"The Strength behind the Uniform": Acknowledging the Contributions of Military Families or Co-Opting Women's Labour?

Leigh Spanner is a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Social Innovation and Community Engagement in Military Affairs (SICEMA) at Mount Saint Vincent University. At SICEMA, she is undertaking research funded by a SSHRC Insight Grant, which explores the gendered dynamics of the transition from military to civilian life in Canada. Her work examines gender norms and power relations in state militaries and Canadian defence and security policy, with a particular focus on how intimate lives and households are integrated into, and shaped by, national security objectives. Leigh received her PhD in Political Science from the University of Alberta in 2019. Her research has been published in *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* and *Critical Military Studies*.

Abstract: Since 2008, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has called the military family "the strength behind the uniform." The contributions and sacrifices of military families, and in particular spouses, are now formally recognized as essential to operational effectiveness, such as the ability to deploy troops quickly and easily. This represents a departure from previous eras, which took for granted the "naturalness" of a gendered division of labour in military households in support of organizational goals. Making visible and valuing this work parallels recent efforts by the CAF to improve the wellbeing of its people and advance gender equality in the organization and on operations. This article considers the gendered labour and power implications of formally recognizing the contributions of military families and spouses to the CAF. What does recognizing the military family as "the strength behind the uniform" mean for women and the gendered labour relations in military families? By drawing on analyses of policies, programs, and institutional rhetoric, alongside interviews by military family members, the article argues that in formally recognizing the family's contribution to operational effectiveness, the CAF is co-opting the labour and loyalty of women spouses in military families. The institutional emphasis on "taking care of its people" obscures the ways in which the service required of military families is gendered and relies on women being constrained by traditional gender norms. These findings have implications for the genuine wellbeing of military families and for assessing feminist progress, or lack thereof, within the CAF institution.

Keywords: Canadian Armed Forces, gender, gendered division of labour, heteropatriarchy, military, military families, military spouses

> [Military families] are an integral part of our Canadian Armed Forces, and their support, commitment and contributions are essential to the success of our operations…Today, join me in paying tribute to the military families whose commitment and support make such a difference to our women and men in uniform. Their personal sacrifices, which sometimes go unnoticed, deserve our heartfelt thanks. Military families, you truly are the strength behind the uniform. Thank you very much.
>
> Honourable Harjit Sajjan
> Minister of National Defence
> (Sajjan 2019)

Since 2008, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has called the military family "the strength behind the uniform." As expressed in the tweet above by Canada's Minister of National Defence on International Day of Families, the contributions and sacrifices of military families, and in particular spouses, are now formally recognized as essential to operational effectiveness, including recruitment and retention, as well as to morale and deployability. This represents a departure from previous eras, which took for granted the "naturalness" of a gendered division of labour in military households in support of organizational goals. Feminist scholarship reveals the ways in which militaries are indebted to the everyday, reproductive labour of women in the household (Basham and Catignani 2020, 2018; Chisholm and Eichler 2018; Enloe 2000, [1983] 1988). As articulated in the Atlantis (2001) special issue on "Women and the Canadian Military" published 20 years ago, combat readiness, specifically deployments, do not just happen at the level of the institution, but require the deliberate work of women at various stages in the process, in the family and in the home (Norris 2001). The work of military spouses in the home is feminized by heteropatriarchal divisions of labour sustained by a separation of the public from private sphere. This reproductive labour is feminized by its location in the private sphere and association with women's work, which renders it unpaid, undervalued, taken-for-granted, invisible, and subordinate to work in the public sphere (Basham and Catignani 2020, 3). This division of labour sustains male dominance in militaries and in families. Recognizing the crucial contributions of military families and spouses suggests that the gendered order of military family life may be changing, however as we see in this article, this is in question.

Strategies to secure the feminized labour by military families require ongoing adaptations to be effective (Enloe 2000) and are characterized in Canada today by a more formal recognition of military families. Making visible and valuing the work of military families is complemented by the CAF's commitment to support family wellbeing through the provision of programs and resources, such as deployment, mental health, and relationship support. These initiatives parallel recent efforts by the CAF to improve the wellbeing of its military members and to advance gender equality in the organization and its operations.

