

"The Military Is the Wife and I Am the Mistress": Partners of Lesbians in the Canadian Military

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ABSTRACT

Lesbian partners of servicewomen remain invisible despite policy changes regarding homosexuals in the Canadian Military. Based on interviews with these women, a defiant understanding of "the dependant wife" is presented. The everyday impact of the Military on the lives of partners, the psychological processes involved in managing such an erasing social context, and the tensions between the lesbian and military cultures are presented.

RÉSUMÉ

Malgré les changements apportés aux politiques concernant les homosexuels dans les Forces militaires canadiennes, les conjointes des militaires lesbiennes demeurent invisibles. Des entrevues auprès de ces femmes, en brosse un portrait défiant qui ne correspond pas au terme d'« épouse dépendante ». L'article traite de l'impact quotidien des pratiques militaires sur la vie de ces conjointes, des effets psychologiques qui en découlent et de la tension qui existe entre les cultures lesbienne et militaire.

In 1992, the Canadian Military officially ended its sanctioned discrimination of homosexuals (News Release/Communiqué AFN: 57/92 1992). For an institution that depends on the rehearsal of cohesion in facing differences, this represented a drastic policy shift; in fact, it meant giving up a tool and a strategy for the practice of ratified hatred. The practice of the hate of "otherness" is fundamental to the institution of the military: the enemy is socially constructed as "the other" and hate is a necessary psychological emotion in order to kill (Grossman 1995). The Military's policy change regarding homosexuality represents an astonishing demonstration of the influence society and its practices, in this case the decisions of the "civilian" court system, has on one of its most insular organisations.¹ Laws, however, are quicker to change than attitudes and practices.

Since 1996, partners of lesbian or gay service members can be officially recognized as same sex dependents by the Military, and thus, access benefits afforded to common-law heterosexual partners (CANFORGEN 094/96 1996). In 1994, Harrison and Laliberté published their book, *No Life like It: Military Wives in Canada*, wherein they document the reality of "heterosexual" women who are partnered with male members of the Canadian Military (see also, Family Violence and the Military Community Research Teams 2000; Harrison 1997; Harrison and Laliberté

1993 & 1997). Given this publication and the policy changes regarding homosexuality, it is surprising that to this day, the reality faced by partners of military lesbians remains unexamined and manifestly invisible. Nothing is known regarding the impact of these recent changes, and of the Military in general, on their lives.

Because bringing what is private into the public sphere is a step toward resisting erasure, this paper aims to address the paucity of information regarding these "invisible wives." I argue that the Canadian Military, through its practices, has erased the reality of the lesbian military partner. It has done so in various ways: until 1992, their presence was deemed illegal; between 1992 and 1996, complacency and a tradition of heterosexism sufficed in keeping them invisible; and, since 1996, their needs have been subsumed under those of "dependents," which is a patriarchal construction of "wife and children" that reinforces the heterosexual hegemony of the military culture (Gouliquer 2000).

To make my argument, I begin by describing the empirical work and feminist epistemological framework on which the present study is based. I then briefly outline the analytic approach adopted to examine the data. I follow with a sample of themes that exemplify how the Military organises the social and influences the psychological realities of participants. To conclude, I advance that the Military's construct of "dependent

wife" conflicts with the "lesbian culture," and discuss the psychological effects it has on partners of military lesbians. Finally, I make a plea for the need to insure a voice for all groups, including those who are marginalised and often invisible.

METHODOLOGY

Between 1997 and 2000, in collaboration with Lynne Gouliquer, I began interviewing military lesbians and their partners for a larger study (see Gouliquer 2000, for a presentation of the 1997 series of interviews with military lesbians). To solicit potential participants, we first relied on Gouliquer's connections with military women, developed over the course of sixteen years of service in the Canadian Forces. Subsequently, the *snowball approach* and presentations of our preliminary analyses in various public forums (Gouliquer 2000; Gouliquer and Poulin 1999; Poulin 1999; Poulin and Gouliquer 1999) produced additional participants. The present analysis is based on ten initial and two follow-up interviews with partners of military members, and my own past-experience as a lesbian partner of a military lesbian. The interviews were structured as life histories, limited in coverage to the time period effected by the Canadian Military. Interviews were carried out in the home of the participants, with the exception of two where alternative arrangements were made (in a friend's home and over the telephone).

