

## Contested Military Identities

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper addresses two workshop objectives: the first is to move beyond superficial responses to symptoms of problematic culture and the (implied) second is to present analyses that can identify emerging issues that have not yet been formally recognized. It draws on critical feminist intersectional theories and conceptual frameworks of professions to extend current work being conducted to support Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) initiatives led by Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC) to evolve professional culture. The basis for the paper is a key conclusion regarding the need to amend the warrior identity that was derived from CPCC townhalls, consultations and targeted focus groups involving over 10,000 members of the Defence Team. Not surprisingly, the idea of shifting the warrior identity has been met with enthusiasm by some; questions and concerns by others. The core of the paper will provide future focussed projections of looming clashes over military identity hence is conceptual and speculative; not empirical and definitive.*

*This paper will initially present the conclusions drawn by CPCC and the articulation of intended changes to the hyper-masculine warrior identity with observations of the concerns raised in various professional fora. Drawing on the seminal literature on the profession of arms, the rationale for some to express concerns over shifting the construction of the warrior will be presented and placed in the context of the return of an aggressive Russia and the specter of Great Power Competition.*

*The core of the paper then presents four disparate issues emerging in and around the military which are woven together to suggest how and why the warrior identity will remain contested. The first is changing domestic roles for the armed forces. In the Canadian context, this is related to the idea that the military was the “force of last resort” to be called out to support civil authorities only when all other measures have been exhausted. Recent military taskings have caused some in uniform to question why the armed forces is being employed in a certain way. The second is the observed backlash against successes advancing gender equality with hegemonic systems operating at multiple levels across domestic and international contexts to work to preserve the status quo and, in some case, erode hard won gender rights. The third is the continued extension of UN and NATO mandates which are expanding the military role into protection and, recently, into prevention. These expansions are assigning the military new responsibilities which require new expertise hence (drawing on frameworks of the profession of arms) influencing military identity. The fourth is the increased use of automated systems and recognition that hybrid warfare involves battles over the narrative conducted by cyberwarriors rather than physical conflict over territory. While some time away, the combination of kinetic operations being conducted only by robotic devices and information warfare conducted by remote operators can ultimately remove the human from the killing zone which has been a defining characteristic of the combat warrior. Given the permeable boundaries around professional self-regulation, this backlash is likely to have consequences internally.*

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Decades of demonstrated failure to effectively incorporate women and diverse individuals into the armed forces has resulted in not only calls for substantive changes but the establishment of a body of critical academic work on the central issues. Developing from the early 1980s, masculinities studies have emerged in which scholars from a variety of disciplines seek to place men at the centre of examinations of gender inequality and violence. Extending on Raewyn Connell's seminal work (Connell 1987; 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), the literature on militarized masculinities highlights the standardization of specific masculine behaviours associated with white male heterosexuality and performances of these behaviours within militaries that are normalized and stand to privilege most men over women and subordinate some men to others (Duncanson, 2015; Eichler, 2014; Enloe, 2000; Higate, 2003). Whitworth (2005) notes that, in the Canadian military, these particular forms of masculine behaviour are founded in relation to general principles of "violence and aggression, institutional unity and hierarchy" (p 93).

While calls for change focus on ending harmful behaviours, it is recognized that these are merely symptoms of underlying causal factors. The requirement is to move beyond behaviours to address the operation of hegemonic systems. This entails recognizing how institutionalized social systems serve to maintain the dominance of cultural practices which work to maintain a particular form of constructed social order. As part of current initiatives to advance changes in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), the Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC) recently identified four key facets of military culture to be addressed: the concept of service before self; the practices used to build teams; the enactment of controlling leadership; and, the construction of military identity.

This paper examines the fourth issue. The focus is not on why aspects of the prototype ideal soldier, sailor, aviator, leader or commander or, more broadly, the 'warrior' needs to shift but on why military identity remains contested with, in particular, the intent to understand evolving professional debates. A central rationale for this paper is the perspective that those seeking to implement intentional culture change should first be able to explain how and why the current culture is manifest and, ideally, be able to anticipate future tensions which may arise. Thus, this paper starts by considering how military members might respond to efforts to change the dominant identity and then weaves together four disparate topics or 'weak signals' to suggest where and how the next round of contested military identity may play out.

