THE ART OF TEACHING (FEMALE) OFFICER-CADETS
IN THE CANADIAN MILITARY

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Abstract
As a literature professor at one of two military colleges in Canada, I have found myself in a unique position. The challenges include balancing the military component of the College with the academic one. The rewards lie in the sure knowledge that graduates from the Royal Military College become people of influence, in the military and in the community at large. This essay looks at some of the issue which face a literature teacher in such an environment.

Introduction
There is a saying that ‘you can take the man out of the army, but you can’t take the army out of the man.’ This is generally regarded as a good thing, because, as another saying goes, the army will ‘make a man’ out of one, meaning that it will invest one with the best and most desirable qualities. But what if the ‘man’ is a woman? I teach English literature at a military college in Canada, and in this essay I would like to temper these expressions with a look at the challenge of attracting and keeping women in the military, beginning with the institution which educates officer-candidates as it struggles for relevance and efficacy in the twenty-first century.

Let me set up a scenario: I raised my hand at a recent ‘Town Hall’ meeting, the first such meeting in the six years I have been teaching first year English literature to officer-cadets. I said, “If we want to retain more women cadets, I suggest we establish mentoring for them as soon as they arrive at the College, to help them to better deal with the transition.” “Absolutely not,” replied our new female Commandant, Colonel Jennie Carignan. “Women don’t want to be treated any differently from the men. I know this from experience.” From which I understood that, although there was a willingness to entertain the idea that there might be reasons that, of the fewer than twenty percent of our student population who are women, one in four will leave after the first year, nonetheless that consideration should not include approaching this population so as to signal alterity. But, of course, women continue to be an ‘other’ in this militarized space, and one ignores this at one’s peril. One young female cadet was shocked to find that the freedom of sexual expression that she took as her right and due in this modern world had an unforeseen consequence: she found herself passed from hand to hand, until she took herself ‘off the market’ so to speak: by marrying. It was an old-fashioned solution to an ongoing struggle for equity and equality, exacerbated in this hothouse environment in which I teach. My aim is to address women’s issues in an institution which is hierarchical and steeped in antiquated traditions, but nonetheless whose task is to prepare young would-be leaders for the challenges ahead.

First, I will give some background into my own teaching experience and the academic environment of the Royal Military College Saint-Jean. I will sketch the role of the soldier, throughout history and within the Canadian context nowadays. I will begin the discussion of women in the military with a brief history, arguing that the changing role of the military – the hybrid humanitarian/warrior role – has allowed for a concurrent counter-movement in the military which is in the vanguard in society: namely, gender equality which challenges the perceptions of the military as patriarchal and part of hegemonic masculinity. Finally, I will address the problems we face at the beginning of the training and educational process, as we receive candidates from varying cultural backgrounds and gendered expectations, starting points which factor heavily into our ability to attract and retain female candidates.
Background

The Royal Military College is very much an institute of higher learning, with all that implies. The academic staff is from all walks of (non-military) life, every colour and creed, fairly evenly split between the genders, PhDs and MAs in all the disciplines, and the course offerings parallel what one would find in any university in Canada, with perhaps a little less choice. I myself gained my PhD in English Literature, with a speciality in modernism, from l’Université de Montréal, and taught as a sessional at the University of Guelph for eight years. Prior to this, I had been teaching for many years in the Québec Cégep system, which is a 2-year post-secondary, pre-university programme unique to Québec, and it is this experience, in combination with my university teaching experience, which, I believe, landed me the job. That, and a smattering of French that, in my original hubris, I marketed as bilingual to enable me to work in this largely francophone environment.

The military college straddles an uneasy line between centuries of formation dictated by tradition and the needs of the modern world. My job as a professor in this environment likewise is caught up in this uneasy alliance. Military leaders in the past came from the aristocracy or landed gentry class, which at one time was synonymous with the educated class. This has translated into the need for all commissioned officers to have a university education, and the Canadian Armed Forces will underwrite the university education of all who enlist to serve as officers. This education can be gained in the military college or in a civilian university. Theoretically, then, I have been hired to provide exactly the same education as I would if I were teaching at a civilian university. In fact, the Cégep system to which we are aligned in Québec sets out a particular curriculum – essentially, various survey and genre courses, with a primary focus on reading and writing. The students who come from all over Canada leave Royal Military College Saint-Jean after one year (the students from Québec attend for two years), and go to Royal Military College of Canada (Kingston) for the balance of their university. This need to pass on to Kingston is the ‘wag the dog’ to which I and my colleague attend (yes, only two teaching the compulsory English literature courses, as there are only 100 English-speaking students at the College). So, we need to make sure they can read university-level texts, take notes, write a coherent essay of about 1500 words, do close-reading of a literary text, research without using Wikipedia – all very basic. It is heaven, with fewer than thirty students in each class – at Guelph, the smallest class was sixty, and the norm was ninety.