The epistemological framework shaping this work is standpoint epistemology (Harding 2001 & 1987) and the methodology is institutional ethnography (Smith 1987). Standpoint epistemology recognises experience as a way of knowing, and values the knowledge of the oppressed. It shares many of the same principles as those of Marxist analyses (Hartsock 1987); accordingly, the oppressed develop a bifurcated consciousness as a means of survival. They understand and anticipate the action of the oppressor, and manage their lives in accordance with these demands (Harding 1991). A "methodology" represents a method situated in the context of a specific epistemological tradition. In other words, a method that is chosen with consideration for the particular assumptions of an epistemological framework, can be referred to as a

"methodology" (Harding 1987). Institutional ethnography, developed by Smith (1986 & 1987), represents a methodology as it adheres to the assumptions of a standpoint epistemology. In this context, the experiences of women, and how their everyday lives are shaped and organised, mark the place where the investigation begins. The aim is to uncover the social organisations that give meaning to these experiences.

By utilising this methodology, a wealth of information regarding the lives of Canadian military lesbian partners was obtained and provides an understanding of the "relations of rulings" (Smith 1987) that shape their lives. This information also taps into how "individual psychologies intersect with social ideologies" (Khayatt 1992, 77).

FINDINGS: A STRUGGLE BETWEEN TWO CULTURES

Partners of military lesbians find themselves caught between two, often opposing, cultures: military and lesbian.² Their intimate relationships with military members force these lesbians to face many of the same issues as those faced by heterosexual military wives (Enloe 1983; Harrison and Laliberté 1994; Marriott 1997). For the most part, however, lesbians must do so invisibly. Nevertheless, given that being out is not an all-or-nothing state of being (Stone 1998), the reality of these women is complex.

The following themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews and encompass various domains, both personal and professional: finances, postings, career issues, support and network of friends, being in the closet, and coming out officially. Participants' understandings of their reality, in the form of quotes, have been used to illustrate each "organising experience."

FINANCES

A woman who comes out to herself as a lesbian quickly learns that she must rely on herself financially. Unlike heterosexual women, she will not expect or dream for a husband to support her financially (Bunch 1987). Typically, she also does not anticipate that her partner will be in a financial position to support her. Each participant in the study

spoke about her financial reality. Finances represent a major concern for the military lesbian's partner, and the power dynamics that accompany financial independence is an underlying discourse. This dynamic is exemplified by an excerpt where Cali³ (8-year relationship) describes her sense of responsibility about finances:

Money is not necessarily a major factor but it's always there. And nobody, at least I don't want to feel like I am being kept. I want to contribute whatever I can. When I found out [that] I got hired full time, it was like a relief and this weight came off my shoulders.

The importance of managing the dynamics accompanying the issue of finances is present when women first get involved together. Given that the military woman's career tends to take precedence over that of the partner, the civilian partner can rarely contribute equally, which results in an emotional weight. Brittany (1½-year relationship) illustrates how important this issue is:

I feel bad not being able to have the income she has because I don't have as good a paying job. She makes three times what I make and I hate that. That part doesn't sit well with me because I don't feel that I'm contributing enough. I mean I pay as much as I can. And the benefits, I don't have the benefits as much as she does.