This article considers the gendered labour and power implications of formally recognizing the contributions of military families and spouses to the CAF. Specifically, I ask: what does recognizing the military family as "the strength behind the uniform" mean for women and the gendered labour relations in military families? I argue that in formally recognizing the family's contribution to operational effectiveness, the CAF is co-opting the labour and loyalty of women spouses in military families. By appealing to their indispensable roles and in providing programs and resources that support wellbeing, the CAF is changing the conditions and logics through which military spouses provide labour in support of the organization and its goals. The CAF assists military spouses in being "the strength behind the uniform" through resilience training and support for strong military marriages, but it is the military spouses' ability to adhere to a heteropatriarchal division of labour that is being strengthened. That is, intimate relationships and the emotional labour provided by the military family, most often wives, is being instrumentalized for operational goals, such as deployment (Howell 2015a; see also Howell 2015c). This intensifies the work required of military families and spouses and raises questions about the genuine wellbeing of military families within the CAF.

This research is informed by thematic analyses of policies, programs, institutional rhetoric, and interviews I conducted with 28 Canadian military family members between 2016 and 2018. The interviews focused on the contributions made by military spouses and families, how the CAF supports them in return, and how these contributions and supports are informed by gendered ideas and practices. Interviewees represented diverse identities and family arrangements. I spoke with civilians and service members; men and women; members of dual-service couples, dual-income families, single-income families; families with and without dependent children; single parents; and individuals identifying as Indigenous and as LGBTQ. The interviews were face-to-face and took place in people's homes (both on and off base), coffee shops, and libraries in various cities across Canada. While the contributors to this study represented a diverse group, most military spouses were civilian women married to men in service. This is reflective of Canadian military families and marriages, where 98% of military spouses are female and 85% of service members are male (Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) 2019b, 7). Thus, this research is about "where the women are" (Enloe [1990] 2014, 1-36) in Canadian military families. It is also about the gendered norms and labour practices that inform military family life, which can persist regardless of the sex of the individuals because of militarism's reliance on heteropatriarchal norms, such as the gendered division of labour (Basham and Catignani 2020).

This article proceeds in three sections. I begin by outlining how the contributions of military families and spouses have shifted away from being taken for granted, if not concealed, to being formally acknowledged as crucial to operational effectiveness. The second section considers the partnership with and support for military families through military separation, such as deployments, training, and exercises. By both instructing military families in resilience and in requiring that caregiving plans be in place for family separations such as deployments and exercises, the military reaffirms its reliance on military spousal labour and their primary responsibility for the "home front." The third section of this article evaluates the institutionalized support for "healthy" military marriages and relationships. These wellbeing initiatives signal the CAF's ongoing reliance on particular forms of kinship and its associated labour practices. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these new strategies in understanding progress for women in the CAF.

Incorporating the Military Family into Operational Effectiveness

> The [CAF] has tried to be more family caring and understanding…. [There are] two reasons they do that. One, [the] public eye is on them. Two, they're trying to get the family [to] support [the CAF] a little more…the family's support [has been] drifting. (Author interview with military spouse)

Military spouses recognize that their work and commitment is essential to the effective functioning of militaries. As indicated by the military spouse above, whose husband has served for over 13 years and has been deployed on several missions, the need to maintain the labour and loyalty of military spouses has provoked the CAF to direct more energy and resources to military family wellbeing. This section traces how the military family has become co-opted by the CAF as partner in operational and organizational effectiveness.

The labour and loyalty of military spouses and families have not always been formally acknowledged as crucial to the CAF, nor supported with institutional resources (Harrison and Laliberté 1994; Military Family Services (MFS) 2016). The contributions of military spouses have long been assumed to take place naturally and free of cost because of the gendered ideas about what wives ought to do in support of militaries and their husbands (Enloe 2000). A heteropatriarchal "privileging of binary gender relations, masculinity and heterosexuality," which characterizes military norms (Basham and Catignani 2020, 3), sustains a gendered division of labour whereby male breadwinners are able to participate in the public sphere, such as military service, because a feminized spouse provides unpaid and undervalued reproductive

labour in the private sphere (Basham and Catignani 2018; Chisholm and Eichler 2018; Gray 2016; Hyde 2016). It follows from the gendering of spheres that only some labour is deemed relevant to global security practices (Chisholm and Stachowitsch 2016, 826; see also Elias and Rai 2015; Elias and Roberts 2016). As the reproductive labour undertaken in military homes, which includes the material and physical reproduction of the military labour force as well as emotional and affective activities (Hedström 2020, 6-7), is devalued through processes that render it apolitical and invisible, "male domination of both spheres" results (Basham and Catignani 2018, 154). That is to say, the public/private divide and its associated labour practices sustain the privilege of men and masculinity in international security through militaries, as well as in the economy and politics more broadly.