The irony here is that my background is overwhelmingly liberal, and I have found myself in the contrary position of being female in a largely male, conservative institution. There could not be a more liberal, left-wing institution than the University of Guelph, where I taught a variety of courses, as sessionals do, including Children’s Literature, Women’s Literature, and Reading the Contemporary World. As I was teaching at Guelph, 9/11 happened, the Canadian military embarked on its seminal role in Afghanistan, holding the fort while the American military went into Iraq, and anti-war protests took place daily in the central quadrant of the university. Even there, I taught war literature (the 60s, actually), and Literature of Social Change, which focused on the ways in which literature has been in the forefront of raising awareness about social issues: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Reading Lolita in Tehran.

At this point, let me emphasize that my current students come from all walks of life, from across Canada. About 20 percent of them are female, and all ‘trades’ in the Canadian Armed Forces are open to both men and women. There is no discrimination, in principle, on the basis of gender, colour, or creed. They come into the College with a grade 11 or 12 high school certificate, at about eighteen years of age, and most have not had the experience of being cadets. As the Tom Cruise character says, in Jack Reacher, “There are four types of people who join the military. For some it’s a family trade. Others are patriots, eager to serve. Next you have those who just need a job. Then there’s the kind who want the legal means of killing other people.” I figure that’s about right, with the possible exception of the point about killing people, because the Canadian military performs a variety of functions. As Timothy Winegard writes, “In Canada there is only one ‘Armed Force,’’ this being the Canadian Forces controlled at the federal level. There are no provincial ‘armies’ and municipal governments do not have the right, as provinces do, to requisition the sole federal force under Aid to the Civil Power.” Comprised of the army, the navy, and the air force, the Canadian Armed Forces trains for work within the borders of Canada, in search and rescue operations as well as in aiding local police forces during crises; in addition, it undertakes military
operations in support of Canada’s role as a member of NATO, and assists as a humanitarian force internationally, which means that the humanitarian function far outweighs the combative one.

Military Formation

The formation of such a hybrid force is a specialized and careful concern, in order to achieve the correct and optimum balance of caring and force, skill and toughness. Research from 1995 concerning the American Operation Restore Hope, in Somalia, highlighted the difficulty American soldiers had of adapting to “the ambiguity of the mission: warrior versus humanitarian.” The Canadian system of educating officers was overhauled following this difficult mission, known in Canada as Operation Deliverance, to include an emphasis on ethics. Canadian soldiers often find themselves working in a humanitarian role in which they are required to “cooperate with the local population,” a population which may or may not be friendly or trustworthy in any way. A colleague of mine from Kingston, Major/Dr. Andy Belyea, an English literature professor who is also military, did two tours of duty in Afghanistan during which he performed influence operations designed to persuade the Afghan people to reject the insurgency and embrace political and cultural change.

This is not a violent force: it would certainly be a misconception to think of the Canadian military as partaking of ‘violent masculinity,’ a term which was coined by Jackson Katz to examine what he perceives as the epidemic of male violence in America today; a term which might come to mind when one considers the potentially combative nature of militaries, and the fact that, regardless of the male/female equity which exists today, the military remains a predominantly masculine force, with an inherent culture of masculinity in which, some would say, misogyny and violence are ‘natural’ and even inevitable. Certainly, these are problems which the military college faces, along with the rest of society, but not to a greater extent than the rest of society, in spite of being an almost uni-gendered environment. Many years of research into the social construction of gender has problematized the essentialist thinking that men and violence are necessarily linked. Suffice it to say that although masculine identity in its many guises remains a matter of some import at the College, violent masculinity faces zero tolerance as such behaviour inevitably leads to expulsion. The focus, rather, as in the best tradition of Sparta, is upon discipline.