For some of the partners, this becomes a frustrating reality and resentment sets in:

These "guys" go through trade's training, and they are making like, \$38,000 a year. They don't even have grade 12. You get a week off to play broomball, you get a week off to go play this and that. This is not the real world! When I started off with TWWK, I was making \$23,000 a year. That's when I started to resent it because I would work hard. I worked like, 12 or 13 hour shifts. Standing all the time. (Alice, 7-year relationship)

While some authors have argued that heterosexual military wives are more likely to be employed these days, providing them with greater financial stability and self-esteem (Drewry Lehr 1999), given the demands of the military lifestyle, it is unlikely that many will attain parity in salaries. For example:

So I did shift-work for the first year...working at convenience stores, wherever I could find work. And Victoria made thousands of dollars per year, where there were some years, I would barely squeak out ten. (Frances, 3-year relationship)

While couples discussed the issue of financial contributions openly, not all of them found a satisfactory resolution to the inequality. The power associated with financial resources is conspicuous, and given that gender does not determine who should assume financial responsibilities, it represents a notable negotiated domain. As soon as the relationship becomes strained, this issue is one of the first to surface. Frances recounts such a culmination of events:

We had a very rough go. When I agreed to move out there with her in '89, I agreed fifty-fifty, right down the middle. [But] it was impossible for me to keep it fifty-fifty. I had just bought a car because I had to commute. I was spending on gas. You're paying your rent, and everything else, and of course there are phone bills, 'cause I'm going to be calling home. It [the relationship] ended in '91. When I left, it was very bitter.

This last quote highlights another aspect of military life which shapes the lesbian military partner: given that military members are posted from one location to another every three to eight years, this circumscribes the ability of their partners to further their careers.

POSTINGS

Like their heterosexual counterparts (Harisson and Laliberté 1994), lesbian partners

regularly face being uprooted, thereby creating a lack of continuity in their employment. These frequent relocations have brought about a pattern in lesbian military relationships: when the servicewoman wishes to end a relationship, a posting will often provide the excuse for the separation to take place, without dealing with the break-up in a forthright manner or acknowledging that she wants out of the relationship. If the couple plans for the partner to move and the relationship does not last, the partner will often arrange to move back near her family or long-term friends, where she can garner support, both financially and emotionally. This is especially common when the posting is to a remote location, and there are few reasons to remain (e.g., no employment opportunity), which leads to numerous relocations. This is reflected in the following:

I moved a lot in my life with postings and break-ups and things like that. I have had more homes than I have fingers and toes practically. (Anita: 10-year relationship)

In addition, when partners of military lesbians are not officially declared as such with the Military, as was the case until 1996, a posting can engender additional complications. If the civilian partner is not out to her family, explaining relocations to isolated locations such as Chatham, New Brunswick, Borden, Ontario, or Cold Lake, Alberta, can be tricky, especially if she is leaving a good working position. For example:

I know my parents were upset that I left, but what are you going to do? You got to leave. But, I never spoke to my parents about it. (Frances)

When there have been too many of these moves to explain, some partners are forced to come out to their families, even if this is not the best time to do so, given how many stressors they are already facing at that particular time. For example, Alice got to the point where the pretences were no longer tenable:

I had run out of stories. I mean all my excuses were done, and nobody was going to buy any more stories. So I knew I had to

tell. Not only [I had to deal with] the distress of moving, I got a job, I got a transfer, that was hard to do. Just the stress of moving and realizing I'm going to a language I don't understand, and a place I'll have problems getting by...having to come out to my family [at that time] was very difficult.

A posting for the partner often represents a separation from support networks such as the family of origin and/or civilian friends. Consequently, remaining connected to an alternative social network, other than that of the military partner, becomes increasingly difficult. As noted in the last quote, for some, it is not only a move to an unfamiliar context but it may also involve a cultural and linguistic transition. Three women interviewed had such an experience.

For the servicewoman, a posting is a normal part of her career. For the long term, and sometimes the short term, it may represent an opportunity for a promotion and an increase in salary. To facilitate these transitions, the Military helps its members by defraying the cost of a "house hunting trip." If the member is married, the cost for the wife or husband to accompany the member is also covered. In the case of the "lesbian-military couple," this advantage is rarely part of their reality. Consequently, the decisions regarding future living arrangements rest on the shoulders of the military lesbian, unless the couple can afford to pay for the partner's travel, which was generally not the case for the women interviewed for this study.

