the way dealt with and completed? How are the reacts to these tests?

#### *Verbal interaction*

How is the verbal interaction?

What is talked and told about? And not?

When is it quiet and when is laughter heard? How is it quiet, how is the laughter – awkward, social, relaxed?

Who is talking and who is quiet – and what do they talk about?

How do bodily practices emphasize different verbal interaction?

### *Physical exercise and strength*

How are exercises and knew practices explained? Are things explained in the same way to everyone?

Have many of the conscripts prepared themselves prior to their service period? By working out or by reading/researching?

What reactions are 'good' and 'bad' executions of exercises met with from instructors and conscripts?

Are some tasks and competencies ascribed more meaning than others?

What appears to be 'tacit knowledge' and how does it become apparent?

How is physical strength – or other forms of strength – articulated?

### *Uniforms*

How are conscripts dressed when uniforms are not required? At night, in the train home...

When do conscripts change out of the uniform? As soon as possible?

How does the uniform look? What parts does it consist of?

How does it feel to wear the uniform?

What is easier and what is more difficult to do when wearing the uniform? What is the 'script' of the uniform?

Is the uniform worn differently by the conscripts? And the sergeants?

Who takes care of the uniforms? Who polish the boots, do the laundry, etc.?

Do the others move or act differently dependent on who is instructing us?

### *Weapons*

What does it feel like to handle a weapon?

How do conscripts react differently to weapons?

Are there other objects that affect the behavior of conscripts or sets different norms?

### *Motivation and ideals*

What different motivations have brought the conscripts here?

What is important to them during the conscription period? What do they ascribe value to and focus on?

What atmosphere is evoked when the individual conscript is evaluated and talks about career choices?

Are there any patterns in regard to who decides to continue onto a military career?

What values and norms do conscripts use to describe the Danish Defence?

Who are presented as the good examples?

Who do conscripts look up to – and down upon?

What is missing? What is absent? E.g. talk about citizenship and duties?

## **Appendix 4: Interview guide – conscripts**

This is an interview guide used in interviews with 26 conscripted soldiers at the end of my participatory fieldwork. An initial draft of this interview guide was written prior to the participatory fieldwork started in February 2016. This was then revised before the interviews were conducted in May, based on the observations and tentative analytical arguments that had appeared during the previous three months at the military camp.

### **Interview guide – conscripts**

*Introduction: Information about the research project, anonymity, confidentiality (reg. other conscripts as well as sergeants)*

Q: Could you tell me a bit about yourself; how old are you, what is your family situation, where are you from, and what were you doing before enlisting in the army?

Q: Have you volunteered to serve? If yes, what was the motivation for doing this?

Q: What consideration and ideas did you have about becoming a conscript? From where did you have insights to the conscription system, if any?

Q: Has military service lived up to your expectations so far?

Q: Is it your impression that other had the same expectations as you?

Q: Do you have any family members who have been in the military?

Q: Could you try to describe the atmosphere in the platoon? And the atmosphere between conscripts and sergeants?

Q: Do you think something would have been different if only a few of you had volunteered to serve?

Q: Do you experience that there is a difference in how sergeants and officers treat you?

Q: Have you travelled home in your uniform?

Q: Can you explain how you feel when you wear your uniform – does it ‘do’ anything to you?

Q: What parts/details of the uniform do you like best – or not like?

Q: How does it function in the different tasks you have to perform?

Q: How do people look at you when you are wearing the uniform vs. when you wear your 'civilian' apparel?

Q: What is your favourite activity among all the exercises and classes we have been through so far? Why?

Q: What is the worse activity we have done so far? Why?

Q: What is it most important to be good at during the conscription period?

Q: What has been your biggest success so far?

Q: What has been your biggest fiasco – if any?

Q: Would you call yourself a soldier now?

Q: When do one become a 'real' soldier=

Q: If you have to mention an example of a good soldier in our platoon, who would it be?

Q: What about strength – do you need to be strong in the military? Why? And strong how?

Q: Would you say that you are strong?

Q: Did you make efforts to get in shape before your military service started?

Q: Do you experience that there is a difference between conscripts with a 'duty to defend' (da: *værnepligt*) and a 'right to defend' (da: *værneret*)? If yes, when and how? Are there different ways of being a good soldier for men and women?

Q: Have there been instances where you have reconsidered that you enlisted?

Q: What is the best part about being a conscript?

Q: What is the worse part about being a conscript?

Q: What do you need to be good at to advance and become a professional soldier?

Q: Have you considered to continue onto a military career? What is (not) attractive about the idea?

Q: What will you be doing when the conscription period comes to an end?