In Discipline and Punish, Michel Foucault traces the development of “the ideal figure of the soldier,” which in the early seventeenth century was “someone who could be recognized from afar… his body was the blazon of his strength and valour.” (We continue this tradition when we dress our students in bright red serge, or when leaders amongst them can be distinguished by the red sashes they wear.) By the late eighteenth century, Foucault continues, the soldier “has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; the posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit.” (By the third week of being at the College, an entire room full of cadets can be relied upon to stiffen to attention at the simple command, “ROOM.”) “A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved.” Foucault goes on to say, “The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely.” Thus, “the meticulousness of the regulations, the fussiness of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragment of life,” “the discipline of the minute.”

This discipline, this molding, begins the moment the new recruits set foot on campus. In time honoured fashion, the candidates are subjected to the “monastic model” of the seventeenth century which holds the boarding school to be the “most perfect.” Along with control of space comes control of activity: the timetable, whose basic principle was the negative one of “non-idleness. It was forbidden to waste time.” Viewed as a discipline, Foucault argues, the principle becomes “a positive economy” of the “theoretically ever-growing use of time.” “Through this technique of subjection a new object was being formed; slowly, it superseded the mechanical body.” Foucault reminds us that, at the root of disciplinary training were spiritual techniques “[s]trongly inspired by Ruysbroek and Rhenish
mysticism,” which were transposed to education. In its religious context, this disciplinary training had the development of the “ultimate capacity of the individual” as its “final result,” and the ultimate goal was salvation. The final result in the profession of war is not salvation, but rather finely-tuned physical and mental dexterity which can be put to use in defence of the nation-state.

Naturally, some people never achieve the apex of disciplined development – epitomized, perhaps, by the Special Forces in Canada, and by the Navy Seals in the U.S. Certainly, our cadets are trainees-in-process, and what we see most often is the more prosaic results of discipline, namely the mechanization of the body, and the suppression of individuality into the “homogeneous social body.” “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes.” At this level, there is an ongoing struggle between the behaviours demanded of military formation and the academic aims.

With some consternation, we professors greet students at the Royal Military College on the first day of orientation and watch them change over the course of a mere three days of military indoctrination, into fledgling members of the military under discipline who, like Browning’s Childe Roland, find that, “If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk/ Above its mates, the head was chopped.” Three days is all it takes between normal high school kid with a ready smile and too-long bangs to tight-lipped, shaven-head, order-taking cadet. Aldous Huxley pinpointed this efficacious conditioning as resulting from a combination of Pavlovian reaction and fatigue, which heightens suggestibility. In other words, the art of discipline controls not only the body, but also the mind. At the same time that the body is being molded into a state of compliancy, the mind is being inoculated to become accustomed to increased levels of stress – certainly, one can see the benefit of this for crisis or combat situations. It is a time-honoured process: I know of no studies which analyse and support this methodology, but I would hazard a guess that this is a key benefit of having officers pass through the military college system. Their tolerance for stress is tested and honed early on, which may weed out those who are unable to sustain stress, and may result in fewer cases of PTSD – such a study remains to be done.

**Education of Cadets**

As teachers, we have a responsibility to help our students to become critical thinkers. We want them to question society, leadership, government policies, and their roles in all of this. We teach them skills and trades, but we also try to teach them to think for themselves. This is the essence of what separates a university education from the trades, most would agree. The ability to think critically – rather than the possession of a loud voice – should be at the heart of leadership. My task as a professor in such a special environment is to challenge, awaken, and maintain the living, individual mind of the student in spite of the pressures towards commonality and sameness. My colleague from the Annapolis Naval Academy, Bruce Fleming, lambastes the “infantilization” of the students, as their environment is “the ultimate nanny state,” in which “hard-charging ‘alpha’ types” have “all their decisions made for them.” Fleming writes, “These institutions do produce some fine officers, even some leaders. But students I respect the most tell me that those who succeed do so despite the institutions, not because of them.” I would argue that the academic component of the institution, conducted mainly by civilian professors, is an integral part of the institution, as a necessary balance to the pressures of the military culture, and plays a key role in the success of the students, as officers and as thinkers.