The Military also defrays the cost of moving the member's household. Therefore, if the couple is not officially out, creative solutions must be developed to insure that the partner's belongings can be claimed as those of the member's. These arrangements represent sources of stress for the civilian lesbian partner, and places her in a dependent position towards her military partner and the Military itself. If the civilian partner has children, these postings may be even more complicated to arrange and justify. If custody is shared with an ex-husband who has no interest or reason to move, it can mean having to choose between her partner and regular contact with her children. One of the women interviewed feared that she could find herself in this situation in the years

following the interview.

When a heterosexual couple is recognised officially by the Military either as married or common-law, and living in separate locations is "chosen" due to a posting, the military member is given additional perks and pay known as "separation pay." This is intended as a form of compensation and can go towards additional expenses encountered. Before 1996, no lesbian couple could benefit from this compensation and the cost of staying in touch, and maintaining dual households represented a financial hardship for these women. This was the case for Kelly (8-year relationship) and her military partner who was attending military college in the late '80s, early '90s.

Postings for the military lesbians, therefore, have purposes that provide a meaning for frequent moves. The civilian partner, however, must justify to herself and her family the associated hardships of this organisational practice. The timing is not flexible, so that civilian partners must adapt to military members' schedules, bringing about challenges and losses. The level of stress for the partner will be mediated by her individual psychological and physical health, social support, and financial resources. It will influence relational aspects of her everyday life and her career.

CAREER ISSUES

Given lesbians' concern for financial self-reliance, and their frequent childless status (nine out of the ten women interviewed did not have children), their careers tend to play a considerable role in their lives and personal identities. The partner of a military lesbian often sacrifices her career goals, if the relationship is to last. Cali explains:

If she is posted, I have no choice, I have to go, and my career ends. I will start from ground zero again...not easy, but if it has to happen, it has to happen.

The success of the Military in erasing the presence of the lesbian partner depends on its ability to create a context where the partner "self-erases" and sees it as "normal," for instance, to abandon her career aspirations. The following quote provides some insights into this process:

If her job goes civilian, does she get out? And she said to me, it's something we have to talk about, and I said, well, it's nothing "we" have to talk about, this is your career but she said it is "our" decision. And I thought this was really nice of her to include me in her career. Like, you know, I'll follow you anywhere. Whatever you want to do, wherever you want to go, I'm there for you. I can get a job anywhere. I mean, it's not difficult to ask if you want fries with that burger. I mean it's a small job but it's a job. (Brittany, 1½-year relationship)

This "self-erasing," however, clashes with the military lesbian culture, and Eileen's quote (10-year relationship) indicates this struggle: "*Your life is on hold for years and years!*" Despite the demands of postings, some civilian partners managed to pursue personal goals: one successfully negotiated transfers with her employer, another completed a university degree pooling courses taken at four different universities, and three became proficient in their second language. Nevertheless, none of them considered separation, due to a posting or a long temporary duty (TD), nor thought of these impositions as positive or welcome aspects of military life. The drive for independence and self-sufficiency among participants was evident and it is impossible to know what career path these women would have followed had they not been involved with military members. The Military's organisational impositions require endless flexibility on the part of the civilian partner.

TEMPORARY DUTIES

An integral element of the military member's life is to be sent on TD (e.g., a deployment or training course). Once again, her career progression is influenced by her ability to go on TD with very little notice. To do so, priority cannot be placed on her home responsibilities, and she must have a dependable support system to call upon when the need arises. Like her heterosexual counterpart, the military lesbian partner is often left managing the household. Franky (3-year relationship) explains how she tightly managed their finances:

It [deployment] was [for] about seven months.... Because the accounts were joint, I made sure the bills were covered, I also made sure she had enough money and we made an agreement: I would ask her, 'how much you need?' I made sure so much was set aside for her. I would take care of everything at my end. We talked on the phone every single day.