Due to the gendered valorization of labour in militaries, military spouses have less power and privilege in the military and in military families. As noted in the 2001 special issue of Atlantis, because spouses are not official military members and due to the primacy of the institution and its commitment to combat readiness, "female military partners are relegated to a subordinate position within their families and within the military institution" (Norris 2001, 57; see also Gray 2016; Hyde 2016). Through a combination of patriarchal and military norms, the military spouse is socialized to acquiesce to the serving spouse and to the military in exchange for social belonging and economic security associated with being married to a military member, such as a built-in military family community and a stable family income. The spouse's contributions are acquired through social pressures, such as praise, criticism, and self-censorship (Harrison and Laliberté 1994, 83), and real or perceived career ramifications for the military member, such as promotion and postings (Norris 2001, 57). Through gendered ideologies, norms, and social and institutional pressure, military spouses internalize a requirement to support operational readiness, which includes the ability to deploy on short notice and to be relieved of domestic concerns (Enloe 2000; Harrison and Laliberté 1994; Norris 2011).

Over time, military families and spouses have demanded more from the CAF in exchange for their contributions. For instance, in 1984 military wives at CAF Base Penhold, near Red Deer, Alberta, founded the Organizational Society of Spouses of Military Members (OSSOMM) as the impetus for formal recognition and support for Canadian military families. OSSOMM advocated for wives' perspectives to be integrated into department policies that affect them and for an improved quality of life for CAF families. Specifically, OSSOMM campaigned for resources such as dental care, pensions, and childcare assistance, as well as rights, including the right to organize politically on or off base. Canadian military wives threatened to withdraw their unpaid labour in support of the military if these demands were not met (Harrison and Laliberté 1997, 42). Because it threatened to undo the cohesion and effectiveness of the military, the political organizing and advocacy of military spouse groups in the 1980s, such as OSSOMM, resulted in Senate hearings on the question of family wellbeing. In fact, military wives' dissatisfaction, and the risk of losing their labour and support, became a threat to national security (MFS 2016, 2). This galvanized the CAF to acknowledge the military family's important contributions to organizational and operational effectiveness.

OSSOMM's activism led the CAF to produce a series of studies, working groups, and reports, such as the *Study Report on Spousal Family Associations* (1988), to consider how to improve military family wellbeing because of its relationship to organizational effectiveness. In particular, CAF leadership was concerned that spousal advocacy and organizing, resulting from dissatisfaction with military life, would threaten the military chain of command and discipline within the CAF. By reviewing British and American military family associations, the CAF concluded that the military chain of command could be strengthened if a family organization committed to military family and community wellbeing was established in partnership and consultation with CAF leadership (MFS 2016, 3-4). The *Study Report on Spousal Family Associations* recommended a consultative relationship between civilian spouses and the CAF on matters affecting family and community wellbeing, and new support centres to support military family wellbeing.

Together, OSSOMM's activism, the findings of the family associations report, and political will resulted in the formation of Military Family Services (MFS) in 1991. Institutional approval for MFS was granted on the basis that the military family's contributions to the CAF "called for a bond of mutual responsibility and commitment between the Canadian Armed Forces and military families" (MFS 2016, 4-5). In other words, the CAF acknowledged that sustaining the support provided by military families requires institutional intervention to keep them committed to military life.

Recognizing the military family as a partner in operational effectiveness began to emerge more strongly following the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs (SCONDVA) Report of 1998, titled *Moving Forward: A Strategic Plan for Quality of Life Improvements in the Canadian Armed Forces* (Parliament of Canada 1998). SCONDVA officially linked the contributions and sacrifices of military families to the operational effectiveness of the CAF, with a particular focus on recruitment and retention. The study itself was motivated by the CAF's concern with the decreasing quality and quantity of recruits, as well as service retention problems, which characterized the mid-1990s. SCONDVA concluded that the CAF has an obligation to enhance military members' wellbeing and quality of life because of its implications for retention and recruitment. The report prompted the creation of Defence Administrative Order and Directive (DAOD) on Families 5044-1 in 2000, a policy which outlines the CAF's responsibility for military family wellbeing and the military family's crucial role in the military community.