Many of my students have the idea that they must give up social involvement. They are told when they sign up that they can no longer participate in certain active associations – they can’t join public demonstrations, and they can’t publically offer their personal opinions on public matters; they can’t run for office. Some of them take this as a signal to give up thinking. Nothing could be further from the truth. In every way imaginable, an officer-cadet must be more, not less. How can they be leaders if they have no clue as to what direction their followers are taking? How can they be decision-makers if they are not quick-witted, with great communication skills? How can they evaluate the fitness of the orders they are given if they do not have a strong grasp of ethics?

As these young men and women march into my literature class, respond immediately to instructions given, hold themselves upright, focus more on their uniforms than on their mental abilities, I can only
think of the responsibility which is mine – to soften them, to develop their artistic selves, to awaken their sense of irony and criticism, and to open the door to compassion for the human condition.

The first task is to look directly at the forces of pride and propaganda that have brought them to the military in the first place. By looking at the poetry of the First World War, we see how recruits lined up to join the war, impelled by a militaristic upbringing and schooling system that, oddly enough, bears direct resemblance to the training these officer-cadets are receiving: strict discipline, sports, sensitizing to the chain of command, classical subjects, oratory… an educational recipe handed down from Roman times. We look at the turn, the disillusionment, when pro-war poetry became anti-war, and Wilfrid Owens wrote about the gurgle of the gas in the lungs of a soldier. The poetry teaches the students about fear and pain. The students teach me about strategy, tactics, and innovations in weaponry.

We dive into the thorny era of the Vietnam War, when America was erupting on the home front with civil rights marches, riots, anti-war demonstrations, hippies, and drugs. We look at Casualties of War, read Tim O’Brien’s “The Man I Killed” and Joseph Komunyakaa’s “Nude Interrogation,” and we question what happens to the spirit of the one who takes another’s life. We ask ourselves, from whence comes the inhumanity of war which results in the massacres of civilians by trained combatants? My students teach me about the stresses of leadership and the breakdown of the chain of command in the field. They are learning to be leaders who continue to answer for Somalia and the life of a 16 year old boy who stole a radio.

We read Colleen Wagner’s play, The Monument, which echoes the Bosnian conflict and the way in which the male organ became a weapon of war wreaking havoc on the women, raping, impregnating, murdering. My students interview members of the staff who served in Kosovo and participated in the Canadian Operation Medak Pocket, when the Canadian military negotiated tactically with the Bosnian belligerents to affect a pull-out. The Bosnian troops still managed to deke into a few local villages for a last day of slaughter.

I have come to realize that I have another responsibility to these students: to give them tools with which to deal with the experiences they will be up against – experiences of unimaginable horror in war zones, and of gut-wrenching self-doubt in the face of life-and-death situations. In a recent interview, a high-ranking female Canadian officer recounted her difficulty in knowing that she was endangering the lives of the young (male) team that protected her in Afghanistan every time she ventured out of the compound in Kandahar. Yes, she was in personal danger, but her protection team, scouring the area where she was to be, perching on rooftops as protective snipers, putting their own bodies on the line for her, was in danger because of decisions she made. She was acutely aware of this, and tried to make her decisions accordingly. If she miscalculated and put them into an open firefight, she might not die (as they might), but living is not always the easiest outcome.27 My students may, sometime in the future, have much to live with. One thinks of Ret’d Lieutenant-general Roméo Dallaire, whose experiences in Rwanda haunted him to the brink of suicide.28 Dallaire has risen to this (new) challenge, as a troubled veteran, to become an outspoken advocate for the cause of child soldiers.29

Women in the Canadian Military

Women students were first admitted to Royal Military College of Canada (Kingston) in 1979, beginning their gradual inclusion in all ranks and facets of the military. Today, women are welcomed throughout the military structure. Two women have achieved senior positions: Rear-Admiral Jennifer Bennet and Major-General Christine Whitecross. In a recent interview, Whitecross admitted to the difficulty of combining career and family (she has three children), which was solved for her family when her husband left the military to devote himself full-time to the needs of the home and children while she pursued her very successful career path and was the main breadwinner.29 As of January 2013, the percentage of women in the Canadian Armed Forces was 14.8.30

Critiquing Hegemonic Masculinity

According to this same government source, “Initiatives are underway that will level the playing field for women in the CAF [Canadian Armed Forces] by eliminating discriminatory practices and attitudes,
rather than granting special privileges and status.”31 As Colonel Carignan said, in the anecdote at the beginning of this essay, women don’t want to be treated differently from men. They want to succeed as equals – to face the same challenges as men, and to succeed through their own efforts. To this end, the Canadian Armed Forces supports the creation of “equipment suitable for a mixed-gender force,” and promotes behaviors which are equally suitable for the career success of all people (such as zero tolerance of sexual harassment). Recruitment efforts are aimed at promoting the many career opportunities in the military.