While material demands are managed, separations remain challenging psychologically. Jessica (2-year relationship) provides an example of the strain this can represent:

[On some TD's,] we wouldn't talk for a couple of weeks, and I would sit around waiting for her to call. I missed her a lot, and then she would finally call, and I would feel anger towards her for some reason. I wouldn't mean to and it's not that she had done anything wrong. I just felt some kind of resentment, because it's like you are all the way out there, you left me, kind of thing. Like, we'd talk once a week and I'd tell her the big things that had happened, but as far as specific little things that you normally get to tell your partner when you are with her every single day, we missed out on that.

Given the ability of the Military to "normalize" its demands, none of the partners interviewed directed her resentment towards the organisation. Rather, an almost fatalistic sentiment was more common. As Kelly demonstrates:

You are missing the other person an awful lot. But it's for a reason that is out of both of our control, so you can't be angry at her, and you just get on with your life, and like I said, I'm a very independent person so I'm always going to find things to keep myself amused.

Isolation, as an additional hardship, was also discussed by some of the civilian partners. For example, Eileen reports taking more than a year to develop a circle of friends when she joined her partner at a distant location. Thus, the Military way

of life not only demands that lesbian partners deal with frequent separations, but the remoteness of many military bases can intensify the feelings of isolation and loneliness. Civilian lesbian communities are often non-existent in such locations, which renders the partner even more dependent on the military community.

FRIENDS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

Despite the change in policy regarding the recognition of homosexual common-law partners in 1996, the Military does not provide a social infra-structure, such as the Military Family Support Program for heterosexual wives, catering to the needs of and providing a culture for lesbian partners, which differentiates them from their heterosexual counterparts. Arguably, all military family services and activities are meant to provide support to the "military wife, whether straight or gay." This is not the case, however, as the lesbian reality is not taken into consideration or acknowledged in this context. With irony in her voice, Jessica explains:

It's like I'm torn. I'm glad it's there [the Family Resource Centre], but I just don't want to feel like I am in need of it. So they really look after us; I hate going to those things - and I'm a 'military wife.' It's a good idea that they take care of the military wives, but you go and it's all women and their kids and I don't really care. I need a support group because of my other half? I'm not strong enough to handle it? If I meet somebody there, they will say, "oh who's your husband?" I will say, "Michelle Ladouceur!" It would be a lot easier if I could sit around the breakfast table talking about my lovely husband and my kids, [saying things like] aren't they cute, and guess what little Johnny did. If I was more like them...but I'm not and I just don't fit into that role.

Providing lesbian partners with the same services as those for heterosexual military wives is confusing equity with equality. The same services provided to both groups do not respond equally well to the needs of both groups. As Jessica's quote illustrates,

these services create further estrangement and isolation for the lesbian partner. It represents a lack of understanding and concern for the lesbian's reality.

It can be argued that the development of "cultural feminism" is the result of the prolific emergence of books, jewellery, music, and political analyses by and for lesbians in the last 25 years (Hyde 1996). Lesbians have developed very strong cultures given their marginal and oppressed status. In addition to the serendipitous meeting of each other, lesbians find one another in specific social locations (e.g., lesbian bars or dances), while engaging in specific social practices (e.g., activism and political action groups, playing on particular team sports). Traditionally, military lesbians and their partners have played or attended games of specific sports. A military lesbian culture has developed, mainly through the participation in broomball, softball, and hockey. If a lesbian partner does not play in a particular sport and her partner does, she is automatically enlisted as a "cheerleader" to the team and expected to attend related events. As Alice explains:

All our friends were always military. They played broomball and baseball, broomball, baseball, broomball, baseball. So you party, you socialize, it's just known that you are attached to the broomball team. You've become almost like a mascot. You also feel like a kind of a mascot.