The relationship between military families and the CAF is governed under DAOD 5044-1, Families (National Defence 2000). DAODs are issued by or under the authority of the Deputy Minister of Defence and the Chief of Defence staff, establish the administrative directions for civil servants of the Department of National Defence (DND), and serve as orders for members of the CAF. Directive 5044-1 states, "the organization requires its members to place service to country and needs of the Canadian Armed Forces ahead of personal consideration…[which] may create profound disruption for the families of the Canadian Armed Forces members" (National Defence 2000). The directive acknowledges the contributions and sacrifices made by Canadian military families, and as such, commits to reducing the negative impacts of frequent family separations and postings on the family. The directive formalizes the CAF's commitment to supporting military families, especially considering "the ever-changing structure, composition and function of Canadian families" (National Defence 2000). The CAF has adjusted their programming to respond to the changing needs of military families, including shifting family demographics and the increasingly combat orientated nature of missions, deployments, and training.

Contemporary wisdom acknowledges that the military family's, and in particular the spouse's, satisfaction with military life is positively correlated to organizational and operational effectiveness (Laplante and Goldenberg 2017). As indicated at the top of this section by a military spouse of 13 years who has three young children, maintaining the support and securing the essential contributions of military families has required that the CAF increase its attention to and support for them. The newest strategy to secure the family's support for the military has been to formally acknowledge the military family's contributions as partner in operational effectiveness—as "the strength behind the uniform"—and, accordingly, to provide institutional supports and resources in this regard.

This recognition was prompted by the combat-oriented missions and onerous operational tempo of the late 2000s, due especially to the war in Afghanistan (2001-2014). During this time, 40 000 CAF members were deployed to the region, which took an immense toll on CAF personnel and their families, including family separation, service-related injuries, and death. This prompted the CAF to formalize their partnership with military families through the Canadian Forces Family Covenant, issued in 2008. A covenant is a contract between two parties; in this case it is an agreement on the part of the CAF to support military family wellbeing in exchange for their "key

contributions in enabling an operationally effective and sustainable military force" (CFMWS n.d.(a)). Emphasizing military families as allies in operational effectiveness, the Covenant asserts, "The strength and resilience of military families contributes to the operational readiness and effectiveness of the Canadian Forces" (CFMWS n.d.(a)). Indeed, the tagline of the Covenant is "Military Families: The Strength Behind the Uniform," signalling that the CAF would not be as effective without the support and labour of military families and spouses. As a visible reminder of the military family's contributions to readiness, the Family Covenant is displayed in DND buildings, on wings, bases and units, and Canadian Military Family Resource Centres across the country (Dunnett 2014).

Formally acknowledging the service of military families in the Family Covenant reinforces the CAF's "responsibility to ease the burdens of service life of military families" (CFMWS n.d.(a)) and to continue improving services directed at family wellbeing (Dunnett 2014). Over time, the CAF's philosophy around families has shifted away from the sentiment "if the military wanted you to have a wife, it would have issued you one," to the present philosophy "we recruit a member, but retain a family" (Dursun 2017, 2). Accordingly, military families receive more institutional support than ever before (Daigle 2013). Indeed, "well-supported, diverse, resilient people and families" is a central theme in Canada's 2017 defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (National Defence 2017). While these shifts may signal progress for the wellbeing of families and spouses, the formal recognition of military families and the associated policies and programs that support them, do little to dismantle the unequal gender norms and divisions of labour required by the CAF in decades before. Rather, viewing the military family as a partner in its operational goals, the CAF has formalized its dependence on the feminized labour and loyalties of military spouses, as we see in the next section on military separation.