Moreover, the change in focus which the Canadian Armed Forces has been undergoing for the last several decades – the hybrid humanitarian/warrior role – has allowed for a concurrent counter-movement in the military which is in the vanguard in society: namely, gender equality which challenges the perceptions of the military as patriarchal and part of hegemonic masculinity. The question, as Mike Donaldson clearly puts it, is, “why, in specific social formations, do certain ways of being male predominate, and particular sorts of men rule?”32 One could certainly see the military as being just such a ‘social formation’ where ‘certain ways of being male predominate,’ namely, “male norms [that] stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body.”33 “Hegemonic masculinity” is “naturalized in the form of the hero and presented through forms that revolve around heroes: sagas, ballads, westerns, thrillers.”34 And certainly, this type of male identity may have thrived in days gone by, but times have changed. Along with a ‘new world’ that has allowed the likes of Chris Whitecross to advance in the military with the help of her (male) partner at home has come a world in which the norms elucidated above can equally be female norms.

In 1993 Donaldson was still writing about the media portrayal of the ‘new man’ who could ‘embrace the feminine [and] become ‘more complete.”35 He pointed out the common thinking that “[i]n their increasing assumption of breadwinning, femocratic, and skilled worker occupations, the line goes, women render themselves incomplete. They must ‘give up’ their femininity in their appropriation of male jobs and power.”36 The current popular culture heroine of The Hunger Games clearly gives the lie to this thinking today: women are able to embrace their roles as breadwinner, as hero, as skilled, with no loss of female identity, and nowhere is this clearer than in the young women who present themselves as officer-candidates. They are required to tie back, flatten, and otherwise control their hair while on duty, to wear regulation uniforms, and to cause their bodies to conform as do the men, no more nor less: one would be mistaken to think of this process as a submission to a normative masculinity. It is part of the process of discipline training. By the same token, the military culture which may once have been viewed as patriarchal is no longer so, although it remains hierarchical: a patriarchy would necessarily involve women in subservient roles, unable to rise in the hierarchy or to hold commanding posts, which is clearly not the case in today’s CAF.

Identity Theory in the Attraction and Retention of Female Officer-Cadets

Jack Reacher missed a point in his assessment as to why anyone would join the military. Along with those entering the family trade, the patriots, those wanting a job, and those who would like to wreak a bit of legal mayhem,37 more than a few join for reasons of identity. Military personnel partake of a particular identity – again, this is not a surprising statement when it concerns males, who throughout the modern age have been manipulated into going to war through propaganda concerning masculine behaviour.38 The reasons women join are equally as diverse as those for men, and equally include identity. A case in point would be Korean-Canadians, who make up between 1 and 2 percent of any given class. Military service is compulsory in South Korea, and is now open to women; South Koreans living in Canada (now Canadian citizens) feel it to be a point of honour to do service as they would have had to in South Korea: to do so maintains their Korean identity in the eyes of their relatives and friends in South Korea. Add to this the many benefits of military service at the level of officer in Canada: the free education, the guaranteed job and salary, the pension upon early retirement, and what begins as a point of identity maintenance becomes an economically sound decision for a new immigrant population.
The military is also the one institution that differs from all others in its negotiation of identity, and of gendered identity, because it is, plainly, in the business of altering identity. Because of discipline training, all identities are subdued and remolded, as Foucault reminds us. This is why, although the majority of students are male, the culture, in my classroom and elsewhere in the college, is not ‘hegemonic masculinity.’ In my classroom, in other classes throughout the college, women succeed academically, as they are doing in society-at-large.

This being said, the first few days, weeks, months of a female cadet’s introduction to this new environment are fragile, and the answer to this fragility may well lie in our having a better understanding of social identity theory. We lose bright young women because their (gendered) upbringing makes it difficult for them to transition from civilian life. Women are precious in the military: too precious, and this causes skewed relations which can be intimidating and difficult to navigate. Those who stick with it—both men and women-- are the survivors whose personal experience colours their judgement of how others would or could succeed.