### 2.0 CHANGE INITIATIVES AND PREDICTABLE PUSHBACK

Echoing the call from many critical scholars across multiple nations, the shift in Canadian military identity called for by CPCC is from a singular ideal hero warrior to recognizing multiple ways to demonstrate military identity. This initiative acknowledges that the current warrior image is rooted in an outdated hero archetype which emphasizes combat/kinetic functions performed by those seen to be strong, stoic and physically resilient (along with being white, male and cisgender). The intent is to expand from this narrow construction to enable all individuals to incorporate their own identity into their professional one; to give greater emphasis to character rather than task completion; and, to encourage individuals to be emotionally flexible and willing to display vulnerability. An illustration of initial policy changes to facilitate this shift was the August 2022 update to CAF dress regulations removing any gender references including for clothing and authorizing self-expression through individual choice for aspects such as hair colour, nail polish, jewelry and visible tattoos.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless tattoos are associated with criminal activities or promote hatred/discrimination based on human rights prohibited grounds thus including racism, sexism, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, ableism, or sexual explicit material: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/caf/military-identity-system/dress-manual/changes-canadian-forces-dress-instructions.html>

Since the policy changes have been announced, “debates” over these shifts in identity have been taking place within the CAF – and, on occasion, in public domains and especially open social media platforms. Not surprisingly, attitudes appear to range from ‘about time’ to ‘fine for you to have purple hair and a nose ring, just don’t look to me to do the same’ to expressed concerns about ‘slippery slopes’ and unintended consequences.

While it is possible that those with reservations may be convinced to accept these changes, the usual methods to be employed may not be effective: formal policy announcements backed up by bureaucratically-approved ‘frequently asked questions’<sup>2</sup> and updated images used to portray military members may sway some but not all. As articulated elsewhere (Brown & Okros, in press; MacLean, 2017), the military typically tries to implement changes through regulative mechanisms (new orders) and pays insufficient attention to the normative or cognitive-cultural domains which involve establishing new group norms or new ways of thinking.

The key issue was referenced in the introduction: the need to attend to the operation of hegemonic systems. Following his work chairing the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, now retired Canadian Senator Murray Sinclair commented that

“... if you remove all the racists” ... in “government, policing, justice and health—you will still have a problem. Because you will have a system that is functioning based upon policies, priorities and decisions that direct how things are to be done, that come from a time when racism was very blatant.” (Moran, 2021)

Thus, it is important to consider how various aspects of professional functioning (the body of ‘policies, priorities and decisions’ along with customs, ceremonies, artifacts and daily practices) serve to create the conditions that perpetuate the dominant culture including the prototype ideal member.

The explanation for why this occurs starts with the fact that the military engages in very intentional processes to construct the prototype ideal member. Generally referred to as converting the civilian into the soldier, entry level professional socialization involves enacting elements of Goffman (1961) Total Institution with the use of de-individualization and social isolation to dislocate the individual from previous social referents and focus them solely on the identity and practices endorsed by the institution. Those familiar with entry level recruit training recognize that new enrollees quickly learn three tactics to deal with the demands placed on them: pay attention to the person in charge; when in doubt, do what everybody else is doing; and, make friends – in other words: the importance placed on obedience to authority, normative conformity and group loyalty. As constant pressures throughout their training, these factors are likely to trump the 30-minute discussion of acceptable new forms of military identity.