Ensuring Operationally Ready Families

Military family life is characterized by frequent and prolonged separations. CAF members are separated from their families for operational reasons ranging from deployments, exercises, and courses. It is a service requirement that CAF members "remain mobile and deployable" and "place service to country above personal considerations" (National Defence 2000). As partners in operational effectiveness, military families are tasked with unpaid work in the private sphere, specifically providing a home and family life that facilitates the CAF member's mobility and deployability, which enables the service member to participate in the public activity of military service. This section details the ways in which the CAF organizes military families as partners in operational readiness, with a focus on the division of labour called for during family separation. Since 2000, the CAF has formally acknowledged the profound disruptions and sacrifices born by military families, especially through family separation, and provides resources to offset them. While the CAF's attention to family wellbeing throughout separation might signal progress for military wives, it is the terms upon which they are incorporated into operational effectiveness that reinforce a division of labour, thus appropriating the work of women. In particular, institutional interventions that enhance personal and family resilience and ensure that there are care plans for dependents download social reproductive responsibility onto spouses and make them more effective at providing unpaid labour in the home during military separations, such as deployments.

Military separations require daily material, emotional, and symbolic labour, which is undertaken disproportionately by women. This work is also gendered as women's work, especially those of "wives" and "mothers," through militarism's dichotomous constructions of masculinity and femininity (Hedström 2020). The labour involved in military separation can include: preparing the service member's equipment and uniforms before they deploy; practices of staying connected through separation, like creating and sending care packages and reading two stories to children at bedtime to offset the absent parent; and the affective work

of managing feelings of loneliness and fear of the remaining family members, often children, and renegotiating household dynamics when the service member returns. These practices are what Deborah Norris refers to as "working them out and working them in" (Norris 2001). A military spouse I interviewed in 2017, who has a young child and who suffered postpartum health issues reflects on the labour involved in military separations, including attending to the emotional needs of her child and her husband:

> [The] hardest element [of military life is] frequent separations. People make comments like, "you knew what you were getting yourself into." Actually, no I didn't. I truly didn't. Until my husband got deployed for the first time, I had no idea, and now we have children. Seeing my daughter cry at night looking at pictures of her dad, it's heartbreaking. When they come back home, they're supposed to fit back in, and it doesn't work. [My husband] tries to pick up the slack cause I'd been carrying the load, but it doesn't help, because he doesn't know how I've been doing it. He feels defeated cause he's trying to help. I don't know how to make that smoother. It is what it is. It's not going to change. You gotta get through it. (Author interview with military spouse)

At each stage of military separation come new challenges, requiring a flexible military spouse who readjusts the focus of her labour accordingly. As military families are recognized as "the strength behind the uniform," they are being called upon to "get through" the challenges of military separation. The terms of this partnership do little to rewrite the gendered division of work that supports operational effectiveness, but rather enhance these dynamics through the institutionalization of "resilience" as a skill and ethos.

"Canadian military families are resilient" is a new refrain touted by CAF officials, politicians, and military families themselves, and corresponds to CAF initiatives aimed at developing resilience in its employees and families. Resilience refers to the ability to thrive in the face of adversity (O'Malley 2010). Colloquially, to be resilient means to "bounce back," if not flourish, or "bounce forward" after hardship (Howell 2015b, 69). Now recognized as crucial to the success of military operations, military families are supported in developing resilience to the hardships of military separation through programs such as the Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) (CFMWS n.d.(e)) and the Canadian Army Integrated Performance Strategy (National Defence n.d.). Here, families are provided with guidance and techniques to be more effective at handling "extended separations, increased workloads, anxiety over the safety of their loved one, and managing transition and reintegration issues upon completion of the tour" (National Defence 2016a). Techniques for building resilience and reducing stress include maintaining a healthy lifestyle, such as proper sleep, nutrition, and exercise; mindfulness techniques, such as controlled breathing and positive self-talk; and building a community, by nurturing a support system and asking for help.

Resilience training compels spouses to enhance the military member's experience in deployment and their own success during family separation through neoliberal logics that make individuals responsible for their wellbeing (Joseph 2013). Neoliberal policies and norms, which privilege privatization, individualization, and familialization (Brodie 1997, 235-36), call on citizens to employ "technologies of the self" to withstand crises and insecurities (Neocleous 2013, 5). In the context of the military, Alison Howell refers to this as emotional self-governance required of military members and their families, which produces more efficient and capable militaries while reducing the military's healthcare costs (2015a; 2015c). Like the economically rational neoliberal subject who must overcome the insecurity and instability of capitalism (Joseph 2013), the military spouse must overcome the insecurities and instabilities associated with family separation through appropriate self-management (Howell 2015a). Prevention is the guiding principle of resilience training in the CAF. Averting the stressors of military life, such as deployment, is based on personal preparation and the acquisition of appropriate skills. Military families are told that they can prevent burnout, exhaustion, and stress by developing their flexibility and introspection, and by being adequately prepared.