IN THE "CLOSET"

Although the Military changed its policy on homosexuality in 1992, most lesbian servicewomen continued to strategically make their private lives invisible, including their partners. Carla illustrates how being closeted influenced her intimate practices and social reality:

The hardest thing is [that] we have to be so secretive in public. When she was going to Bosnia, I couldn't stand there like other wives could with their husbands and give her a big hug and kiss, and say I love you and I will miss you. You can't hold hands. It is basically: drop her off, and "hey, have a good trip kiddo." That's the keyword, she

knows what that means. (Carla, 4-year relationship)

Several authors have documented how "being out" significantly effects relationship quality (Ellis 1996); job satisfaction (Ellis and Riggle 1995; Woods and Harbeck 1991); and psychological adjustment, specifically in terms of anxiety, positive affectivity, self-esteem, positive identity development, and availability of social support (Ellis 1996; Jordan and Deluty 1998; Miranda and Storms 1989). When military lesbian partners are closeted in some areas of their lives, like any other homosexual in such a situation, stress is associated with this "double life" (Chauncey 1994; Khayatt 1992). This stress adds to that resulting from military practices such as postings. Jessica demonstrates how this juggling act lead to poor psychological health:

If Michelle had been home, I would have been fine with my job. Or, if Michelle would have been away, [and] I had a better job, then it would have been fine. I ended up having to take about two weeks stress leave, just because of everything. My job, Michelle being away, it was just really hard. And plus, the people that I worked with didn't know about me and Michelle, so they didn't know that I was going through this.

Partners' ability to manage these double lives is impressive, but constant vigilance comes at a cost. At least, the threat of being investigated and "caught" is no longer a factor to be reckoned with as it was prior to 1992.

COMING OUT OFFICIALLY

While younger women were more likely to choose to come out officially to the Military, older women were more fearful, having more knowledge and experience with the era when homosexuality was deemed a criminal offence. These women either had contact with the Military's Special Investigative Unit (SIU) themselves, knew people who had, or had heard extensive stories about the "witch hunt" (Gouliquer 2000). For the partners of military lesbians, coming out officially has many

implications related to the heterosexist environment the Military still embodies. Some fear that coming out officially could have negative career implications for their partners and lead to harassment in the work place. Yet, important and tangible benefits for the partner also make the decision to remain closeted, or to come out, not a simple one. For Brittany (1½-year relationship), the issue is complex:

I'm not sure I'm ready for her to do that because I don't want her to be ridiculed, I don't want her to be judged or hurt her career for doing this for me. So, it's a big step.... It wouldn't bother me to say she's my spouse, not one bit. My parents know so it's different, but her family doesn't know and she has a career, so I don't want her to hurt her career.

The themes presented above support the thesis that military social practices are grounded in a heterosexual and patriarchal hegemony (Gouliquer 2000). Despite changes to its officially sanctioned discriminatory practices, the interviews demonstrate that the Military continues to negatively affect the lives of these lesbian partners. The heterosexist and patriarchal social relations could only be made visible from the perspective of these women's lives (Harding 1991; Smith 1987).

DISCUSSION

According to Erving Goffman (1960), a total institution means a variety of conditions: for example, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority, various enforced activities are brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aim of the institution, and real or symbolic barriers indicating a break with the society "out there" exist. Arguably, the military is a total institution. It creates and elaborates a network of psychological, recreational, religious, economic, and educational services and facilities marked by convenience and reduced prices (Arkin and Dobrofsky 1978). By carefully structuring not only work activities, but also leisure activities and personal lives, the Military obtains full "devotion" and "commitment" from its members. Effectively,

these undertakings also isolate "wives and children" from the civilian world and its influences. Thus, the Military also maximizes the likelihood of having the full commitment and free additional involvement/work of the member's family. By doing so, military members have the support needed to perform their "duties" relatively uninterrupted (Harrison and Laliberté 1993 & 1994).

What happens, however, if the family of a female military member is a civilian woman? Until 1992, military rules made her an illegal entity: if suspected to be a lesbian and seen with military women, she could be investigated and followed. Between 1992 and 1996, military social homophobic practices rendered her presence invisible: even by 1997, none of the military lesbians Gouliquer (2000) interviewed had claimed "same-sex status." After 1996, she became a "dependent," thereby reinforcing the heterosexist hegemony of the Military as her needs were confounded with those of heterosexual military wives.

Doing an institutional ethnography allowed me to identify social sites and practices that uncovered the relations of ruling organising the civilian partners' lives (Smith 1986). But as a feminist psychologist, I was also interested in identifying psychological effects resulting from these practices. By first identifying the social sites, and then examining how women coped with these situations, I was able to uncover links between the psychological and the social. This strategy not only centrally situated women's everyday lives in this inquiry, but also their psychological experiences.