These become accentuated through the dress, deportment and narratives of their instructors (and later on, leaders at the Unit level). Emphasized in military doctrine is the use of transformational leadership and especially the role of leaders to emulate the preferred identity and behaviours (Chief of the Defence Staff, 2004, pp: 51-56). Thus, seniors are expected to lead by example to demonstrate ‘what right looks like’ and are likely to draw on the examples and insights drawn from observing other (often more senior) leaders who, in turn, learned from those who served before them. It is through these types of daily practices that previous legacies including inherent biases and awarded privileges are perpetuated. This is amplified by a professional perspective that the military should never forget valuable lessons paid for in blood and treasure; these serve to anchor the military in well described (even if rather inaccurate) myth making.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Amongst others see the FAQs for the recent changes in CAF dress regulations referenced in the previous footnote.

<sup>3</sup> An example in the Australian case is the ‘digger’ identity which arose from the Gallipoli Campaign. The constructed digger emphasizes: endurance, courage, ingenuity, good humour, and egalitarian mateship. As stated by James Sheffield: Historians have critiqued this ‘Anzac Legend’: the supposedly egalitarian nature of the Australian Imperial Force has been exaggerated,

As articulated by Taber (2009) a contributing factor is the presentation of ‘boss texts’ that construct specific narratives around the military as a way of life. Particularly in assessing the 2003 publication of *Duty with Honour*, she commented that: “The CF boss texts perpetuate the idea that military members must act and think within very narrowly defined ideological codes and textual representations, supporting ruling relations that work to exclude competing ideas and anyone who does not fit the military's dominant narrative” (p 34).

The component of *Duty with Honour* presenting the military ethos was recently updated with the publication of *Trusted to Serve*. Taber (2022) commented this update is intended to answer the question “Who is an ideal military member?” (p 13). She observed on several key changes between *Duty with Honour* and *Trusted to Serve* including restating the concept of respect; the addition of inclusion; and, the exclusion of the use of the term warrior hence signalling a shift from a warrior model to a character-based inclusive ethos. Consistent with the argument presented in this paper, she concluded that “it remains to be seen how the ethos is incorporated throughout the organization; how personnel perceive, enact and informally teach the ethos; and, therefore, how effective *Trusted to Serve*, as a boss text, is at engaging the organization as a whole in cultural change” (p 18).

As reflected in Taber’s comment on ‘how personnel perceive, enact and informally teach the ethos’, the construction of military identity (and endorsement of what is deemed acceptable) most often occurs through informal social exchanges within small groups. As illustrated in Brown’s qualitative research (Brown 2020 & 2021), a key element of hegemonic systems is the construction and policing of social hierarchies which serve to award varying degrees of status and power within any group and to signal to individuals acceptable group norms around behaviours and projecting one’s identity. This research demonstrates that, even when attending a theoretically egalitarian professional development course, military members are still fully aware of the implications of their gendered performances with those representing the dominant ideal conscious that they are, in fact, engaging in social policing.

As explained by Tait (2020) from her research involving CAF members:

“Theories of hegemonic masculinity emphasize that although gender norms are socially constructed, gender performances will be judged against a standard or ideal of masculinity that has become hegemonic within a given sociohistorical moment. Accordingly, someone in a body coded as male may not meet masculine ideals; they may fail to meet these socially constructed standards, or they may disregard them of their own volition. Likewise, someone in a body coded as female may not perform in ways that are considered feminine, or they may fail in their attempt to live up to the standards of idealized masculinity in the case of military service” (p 13)

As articulated elsewhere (Brown & Okros, 2019; Okros, 2009) an additional facet of military hegemonic systems pertains to practices to preserve a ‘tight’ culture rather than authorizing a looser culture. Tight cultures put an emphasis on homogeneity, normative conformity, social cohesion, role obligations, the common good and a reliance on history, customs and traditions thus focus on a past to inform today. Conversely loose cultures authorize individual choice, flexible norms based on values rather than rules, personal responsibility rather than imposed obligations and expectations that societies and social norms will evolve, hence an orientation to the future as something to be created rather than a past to be preserved.