Individualized notions of wellbeing divert institutional and political attention away from structural inequalities and vulnerabilities (Joseph 2013), such as the operational requirements and corresponding demands on military families, especially women. Through resilience, military families and spouses must now devote time to restructuring their habits, mindsets, and thoughts, so that they may be more effective partners in operational effectiveness. Importantly, military spouses are partners in operational effectiveness based on their ability to withstand the challenges associated with providing reproductive labour in the military home. By promoting and supporting military family wellbeing, the CAF is demanding even more of military spouses on top of the unpaid labour already provided by them. Through resilience training, military spouses become responsible for their wellbeing and for enhancing their capacity to provide unpaid reproductive labour. This becomes a challenge for military families who do not have a feminized spouse to fulfill this role, such as single parents who often rely on extended families or are forced to leave the military (see Brewster 2017; Falvey 2017).

Policies aimed at partnering with military families and supporting them through military separation, normalize a gendered division of labour in military family life, in particular the downloading of dependent care onto civilian spouses in the name of operational effectiveness. At the forefront of the CAF's recognition of the military family's contributions and the institutional attempts to alleviate the conflicting demands of service life and family life is the Family Care Plan (FCP) (CFMWS n.d.(b)). The FCP, which was instituted as a support initiative in 2002, ensures that military families have a plan in place for the care of dependents when the service member is obliged to be separated from their family. Specifically, the military member must designate a caregiver for dependents when they are required to be away from them for duty reasons. At its core, the plan ensures that service members remain deployable and operational, irrespective of the care requirements of their dependents. While the FCP is not legally binding, military members who fail to prepare an FCP and file this with their Commanding Officer risk administrative or disciplinary action.

Through the FCP, which aims to support military families through separation, the CAF transfers dependent care from the military and service member to a spouse in the name of operational effectiveness. Accordingly, the FCP reaffirms the heteropatriarchal power relations in the military family, where the service member holds principal authority over the family, and this authority permits delegation of caregiving responsibility to "usually the spouse" when they are required to be away for duty reasons (CFMWS n.d. (b)). Said another way, the military service member is the paternal head of household who has the authority to make strategic and managerial decisions about the care of their family and to assign the responsibility for quotidian caregiving of the family to their spouse. These mechanisms of support institutionalize the premise that, as many of my interview respondents noted, "There is a wife at home." Thus, these supports shape ideas about who is primarily responsible for domestic labour in military families. A stay-at-home military wife reflects on the division of labour in her family:

> It's me. That's why I ended up staying at home for now and making my own business…. If he's gone, what are you going to do? It's easier for us. Our life is planned [such] that I do it all and if he's [at] home it's a bonus. (Author interview with military spouse)

Formalizing the downloading of the responsibility for dependents onto military spouses revitalizes the male breadwinner/female caregiver formation of the family, under the guise of institutional support. That is to say, the CAF initiatives for family wellbeing rest on, and reproduce, the assumption that military spouses will downplay their careers and employment so that they can prioritize unpaid labour in the home and the care of dependents in the name of operational effectiveness (see Spanner 2020). This is significant, given that military spouses are more likely to experience unemployment and make less money than their civilian counterparts (Wang and Pullman 2019). Policies and corresponding ethos that insist on gendered divisions of labour in support of operational effectiveness raise important questions about family wellbeing, gender equality in the CAF community, as well as the genu-

ine integration of women in the CAF as military members.

Military families are now formally recognized as essential to operational effectiveness, especially through their sacrifices and contributions related to family separation. CAF efforts to reduce the burden of military separation on military families through resilience training and the FCP normalize a gendered division of labour and the appropriation of women's unpaid labour. Such initiatives are based on essentialist ideas of femininity and the privileging of heteropatriarchy, which inform ideal notions of conjugal relationships in military families. How the CAF supports military marriages to bolster operational and organizational effectiveness is the focus of the next section.