Each of my students comes to the college with a particular social identity which has been formed from deeply-rooted cultural values, beliefs, and ideology which “act as an unconscious filter” for subsequent experiences. In the military context, these divergent factors need to be ‘normalized’ so as to be positive contributions, rather than negative forces, in the overall group dynamic. For the purposes of an overview, I turn to Kathleen Ethier and Kay Deaux’s 1994 study, which references some of the classic studies in social identity, and focuses on the way in which social identity is negotiated when contexts change:

Identification of oneself with other people who share common attributes is an important aspect of self-definition. Theories of social identity, developed by Tajfel (1981), Turner (1987), and others, emphasize the importance of collective membership and the significant effects that group membership can have on behavior. These behaviors include feelings of attraction toward members of the in-group, stereotypic judgements of out-group members, social influence, and preferential treatment toward the in-group (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Turner, 1987).

Social identity theory has been developing over the last thirty years and continues to be updated for the contemporary world, in which some of the problems identified previously have been exacerbated by the proliferation of computer technology in the home, social networking, texting, and so forth. Our methods of communication and group involvement are altering. However, the essential theories of social identity construction seem to be remaining valid.

Self-definition necessarily undergoes evaluation and potential modification during periods of great change, one of which would be entering a military environment, a change which renders self-definition salient at the best of times. Ethier and Deaux studied social identity categories which might be thought to be resistant to change, such as gender and ethnic identity. They found that stability is maintained by the “process of remooring the identity to supportive elements in the new environment.” However, this remooring in the face of the threat of salience was only enabled in students whose original ethnic or gendered involvement was high to begin with. “[I]n the face of threats, evaluations associated with the identity are particularly vulnerable to negative change. Students who perceived substantial threat and ambivalence about their identity... showed subsequent drops in self-esteem associated with that identity.”

According to Statistics Canada, in 2006 women accounted for 60% of university graduates between the ages of 25 to 29. In the non-military world, the female-cadets would find themselves in a slight majority in academic circles. The research of McGuire and his colleagues shows that people whose
“status (e.g., ethnicity, gender, or hair color) is a minority in their group are more likely to be aware of that characteristic than those whose status is a majority.” This suggests that those few who are of the female gender are salient in our population, in spite of the fact that their gender does not render them salient in the academic world-at-large. Hogg and Abrams (1990) argued that “individuals are motivated to categorize themselves in the most meaningful way as dictated by the context.” Individuals whose categorization of themselves becomes depressed may choose to leave the group rather than to risk “further experiences of low self-esteem.”

In some sense, this is self-evident: females are at risk in a predominantly male population, given their minority status. However, such a statement is too blunt; I believe this type of research can help us get closer to the problem at hand, and to identify specific salient moments for the young women who choose careers in the military. For instance, the testimony of the young woman with which this essay began included information concerning her father, that he was the chief instigator of protests against the inclusion of women at Royal Military College of Canada (Kingston) in 1979. She felt it was (happily) ironic that his daughter was now in the military. Part of her self-identification was that of a woman who could assail the previously male-only fortress, and assume the previously male-only behaviours, including that of sexual freedom with no consequences, which her acculturation in our post-sexual revolution world had assured her was possible. The enforced intimacy of life in a boarding school caused her to experience the lowering of her self-esteem when she attempted to put her freedoms to the test, and she responded by removing herself from the group, sexually, by marrying, and physically, because married members are the only ones who can live off campus. This is one possible explanation of her behavior. Through an understanding of social identity theory, paired with interviews of women who have successfully negotiated this demanding environment and those who have chosen to leave, we can come to a clearer understanding of ways in which we can facilitate the transition from civilian to military for women – and, possibly, for all cadets. If we can identify the at-risk issues, we will have an opportunity to renegotiate the space and the behaviours of the college so as to prioritize the needs of group-adhesion for the at-risk group.

**Social Identity Theory in the Military Classroom**

A look at the workings of the classroom in the military college reveals that, of course, women are in the minority: there will be only one or two women in any given classroom. Whereas in the squadron as a whole (the college is divided into three squadrons) females will have a certain mass, albeit small, with which to establish some cohesion and to ratify their identities as women, this possibility is virtually nullified in the classroom. Nowadays, studies in education and gender focus on the difficulty that boys are having in the classroom: girls outperform boys, who are more likely to drop out early, repeat grades, and choose a stream other than university. Our situation at the military college is anomalous in today’s educational environment. In order to understand the situation, we need to turn the educational calendar back about thirty years, when females were in the minority in most university classrooms.