These various factors can combine to produce well intentioned, highly professional leaders who express concerns over what they see as potential consequences of adapting the dominant military identity. A central facet pertains to what is generally called combat motivation. The evident concerns pertain to the primary job of military leaders: to build cohesive, effective teams that will succeed under arduous conditions. While exemplified by combat, this applies across a wide range of high-risk military operations. Search and rescue

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while Iarrikinism shaded into racism and criminality. <https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/the-myths-of-the-battle-of-gallipoli/>

personnel (SAR Techs) dangling on a thread in the middle of North Atlantic storms; Naval boarding parties entering foreign vessels to interdict criminals or terrorists; divers going into murky waters to search for dangerous objects or a host of others represent conditions where the military wants to generate the will to persist even when scared, tired, cold, hungry, wet, exhausted and really just wanting to climb into a warm bed.

Professional reservations that evolving central parts of CAF identity may erode this motivation are predictable especially if leaders are not enabled to envision alternate identities which will also resonate or are equipped with the tools or narratives to be able to do so. The focus on traditional ways of generating combat motivation can be reinforced by current narratives of an increasingly dangerous world with the return of Great Power Competition. These two intertwine around the Russian invasion of Ukraine leading some to anticipate significant high intensity combat. When amplified by the echoes of Afghanistan, the concern is that evolving the warrior identity (and directing leadership, controlling command styles or tight group norms) will put individuals and missions at risk. It is for these valid, operational reasons that an emphasis is given to small group cohesion<sup>4</sup> and part of the rationale for the personal judgements that occur in policing social hierarchies: individuals assess whether their peers will be able to 'cut it' when the moment arises and, more importantly, if they will have their buddy's back. As illustrated in Tait's quotation, the challenge is that many military members are using highly gendered and racialized stereotypes to judge others.

This brief presentation illustrates how facets of professional (hegemonic) systems and daily practices can intertwine to create the conditions under which the dominant identity is reproduced hence explains why efforts to shift or expand the accepted identity may encounter resistance. To extend, the profession of arms is never static: changes continually take place regarding the types of missions assigned to the military, equipment in use, tactics employed, updates to the theory-based body of knowledge and in the expectations that the citizenry have of their armed forces. These are integrated in *Duty with Honour* in a framework which reflects how changes in roles and missions (the profession's jurisdiction or exclusive domain) can require updates to the three facets of identity, responsibility and expertise with potential consequences for the values incorporate in the military ethos. The update to the ethos component was addressed in *Trusted to Serve* however the following section moves to anticipatory consideration of emerging issues primarily related to jurisdiction, responsibility and expertise which may result in new 'debates' over military identity.

### **3.0 FOUR EMERGING THREADS**

To extend on the consideration of the professional framework, the wishes of some notwithstanding, the armed forces is always embedded in broader societies (at home and abroad) and subject to direction from the civil authority. Social evolutions and especially changes mandated from government on the role or purpose of the armed forces can have impacts on identity, responsibility and expertise; and, may require amendments to core values embedded in the military ethos. Four threads of changes are presented as of importance with the caveat that the deductions offered are best read as speculative or informed suppositions however are worthy of consideration.

#### **3.1 The Force of Last Resort**

The received worldview within the profession of arms (certainly the CAF) is that the military should generally be left alone to focus on its core business and, especially, not tasked with conducting activities which should or could be undertaken by other agencies. As articulated by Abbott (1988), this is a reflection of the general frameworks of professions under the concept that professions provide a unique service to society – and shouldn't seek to or be tasked to expand beyond their domain. A consequence is that professions concurrently seek to have a monopoly over their unique jurisdiction but avoid straying into that

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<sup>4</sup> There is an extensive literature which demonstrates that the key is task cohesion: working together to accomplish assigned work and not social cohesion: the degree to which individuals like each other (MacCoun et al, 2006).



of other professions. Thus, military members see the armed forces as the force of last resort which 1) should only be committed to combat when all other political means to resolve the issue have been exhausted and 2) should not be assigned tasks which are outside their core missions.

In the Canadian context, the tendency for local governments to call on the CAF in response to domestic circumstances<sup>5</sup> while the Federal government concurrently tasks the armed forces with international operations is not new however has a new generation of CAF members worried about the misuse of military capabilities. Informal social media exchanges and occasional papers written for career courses have commented on both what the military should be tasked to do and what it means for military identity; typically along the lines of: this is not what we do, this is not who we are.