Co-Opting Military Marriages

The military family's contributions to operational effectiveness, which are characterized by heteropatriarchal power dynamics and gendered divisions of labour, are accomplished through normative ideas about the conjugal couple (Wool 2015, 27). Studies show that military members' satisfaction with their conjugal relationships, perceived spousal support, and spousal support for the member's career are positively correlated with the member's personal wellbeing, as well as "organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment, morale and turnover intentions" (Laplante and Goldenberg 2018, 30). That is to say, the very idea of the military family as partner in operational effectiveness relies on military marriages and relationships characterized by civilian spouses who structure their activities, identities, and efforts in support of the military member (Enloe 2000). As military spouses are recognized as crucial to the functioning of the organization, their intimate lives and relationships become a matter of military concern and institutional strategy, evident by the institutional investment in strengthening military marriages. These initiatives include the CAF's Healthy Relationships Campaign (CFMWS n.d.(c)), guides to intimacy (CFMWS n.d.(d)), and resources for military caregivers (Government of Canada 2019; Ottawa Public Health et al. 2016).

Because of the crucial contributions of military spouses, the CAF has an interest in keeping military marriages healthy and intact. In fact, resilience programs for militaries were developed, in part, to reduce the divorce rates among military families (Seligman and Fowler 2011, 84). The supports offered by militaries to keep military marriages together suggest that they would not be able to meet their institutional requirements without the commitments and unpaid labour of military spouses. Thus, as the CAF partners with military families to support military marriages, they secure the loyalty and labour of the military spouse for operational purposes.

CAF initiatives to support military marriages, such as the Healthy Relationships program, offer tips for navigating the challenges of military life and provide guidance on the continuum of intimacy, while normalizing ups and downs (CFMWS n.d. (c); Government of Canada 2019). Likewise, the CAF's resilience training includes resources for the conjugal military couple with a section of the training program titled "Reuniting with Your Partner or Spouse" (National Defence 2016b). The purpose of this resource is to facilitate the reintegration of the service member back into the home following deployment. Similarly, spouses who are caregiving for injured and ill military members are provided with guidance on how to navigate intimate relationships, including emotional and sexual intimacy with their partners who have service-related injuries and illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (CFMWS 2019a). Here, military caregivers are educated about the reasons injured and ill members withdraw from intimacy.

Acknowledging the military family as crucial to the operational effectiveness of the Forces legitimizes treating the physical and emotional intimacy in conjugal relationships as a matter of military concern. CAF support resources are devoted to strengthening the military marriage and to normalizing challenges and self-sacrifice by military spouses. Consider the following tips for a successful transition: "Ease back into intimacy. It's not easy to regain physical and emotional closeness after stressful situations," and "Tone down the fantasy—often how we structure it in our heads is

much different in reality!" (National Defence 2016b). Guides for military caregivers struggling with intimacy with their spouse suggest coping mechanisms for the caregiver/partner, such as positive thinking and self-talk: "I have a right to my emotions" and "I have the right to have my needs met" (Government of Canada 2019). Despite an acknowledgement of a military spouse's needs in marriage, she is being socialized to accept a military marriage/conjugal relationship characterized by a lack of intimacy, both sexual and emotional. Accordingly, self-sacrifice in military marriage by the military spouse, perhaps in the form of celibacy, becomes normalized. As revealed in my interviews, this expectation, which is now a part of a resilience mindset, works alongside the social expectation of monogamy by military wives and an associated condemnation of military wives who are unfaithful (see also Ziff and Garland-Jackson 2019, 8). Military spouses who embrace personal techniques, like positive self-talk, in order to be more amenable to the pressures associated with military marriages, such as loss of intimacy and self-sacrifice, are idealized in CAF resources designed to strengthen military marriages.

A strong military marriage secures the emotional and material labour provided by a military spouse, promotes and sustains a deployable and healthy force. Through a culture of resilience, the military spouse assumes responsibility for preventing operational stress injuries by providing a stable home-life and military marriage, as expressed by this military spouse of 18 years:

> [I read an] article recently [that] having support at home is the first line of defence of PTSD. Studies show [that] members who have support before and after they leave [on deployment] and come home to a family environment that is stable, [they] have lower chance of PTSD. We see that with the members that come back [to no support]. [However,] families can't be to blame; sometimes there's nothing that could have been done. [But] it helps with the resiliency of the member... [to have a] supportive family. [And] culturally, relationship-wise, we think we should leave unhappy relationships. [But] being happy all the time versus being abused isn't the same thing. (Author interview with military spouse)