Q: Where do you see yourself in 10-15 years? Regarding work, education, family?

*Follow up on notes or instances during the fieldwork that has involved this specific person.*

## **Appendix 5: Interview guide – sergeants and officers**

This is an interview guide used in interviews with most of the sergeants and officers included in this study; a few instances of spontaneous interviews led to interview situations without any structure or recording. An initial draft of this interview guide was written prior to the participatory fieldwork started in February 2016. This was then revised before the interviews were conducted in May, based on the observations and tentative analytical arguments that had appeared during the previous three months at the military camp.

As a note to myself, I had added the suggestions of using others as an entry to ask questions (it is easier than to talk about oneself) and using ‘the civilian sphere’ as contrast.

### **Interview guide – sergeants and officers**

*Introduction: Information about the research project, anonymity, confidentiality (reg. conscripts as well as other sergeants/officers)*

Q: Could you tell me a bit about yourself – how old are you, where are you from, where do you live (alone or with somebody)?

Q: What have you been doing up until now?

Q: What was your motivation for applying to the military?

Q: Do you have any relatives who have been in the military?

Q: How is it to train conscripts? What are you attentive to or emphasize in your teaching?

Q: What is your favorite drill/activity/exercise to teach? And the most disliked?

Q: What has been your biggest success up until now as a teacher/leader?

Q: And your biggest fiasco – if any?

Q: Could you try to explain to me what the military ranking system ‘does’?

Q: What do you consider to be the purpose of having a conscription system in Denmark? What does it ‘do’?

Q: How do you assess the future perspectives of this system?

Q: What is most important to learn during military service?

Q: What do you need to be good at to continue onto a military career and become a professional soldier? And how do you assess this among conscripts?



Q: When/how do you assess who lives are then living up to this? At specific drills or situations?

Q: When are you are 'real' soldier?

Q: Can you mention a conscript who is – or has the potential of being – a good soldier?

Q: Are there different patterns in how women and men perform and are motivated?

Q: What about strength – do soldiers need to be strong? And strong how?

Q: Would you say that you are strong yourself?

Q: Is there are difference between who you are when you wear the uniform and when you are in your 'civilian' apparel?

Q: Can you explain how you feel when you wear your uniform – does it 'do' anything to you?

Q: How do people look at you when you are wearing the uniform vs. when you wear your 'civilian' apparel?

Q: Have any incidents or turns of event made you consider leaving the military?

Q: What are your thoughts in a longer run – in 10-15 years – regarding work, deployment, family, living situation?

*Follow up on notes or instances during the fieldwork that has involved this specific person.*

*E.g., ask about the importance of or reason for using 'military' lingo.*

## Appendix 6: List of interviewees

Below is a list of all the interviews carried out during the research process. These have been supplemented by a range of more informal conversations with conscripted soldiers, sergeants, officers, and high-ranking officers that I have come across at the various military camps, conferences, etc. that I have been to over the previous three years.

These interviews have had a duration of 30 to 90 minutes. The majority of them have been recorded and transcribed, whereas a few of them have only been documented in writing.

	<b>Rank and pseudonym, if any</b>	<b>Gender</b>
1	Conscript: Karlsen	M
2	Conscript: Nielsen	F
3	Conscript: Hajjar	M
4	Conscript: Juul	M
5	Conscript: Buster	M
6	Conscript: Peter	M
7	Conscript: Olsen	F
8	Conscript: Kenn	M
9	Conscript: Frost	M
10	Conscript: Christoffersen	M
11	Conscript: Werner	M
12	Conscript: Stender	M
13	Conscript: Andersen	M
14	Conscript: Just	M
15	Conscript: Fischer	M
16	Conscript: Bisgaard	M

17	Conscript: Madsen	M
18	Conscript Teckemeier	F
19	Conscript Lindberg	M
20	Conscript Green	M
21	Conscript Cure	M
22	Conscript Kloster	M
23	Conscript Dam	M
24	Conscript Hjort	M
25	Conscript Richter	M
26	Conscript Keith	M
27	Sergeant DC	M
28	Sergeant Weiss	M
29	Sergeant Kleinmann	M
30	Sergeant Winther	M
31	Sergeant Wilson	M
32	Sergeant Riis	F
33	Captain Schmidt, Company commander	M
34	Company second-in-command, Lieutenant Olsen	M
35	Lieutenant Petersen, Platoon commander (interviewed twice)	M
36	Colonel Johnsen, Regiment commander	M
37	Company commander and second-in-command from different company	M, M
38	Company commander from a different regiment	M

## **Appendix 7: Coding – overview from NVivo**

The following codes have been developed and applied during the transcribing process in which I have made use of the program NVivo. What is presented here is the final list of codes – they represent a variety of different analytical threads.