This is a predictable response: CAF members generally see the role of the military in a specific way which strongly influences their shared identity. The CAF has a long history of telling itself stories which work to rebut the resilient view of many Canadians of soldiers in blue berets armed with teddy bears doing random acts of kindness.<sup>6</sup> Against the backdrop of the perceived clarity of missions in Afghanistan, a belligerent Russia and predictable CAF personnel shortages, the expectation is that political leadership will provide very clear articulation of what the CAF is to do hence is to be. Yet to play out with the current update to defence policy, the military ‘desperate search for certainty’ is likely to remain unanswered.<sup>7</sup> Having presented a key idea for several years at senior officer career courses, I have encountered resistance to Peter Feaver’s 1996 observation (for the US military) that the ‘people’ have the right to choose what kind of military they want – and have the right to be wrong. The key observation is that the ‘mess discussions’ over the government of the day not understanding the purpose of the armed forces are likely to continue.

Given that the projections are that the incidents and severity of climate-change induced natural disasters and serious pandemics are only likely to increase, the internal debates over ‘who we are’ are likely to also continue. This may also arise in other NATO nations as the current focus on national resilience is increased with the observation that the armed forces in a few nations may have difficulty accepting the roles that are apparent under the Swedish Total Defence Policy.

The central issue is that these new or expanded roles do not align with the military construction of the heroic warrior. While the work performed by CAF members in the middle of the COVID pandemic was of significant importance to those they assisted, changing bedsheets in long term care homes is a far cry from the image the military has constructed of the institution and of the prototype ideal member. Doing work that the ‘average civvy’ could do erodes the military exceptionalism of being uniquely trained and capable of achieving extraordinary feats that others could never accomplish.

### 3.2 Backlash to Gender Equality

Work on framing the third Canadian National Plan for Women, Peace and Security has highlighted that “women peacebuilders, human rights defenders, including environmental and land defenders, are increasingly under attack”. Narratives against ‘Western social agendas’ that present gender equality as being against religious teachings or cultural practices have been exploited by a number of extremist groups however have been echoed by politicians in a number of nations including Canadian dog whistles. The broader issue is evident in judicial and legislative actions in a number of countries that have eroded hard-won

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<sup>5</sup> Commonly weather-related disasters (noting that many did not see the 1999 Toronto snow shoveling exercise reaching that threshold) but other examples include service in long term care homes, distributing COVID vaccines and responding to prison riots.

<sup>6</sup> Consistently reported in external opinion surveys including the 2022 Earnscliffe “Views of the Canadian Armed Forces” report.

<sup>7</sup> As has been the case since the mid-60s; there are a range of reasons why the government response to ‘what do you want us to do?’ is ‘be flexible’; ‘how much money will you give us?’ is ‘a dollar less than the bare minimum’; and ‘who do you want us to be’ is ‘friendly’.

equality rights. It is also evident in Canada with women in public life (especially politicians and journalists) being subject to increased, almost unrelenting, hate and threats (Arce, 2022). The CAF is not immune although it appears efforts to detect those holding racist or misogynistic views are being identified (Brewster, 2022).

One explanation of these phenomena is that patriarchy works as the most powerful hegemonic system and is constantly operating to preserve the power and status of those privileged and to prevent advances by others. As illustrated in Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal work (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) when combined with structural racism, this leads to the recognition of social struggle: the understanding by those working to advance equality rights that their work is never done; it is constantly at risk of being eroded and their livelihood and well-being may be attacked by entrenched groups or those with the power to control State functions. As illustration of the power of hegemonic systems, one need only consider that there have now been 55 years of formal activity to advance gender equality in Canada including the CAF.<sup>8</sup> The concept of social struggle against patriarchy suggests that those seeking to influence the warrior identity will need to be on constant vigilance as the pressures to revert to the dominantly masculinist form will continue to resurface.