The resilient military marriage, as characterized above, reinforces gendered images of conjugal relationships exemplified by a doting and nurturing civilian spouse, who need not be "happy all the time." To the military spouse above, being unhappy is not a sufficient reason to leave a military marriage. In a sense, the military spouse's rationale for staying in a military marriage echoes the "suck it up" and "work it out" mentality required of the ideal soldier in combat (Howell 2015b, 146). Institutional supports that keep conjugal relationships intact encourage spouses to take on the challenges of a military marriage in support of an operationally ready force, and military spouses internalize this requirement so long as the marriage difficulties are not too egregious, such as being "abused." It bears mention that we know that intimate partner violence in military marriages is experienced at a higher rate than in the civilian sector because of the gendered culture in militaries, and an organizational structure and norms that encourage secrecy (Harrison 2002). Indeed, research of the British military reveals that institutional resources to address military family violence are centred not around the abused family member, but around the military member's ability to deploy (Gray 2016).

As the CAF formalizes its partnership with military families through attention to military marriages, it revives the expectation that military spouses will acquiesce to the military member's career and to the requirements of the institution (Enloe 2000; Harrison and Laliberté 1994). CAF marriage resources normalize the military marriage as challenging and require the civilian spouse to accept the burdens of military relationships by adapting to them. In fact, the marriage resources are directed at military families and caregivers—not at the military member. This placement suggests that it is the military spouse who needs to accommodate and adjust to the needs of the military member, and to be the one to sacrifice in marriage. A military wife of five years reflects on the sacrifices she makes in a military marriage,

> First and foremost, in military [marriage], you are not first, you are second sometimes third… and you have to be content with that. Because at the end of the day, he's gotta pick the army over me. (Author interview with military spouse)

The exemplary gender practices in military marriages are ones where the spouse accepts being subordinate to the needs of the institution, and to the member's commitment to it. These institutional supports suppose that as a partner in operational and organizational effectiveness, the military spouse will self-sacrifice in terms of intimacy, caregiving, and so on.

A military marriage characterized by a spouse who is devoted to the member and to the CAF is an operational asset. She will find ways to get through deployment smoothly, provide a stable home life, and nurture family relationships, and will care for her injured and ill partner when required. The unpaid labour provided in military marriages is essential to operational effectiveness and to the wellbeing of its members and has become a matter of military concern through the CAF's increased attention to and partnership with military families. The military spouse's incorporation into the institution has been furthered by support for military marriages, characterized by patriarchal dynamics and feminized practices of care.

Conclusion

Just shy of 20 years since *Atlantis'* last special issue on women, gender, and the CAF, military families remain bound by traditional gender ideologies, which are necessary for the military to function as it does. The "self-reliant wife" who is independent and takes on the role of "husband" and "wife" while her husband deploys and who defers to him once he returns (Norris 2001, 60-61) has been updated to the "resilient military spouse" who enhances her ability to weather deployment by improving herself and seeing military separation as an opportunity for personal growth. Similarly, the importance of family cohesion and the military wife's work in making sure the family runs smoothly to combat readiness (Norris 2001, 59-60) now involves efforts to increase the health and longevity of military marriages and enhance the spouse's role in preventing and repairing injury in members. Then and now, the CAF relies on the feminized labour and loyalty of military spouses and points to the limits of feminist progress in contemporary military families.

It is the strategies through which gender norms and practices in military families are acquired that look different two decades on. The sacrifices and contributions of military families are no longer rendered invisible or trivialized. Rather, the military family and spouse is recognized as crucial to military effectiveness and organizational outcomes. Their contributions are recognized in policy and in statements by military and political leadership and substantiated with institutional programs and resources. Alongside this acknowledgment, and as the CAF attempts to alleviate the burden service life places on military families, the CAF is reinforcing traditional gender norms and dynamics. Through resilience training, caregiving plans, marriage supports, and military caregiver resources, the CAF is enlisting the military family into operational effectiveness based on unequal gender norms. These strategies relieve the CAF from providing more substantial support to military families and personnel. The adage that military families are "the strength behind the uniform" signals the CAF's reliance on spousal labour and evokes patriarchal ideas about families that are comprised of spouses who are both devoted and subservient to the service member and the military. Present-day strategies to value the military family's contributions privilege a particular gendered contribution, which raise doubts about gender equality in CAF families and the broader CAF community.

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