### **Coding – overview from NVivo**

#### ***1. The good soldier***

A real soldier – when do you even become one?

Competencies and behavior – how is the good soldier reflected in e.g. *Soldier of the Month*?

Materiality – how is the good soldier reflected materially? The implied soldier

Motivation – how do you demonstrate this? And what makes it increase among those who want to stay in the military?

Demarcations/boundaries – what can the role as a soldier not encompass? (ethnicity, disability, language, age, gender, sexuality)

#### **2. Disciplining and the total institution**

To be ready. All the time.

Hierarchy (added from week 10 of the field notes)

The collective before the individual – uniformity, the platoon as a social organism

Control and corrections

The process of maturing – a becoming

#### **3. The military lingo**

#### **4. Physical strength**

What does it mean to be strong?

How is it measured? How is it ‘used’ as a tool of differentiation?

The body as modus/nexus for military work and learning processes? Embodiment of values and norms

Mental strength (added during the coding process)

## **5. The line of fire as focal point**

## **6. Warrior mentality; being trained to be a warrior (weapons, shooting to kill, etc.)**

## **7. Gender differences (in treatment and performances)**

Gender-mixed rooms

Debate on gender equality in the Danish Defence

## **8. Conscription as an institution**

The bond between men (added from week 10)

What affects to contents of the conscription period?

Citizenship and politics – how do thoughts about democracy, state, foreign policies appear?

Conscription as a right or a duty?

The function of the conscription system – what should conscription be 'able' to do?

## **9. The uniform**

Influence on behavior

Symbolism

## **10. Methodological considerations (added during the coding process)**

## Appendix 8: Reporting of the project to the Danish Data Protection Agency

DET HUMANISTISKE FAKULTET  
KØBENHAVNS UNIVERSITET



### Udtalelse vedrørende Statistisk og Videnskabelig Databehandling

2 NOVEMBER 2017

Det bekræftes hermed, at ph.d.-studerende Beate Sløk-Andersen har anmeldt sin dataindsamling i forbindelse med projektet "Den danske soldat" til Det Humanistiske fakultet den 16.10.2017. Dataindsamlingen vil fremover have journalnummer: 504-0027/17-4000.

AFDELING FOR STRATEGI OG  
FORSKNINGSSTØTTE

Indsamlingen er dermed dækket af Det Humanistiske Fakultets fællesanmeldelse af statistiske og videnskabelige databehandling til Datatilsynet (J.nr. 2015-57-0126).

KAREN BLUXEN VEJ 4  
158.1.21  
DK-2300 COPENHAGEN S

Beate Sløk-Andersen bedes forholde sig til de vedlagte dokumenter og fremover sikre, at databehandlingen overholder krav og retningslinjer skitseret i vedlagte udtalelse fra Datatilsynet fra d. 2. oktober 2015.

Forskerservice@hum.ku.dk

Med venlig hilsen

  
Tatjana Crnogorac  
Sagsbehandler

## Appendix 9: Overview of articles

Title of article	Publication outlet	Publication status	Reference, if any
“Researching the body – the body in research. Reflections on a participatory fieldwork in the Danish army”	<i>Kuckuck. Notizen zur Alltagskultur.</i>	Published.	<i>Kuckuck. Notizen zur Alltagskultur</i> , 2017 (2), 28-32.
“Vomit over tears. The performance of will among conscripted soldiers”	<i>Critical Military Studies or Conflict and Society: advances in research.</i>	In preparation.	-
“How good soldiers become-with their uniforms: an exploration of uniformity in practice”	<i>Ethnologia Scandinavica.</i>	Published.	<i>Ethnologia Scandinavica</i> , 2018 (48), 7-25.
“The butt of the joke? Laughter and potency in the becoming of good soldiers”	<i>Cultural Analysis.</i>	Accepted with revisions.	-

In addition to the single-authored articles included in the dissertation, the research efforts of this research project have also led to the following co-authored publications:

Muhr, Sara L. and Sløk-Andersen, Beate. 2017. Exclusion and inclusion in the Danish military: A historical analysis of the construction and consequences of a gendered organizational narrative. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 30 (3): 367-379.

Bennike, Kathrine Bjerg; Mohr, Sebastian and Sløk-Andersen, Beate. 2018. Gender, war, and the military. On the complexities, conceptualizations, and lived realities of militarized sociality. *Women, Gender & Research* 2-3: 3-11.