The primary implication of these dynamics is on the contrasting responses provided earlier to the CPCC announcements on shifting military identity and the 'about time' versus the 'slippery slope' communities. Those with concerns may accept some of the narratives that work to justify the status quo hence see themselves as siding with the majority view that changes are not warranted or should be resisted. Conversely, those who see valued advances towards achieving gender equality as being under attack are likely to increase their efforts to confront the systems of oppression. As highlighted in Okros (2020), analyses of generational cohorts indicate that young women in Canadian and American society are increasingly impatient with the pace of social changes with the identification of the need for significant advances and a heightened vigilance to monitor erosions. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is surfacing in the CAF amongst young women who have joined the military in the last few years. Thus, while the previous discussion of evolving military roles suggested the likelihood of continued internal debates over military identity, it should be recognized that, for some in uniform, specific instances (such as policy announcements, decisions related to court cases, media coverage or even images) may serve as a triggering event that may surprise senior leadership by suddenly emerging as a hotly contested *cause célèbre*.

### 3.3 The Rise of Prevention

The third thread has not yet been visible to many but comes from evolutions in UN and now NATO (and UK MOD) approaches to missions and related tasks. To extend on considering the WPS agenda and especially the four pillars of UNSCR 1325<sup>9</sup>, the professional view has been that the role of the military under WPS or human security approaches is restricted to providing protection. Now evident in most UN mandates, the implications of the military having to take on broader protection roles requires additional analyses and, likely, subsequent considerations for doctrine, training etc. The emerging issue, however, is the expansion to prevention. This is a key factor in the Vancouver Principles as these require the military to not just deal with encounters with child soldiers but to prevent their recruitment. Debates over the military role in preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) emerged in recent NATO work on this file as the 2021 CRSV Policy states "NATO planners will identify objectives, tasks and related assessment tools to prevent and respond to CRSV".<sup>10</sup> Thus, this is not just a factor in the political domain but is expected to be addressed in

<sup>8</sup> I count from PM Pearson's Feb 1967 establishment of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada which directly resulted in the 1970 changes to prevent women from being released as soon as they married and the subsequent changes to prevent release on the basis of pregnancy. The 1977 Canadian Human Right Act led to expanded employment opportunities and the 1985 Charter of Rights and Freedoms to (theoretically) full opportunities for women; if not 55 years, the catalyst for the most 'recent' changes occurred a mere 37 years ago.

<sup>9</sup> Prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery.

<sup>10</sup> NATO Policy on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, May 2021: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_184570.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_184570.htm)

military operations. NATO SGSR Irene Fellin has recently stimulated consideration of prevention roles for the military under two other NATO Human Security themes of Children and Armed Conflict and Cultural Property Protection/Cultural Heritage Exploitation. It is evident that prevention will also surface when NATO seeks to advance policies for combatting trafficking in human beings.

While this third thread is still under-developed, it also has the potential to result in a noticeable shift in military roles hence (back to the *Duty with Honour* professional framework) to the need to update assigned responsibilities, required expertise and constructed identity. It is the last that will, again, lead to internal debates as to who ‘we’ are, what ‘we’ are expected to do and what ‘we’ value. While the focus of this paper is on identity, it should be noted that the collective result of the professional framework and professional functioning is the creation of a military worldview.<sup>11</sup> Like other professions such as law, medicine and religious ministry and underlying academic disciplines, this worldview directly frames ‘sense making’: especially how information is collected, analysed and acted on.<sup>12</sup> The UK MOD recently conducted valuable discussions on the consequences of forcing human security considerations to fit into the PMSEII<sup>13</sup> planning architecture: the concern is that the real meaning of assessments of insecurities or inequalities can get lost in translation. An illustration of the issues is when the military used WPS-inspired gender considerations to have uniformed women collecting intelligence from local populations to then feed this into a COIN framework which resulted in actions directly opposed to the WPS agenda (Ledet et al, 2018).