In an essay which was originally published in 1985, Catherine Krupnick gives the results of a study in which videotapes of twenty-four instructors at Harvard College were analyzed, specifically to answer the questions: “What are the differences, if any, between male and female students' participation in classroom discussion? How does the gender of the teacher affect the students' participation?” At that time, she reports, the majority of instructors were male, and the majority of students were male. In this situation, it was discovered that “male students spoke two and a half times longer than their female peers,” and that the “male competitive style won out” in group discussions which had mixed-gender participation. In other words, whether we like it or not, there are gender differences in student participation and learning, and these differences can be exacerbated in certain circumstances, such as our predominantly male classroom settings. Females who would, nowadays, be in the majority in a university classroom, find themselves in the minority at the military college, and the likelihood is that they would behave as Krupnick has described, and that their self-esteem might suffer under these circumstances.

Krupnick’s study validates what many other studies have shown: that the gender of the instructor makes a difference, in that women are more likely to speak in class discussions when the instructor is
female. (Of course, we all have had the articulate students for whom no situation is problematic.) In my experience, the reaction of female cadets to me is mixed: some are warm, and some are not. Nonetheless, it is just possible that I can form supportive bonds with my female students, if I pay attention to this aspect of classroom management. There are other things that one can do in order to provide female students with much-needed opportunities to solidify and boost their self-esteem in the classroom context. For instance, one can provide opportunities for discussion that are not dependent upon having a person be outgoing or competitive. My students can choose their own group members: quite often, the women will choose to be with other women, but not always. The groups report their discussions in order, which gives each group equal time to speak fully. Research topics can be tailored to subjects of personal interest: the women often choose to research what other military women have achieved.

Is it possible that the non-military side of this officer-training partnership can, by altering the behaviour of instructors to adjust for a more equitable inclusion of women in the classroom, given the preponderance of men, assert a positive influence on the salient identities of these women, thereby tipping the balance in favor of remaining in the group? It is a question we would do well to think about when we consider how best to retain women during the early days of their training as officer-cadets.

Conclusion

We make the mistake of assuming that all women are at-risk in the military context, but we also are mistaken if we assume that they must survive in the make-it-or-break-it sense. Although women don’t want to be treated differently from men in the military, and it is the official policy of the Canadian Armed Forces to include women without special status or accommodation, nonetheless, at least at the very beginning of their careers as officer-candidates, women are at risk, due in part to issues of salient identity which resolve, in too many cases, with a voluntary withdrawal from the group, and from the military college. By having a clear understanding of the pressures which are brought to bear upon women in predominantly male environments, we can increase their chances of success: by enabling them to form a critical mass in the classroom, by opening a space for their input in group and whole class discussions, by bearing in mind gendered aspects of the learning process – aspects that may indeed change over time as students enter the college who have been differently – more androgynously – enculturated. Is this treating women differently? I believe it is respecting them and making space for them in a world in which they can succeed, admirably.

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1 These are rough statistics from personal observation over the last six years at Royal Military College Saint-Jean.
4 Timothy C. Winegard, Oka: A Convergence of Cultures and the Canadian Forces (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2008), 79.
6 Ibid, 623.
7 Jackson Katz, The Macho Paradox (Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, 2006). This book updates concepts which first appeared in the 1999 documentary video, Tough Guise, which examined the social construction of masculine identity.
9 Having said this, it is clear that such essentialist thinking persists in terms of perceptions concerning women’s behaviour. Miller and Moskos reported that women were seen as a ‘weakness’ in the American force in Somalia: “I’ve noticed that some of the women over here have been very gentle with the society around them, and are putting


11 Ibid, 135.


14 Ibid, 140.

15 Ibid, 141.

16 Ibid, 154.

17 Ibid, 154.

18 Ibid, 154.

19 Ibid, 155.


21 Ibid, 160.

22 Ibid, 184.

23 Ibid, 183.


31 Ibid.


35 Donaldson, 652.


41 Ibid, 249.
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42 Ibid, 249.
43 Ibid, 249.
44 Ibid, 249.