While some of the experiences of lesbian partners are similar to those of their heterosexual counterparts, others are different. One difference is cultural. Some Queer theorists argue that no single lesbian culture exists (Gamson 2000). There is evidence, however, indicating that many aspects that typically define cultures such as common symbols, music, and literature are in fact shared amongst lesbians (Hyde 1996; Penelope and Wolfe 1993). The interaction between lesbian cultural practices and that of the military are sometimes harmonious, but often in conflict.

On the harmonious side, when lesbians stay in the closet, it is advantageous for the Military and may protect the military lesbian from harassment due to homophobia. It also taps into

familiar behavioural repertoires for many military lesbians. For instance, in the Military, there is a code of conduct dictating that members in uniforms should not display affection. Lesbians are well versed in concealing their sexuality; thus, only displaying affection in private contexts often represents a shared requirement. Unfortunately, these practices allow the Military's heterosexist culture to remain unchallenged. Consequently, the closet may afford lesbians a limited sense of security, but it reinforces the Military's heterosexual image and culture, while socially, psychologically, and financially disadvantaging the military lesbians' partners. When not officially out, therefore, the invisibility of these women is doubly advantageous for the Military; not only its heterosexual image is bolstered, but no financial expenditure is incurred for the labour of the partners when the military lesbians are called away on duty.

On the less harmonious side, the military culture remains a hostile environment for women (O'Hara 1998 a, b), and in particular, lesbians (D'Amico 1997). As Gouliquer (2000) states, "how gay women live and negotiate their sexuality within the Canadian Military today is influenced by a past made up of discriminatory policies and practices, as well as a culture based on a hegemony of male heterosexuality and the denigration of homosexuality and femininity" (265). As mentioned previously, the term "dependent," used to refer to partners of military members, is in direct conflict with the lesbian's values of independence and self-sufficiency, which kept resurfacing throughout the interviews. Thus, being classified as a dependent may represent an additional psychological barrier to coming out officially and infantilizes women (Hyde 1996).

This paper represents the first documentation of the lives of lesbian partners of military members. It problematizes some of the Canadian Armed Forces' organisational practices and its hegemonic heterosexist culture. Until the Military considers problematic the associated impacts of these practices and culture, it will remain an environment that privileges patriarchal heterosexuality at a cost to women and homosexuals.

In addition, the present study sheds light on some of the psychological effects the Canadian Military has on partners of military lesbians.

Despite the convenience of their invisibility for the military system, like other marginalised groups, they deserve a voice, equal rights, and equity. While military lesbian partners make the best of a constraining situation, they do so at significant personal costs. The required need placed on them to remain flexible and adaptable is much like what young heterosexual women do for their "as-yet-unknown" husbands (Angrist 1969). The psychological consequence is often to erase their needs, aspirations, and values, and replace them with those of their partners' and the Military's. Cali sums it up in the following way:

Whereas the guys can take their wives, girlfriends, and do whatever, Karla can't take me all the time, Karla can't talk about me. Karla can't say, "oh ya we did this, this weekend, we went out on the boat and we got drunk and we did this and that." She can't do that so if I were to sum it up, the Military is the wife and I am the mistress.

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ENDNOTES

1. The events that have led to the policy shifts regarding homosexuality in the Canadian Military have already been documented by a number of authors (e.g., Belkin and McNichol 2000; Gouliquer 2000; Park 1994).
2. I come back to the contentious issue of the existence of a lesbian culture in the discussion. At this point, I am not arguing that a single lesbian culture exists. I do contend, however, that groups of lesbians share essential elements that define "cultures," distinguished from the dominant culture, and are justified in claiming to have a culture of their own.
3. Pseudonyms have been used, and identities are sometimes discontinued between quotes to further conceal identity. Quotes have been edited to remove repeated words and hesitations to facilitate reading comprehension.

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