More broadly, the expansion of potential military roles or military contributions to integrated ‘whole of mission’ approaches to address prevention across a number of human security domains will have direct and indirect consequences. As the military will rarely, if ever, be the lead actor in ensuring prevention, particularly on UN missions this will require those in uniform to work closely with and often subordinate to, the plans and actions of others who are the lead for prevention. A good example is the Canadian government ‘Triple Nexus’ initiative designed to better integrate the actions of the humanitarian, development and security sectors.<sup>14</sup> Recognizing the adage in these contexts that everybody appreciates better coordination but nobody like to be coordinated by somebody else, the military is likely to have difficulty when they are not in charge of the planning and conduct of mission activities. To return to the professional framework, which ensuring physical protection can draw on expertise that is associated with the combat warrior, these individuals rarely possess the different knowledge and skills required to engage with civil society organizations and local communities to ensure effective prevention. As a result, an increased emphasis on prevention has the potential to disrupt the broadly constructed identity of the armed forces as well as the internal social hierarchies of who is the most important for mission success.

### 3.4 AI and Cyber

A topic of increased attention in the military is the exploitation of artificial intelligence (by own and hostile forces). Evolutions in this domain are also likely to cause disruptions to collective identity and internal hierarchies. In a 2022 workshop organized by the Transforming Military Cultures network, Australian sociologist Samantha Cropvoets stimulated an interesting discussion by observing that AI, cyber and

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<sup>11</sup> This is an underdeveloped topic; very little literature exists to articulate the military worldview beyond Sam Huntington’s 1957 description that the ideal soldier is conservative in the classical sense. He argued that the ‘military mind’ emphasizes the “permanence, irrationality, weakness, and evil in human nature”; is more focused on vice than virtue; suspect of human cooperation and skeptical of change hence prefers the status quo. His summary statement is that the military is “pessimistic” and “historically inclined...It is, in brief, realistic, and conservative.”

<sup>12</sup> Noting that, in academe, the worldview is often explained with reference to the discipline’s specific ontology, epistemology and methods.

<sup>13</sup> Commonly represented at PMESII-PT, this stands for Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical environment, and Time which reflect not only which factors the military considers of importance but how data and information are integrated into sense-making.

<sup>14</sup> Noting the reference to the security sector has evolved to being the peace sector: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILwRih25yYo>



robotics were changing not only how the military conducted activities but what activities were being conducted and by whom with displacement/disruption to long held ideas of the role of the military and the ideal military identity. This starts with ‘cyber warriors’ and remote UAV<sup>15</sup> operators – who clearly do not have to meet common military fitness standards. This issue has been identified as problematic for the CAF when held against the current universality of service policy (Keene, 2017; Southen, 2020). Again, changes in what work needs to be done can lead to amendments to who does these tasks, the nature of the work environment and, ultimately, the image of the military member who performs this work. The debates (and jokes amongst different communities within the armed forces) over remote drone operators wearing flight suits is one example of contested military identities.

The issues of drone operators are of importance for two other reasons and especially for those who are actively engaged in the ‘kill chain’. An initial internal narrative had been the drone operators is usually well removed from the battle zone or even the threat of operations hence is at no physical risk and therefore not seen by some as ‘real combatants’. These narratives have implications on the social hierarchies identified earlier which frame who is important and who is less valued but also extends to how individuals are seen by others. An example is the more recent recognition that some drone operators are at much higher risk of mental health issues but were not initially recognized as such by the military medical system (Bryant-Lees et al, 2021; Saini et al, 2021). Importantly, the degree to which a military member’s identity and employment match the prototype ideal, the more likely they are to be given institutional and peer support when in need.

An extension of the implications of drone operators’ activities – and ultimately all of those who are going to work with autonomous systems pertains to the moral and ethical consequences of actions taken (Bailey, 2015; Jordan, 2016; Olsthoorn, 2019). Returning again to the professional framework incorporated in *Duty with Honour* (and more broadly the literature on professions including medicine, law and policing) is the recognition that articulated professional values, constructed identity and internalized responsibilities merge to inform not just ‘who I am’ and ‘what I am supposed to do’ but ‘how I am to do it’. The body of Just War Theory and the Laws of Armed Conflict provide the principle-based moral foundations for military decision making especially regarding the application of lethal force. Other than the fact that flight suits are just comfortable for drone operators to wear (and are replaced when worn out), part of the practices of the Total Institution are to consistently remind the military member of who they are hence of the values that are to be given emphasis when making complex moral judgements. Simply stated, the assumption is that wearing the uniform connects the individual to their profession.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note the concerns that have been raised when military members (especially Special Forces) wear non-standard uniforms.<sup>17</sup>

To extend on the issues around AI and cyber, a more critical shift has been that information operations are no longer seen as supporting the land, sea or air battle (for which the Army, Navy and Air Force versions of the combat warrior are clearly the most important) but the information domain has become a battle space on its own. The net result is that the battle is often now over the narrative not territory. The inference drawn is that shifts in military roles and especially in understanding who engages in which battles serves to displace the supremacy of those who use kinetic actions to take and hold ground. As a result, it is plausible to predict that evolutions regarding AI, cyber and robotics will not just alter military tactics but lead to ongoing cultural scuffles over roles, responsibilities and ultimately professional identity.

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<sup>15</sup> Technically unmanned aerial vehicles although better as remotely piloted aerial vehicles.

<sup>16</sup> As do relevant symbols for other professions such as the white lab coat and stethoscope for doctors; robes for lawyers and the badge for police officers.

<sup>17</sup> An illustration of the types of debates that can arise is between Parks (2003) and Pfanner (2004).

## 4.0 IMPLICATIONS

As stated, observations are provided as food for thought and, in no way, definitive analyses. The central point offered is that US military sociologist Morris Janowitz was right:<sup>18</sup> the military does not exist in a social vacuum but is constantly buffeted by external changes which can influence key facets of the profession including shared and individual identity. As the armed forces engages in intentional activities to initially construct and subsequently influence identity, it is recognized that facets of identity will often be being negotiated – by the profession with government and society; by military leadership with more junior individuals in uniform; and amongst military members at the small group level. The CPCC initiatives to shift four key aspects of military culture are seen as intended to contribute to negotiations in all three domains.

An initial conclusion offered from this paper is the recognition that, while top-down initiatives can serve as one influence on identity, these are not the only ones and, on occasions such as the 1995-96 efforts to create the ‘Defence Team’, may actually just be received as background noise which is drowned out by daily exchanges stimulated by other factors of importance to how military members see themselves and each other. It is this recognition of multiple factors at play at any given time that inform the Taber (2022) observation that it will take time to determine what effects the recent *Trusted to Serve* will have; ditto CPCCs initiatives.

The primary idea presented to understand these dynamics is the recognition that patriarchal hegemonic systems work to preserve the status quo and that these systems are deeply embedded in not only policies but daily practices. To extend the popular Drucker quote: not only does culture eat strategy for breakfast but, when the strategy is to change culture, for lunch, dinner and midnight snack. As reflected in the social psychology literature on individual and group responses to threats to identity: narratives will be constructed to counter the changes and preserve key characteristics of the dominant identity.<sup>19</sup> Of importance, over time the military has created the spaces, places and informal rules for where and how internal debates over culture and identity can take place. How aspects of identity, social hierarchies and allocated privilege will shift will be under constant negotiations within the profession. Top-down organizational change initiatives will mainly shift where and how subgroup tensions will become visible to senior leadership. Applying critical analyses to understand these social dynamics and to anticipate or monitor evolving tensions are of importance for those seeking to guide culture and shape identity in specific ways.

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<sup>18</sup> A recurring comparison is between Huntington’s assertion that the military culture needs to be unique enough to be kept apart from society; Janowitz argued that the military needed porous borders to be kept part of society.

<sup>19</sup> When designing the mid 1980s Combat Related Employment of Women trials, I noted the emergence of the narrative by those seeking to preserve the status quo that all men could leap a tall building in a single bound; no woman could climb a flight of stairs.

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