Women, peace and security: the agenda is not women and it won’t achieve peace or security

Captain Denna Fryer, Australian Army

It has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in armed conflict.

Major General Patrick Cammaert, former UN Force Commander in the Congo

This article argues that positive discrimination measures, as a by-product of the requirement for the ADF to fulfil its obligations to the ‘Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018’, may do more harm than good in the pursuit of equality between men and women in the Services.

The reasons for this are threefold. First, at the most basic level, the language of the action plan lumps the three vastly-different concepts of women, peace and security together, diminishing the meaning and agency of each. Second, the action plan’s agenda is more applicable to armed-conflict environments, where positive discrimination policies may be more effective, but is less useful when applied to the Australian domestic context where gender discrimination takes a vastly-different shape. Third, the agenda perpetuates an unconscious, unspoken bias that exists in the Australian context—similar to the ‘tall poppy syndrome’—which undervalues the role of women in traditionally male roles. The article will conclude that while the National Action Plan may meet targets and achieve statistical success, it may not achieve its intended outcome of true equality.

An ADF example is significant to the discussion on related plans and policies because the ADF arguably has the greatest stake in the success of the action plan, as it is charged with the implementation of 17 of its 24 actions. With the creation of an implementation plan for the ‘Removal of Gender Restrictions from ADF Combat Roles’, and the establishment of a ‘women, peace and security’ adviser within selected ADF headquarters, the responsibilities placed on the ADF by the action plan have been taken seriously by the ADF’s senior leadership, perhaps none more so than former Chief of Army Lieutenant General David Morrison.

As Chief of Army, General Morrison ordered members of the Army to respect women or ‘get out’, stated that armies that ‘value the male over the female ... do nothing to distinguish the soldier from the brute’, and sought to banish the ‘unconscious bias’. As such, this article analyses elements of the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda and where the ADF’s approach may detract from the pursuit of true ‘gender-mainstreaming’, which is defined as ‘ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities’.6

Background

[UN Security Council Resolution 1325] stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

Senator David Johnston, Minister for Defence

The ‘women, peace and security’ agenda advanced by the UN Security Council, encompassing a number of resolutions, calls for the equal participation of women in creating and maintaining international peace and security. More specifically, it provides guidance to stakeholders and requires signatories to the resolutions to incorporate a ‘gender perspective’ into planning for all aspects of armed conflict. This means ‘addressing the needs of women and girls during and after...
armed conflict’, empowering and including women ‘and their needs and perspectives in peace-
building’, as well as preventing and protecting women from conflict-based gender-related sexual
violence.9

The resolutions are ground-breaking in international relations because they explicitly condemn
the use of women’s bodies as ‘battlegrounds’ or ‘weapons’ in armed conflict, and acknowledge
the specific challenges women face in achieving equality in decision-making processes that
surround armed conflicts. While it is undeniable that these two issues need the critical and
immediate attention of governments worldwide, implementing them at the domestic level
outside an armed-conflict environment may be counterproductive to achieving the long-held
aspiration of equality—not equity—held by and for women and men alike.

The ‘Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018’ is a whole-of-
government response to the international ‘women, peace and security’ agenda. In implementing
the action plan, the implicit assumptions throughout the UN resolutions—designed for an armed-
conflict context—do not directly translate to the Australian domestic context. This is because
Australian society is obviously not an armed-conflict environment in which women routinely
experience systematic gender-based violence and discrimination, or have little or no access to
gender-specific hygiene and medical facilities. Nor are they often killed at birth because of their
gender or considered not capable of representing their own interests in social decision-
making processes.

Resolution 1325 arose from the need to protect and advocate for women exposed to these
conditions, as well as provide frameworks for women’s empowerment through what is
commonly known as the mechanism of ‘positive discrimination’. Gender-based violence and
discrimination exists in Australia but not to the same degree as in countries ravaged by armed
conflict. Accordingly, implementing the same positive discrimination policies in Australia may
perpetuate the very social stereotypes they try to defeat.

This sentiment was revealed in the 2012 review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian
Defence Force, commonly called the Broderick Review, which quoted a female ADF member’s
response to the review’s recommendation that ‘women may need different and specific supports’
to men, asserting that:

The biggest mistake, however, would be to give special treatment to women. This would
reinforce the view that women are inferior and can only compete if given an advantage. It
breeds division and is totally counter-productive to attempts to have women advance.10

Despite acknowledging that many women in the ADF share this view, the Broderick Review
maintained that targets were required to overcome the failure of ‘trickle up’ strategies.
Disagreeing that men and women in the ADF should be treated equally, the Broderick Review
instead prescribed a policy of positive discrimination to drive cultural change in the ADF,
emphasising the necessity of targets as a ‘broader imperative for change’.

Discussion

Which one of these things is not like the other: women, peace or security?

At the most fundamental level, the three separate concepts of ‘women’, ‘peace’ and ‘security’
present a confusing and arbitrary representation of the UN resolutions. While ‘peace’ and
‘security’ naturally go together, with both used to describe a state of freedom from disturbance or
threat, ‘women’ is the odd one out; moreover, lumping the concepts of women, peace and
security together is problematic for two reasons.

First, it simplifies female adult human beings to a homogenous group and, in so doing,
emphasises perceptions of women as caretakers and peace-bringers. Second, it disregards the
role of women in creating and perpetuating violence and warfare, and neglects the importance of
the role of men in ‘peace and security’. These two points are pertinent for the ADF to consider in
employing the National Action Plan’s actions, because the agenda from which they are built may
implicitly endorse the wrong perceptions of women in the ADF, and undervalue the role of ADF men in peacekeeping and security operations.

The ‘women, peace and security’ agenda reinforces representations of women as especially vulnerable to violence. The preamble to Resolution 1325 states that ‘women and children account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict’—a sentiment that is reiterated by the call for ‘special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict’. However, there are a number of problems with this representation of women, least of which is the fact that there is no empirical data to reflect the claim that women are more adversely affected by war than men, a point which will be discussed later in this article.

The first problem is that the representation of women as ‘women and girls’ or ‘women and children’ reinforces stereotypes of women as ‘weak, dependant, helpless beings’. Laura Shepherd claims these representations fasten ‘bodies in relation to a biologically determined narrative of sex difference that universally subordinates the female and requires that the female be weak’. Similarly, Nadine Puechguirbal argues that this representation has produced a new type of human being—‘women and children’—which is used so often and interchangeably to represent women. This sees children as an extension of a woman, perpetuating stereotypes of ‘women as caring and nurturing mothers … unable to cross boundaries and move to the public arena where men are designing policies, taking decisions and running the world’.

The use of the term ‘women’ throughout the UN resolutions fails to account for the cultural, social, religious, age or educational differences of female adult human beings. Likewise, use of the term ‘women and girls/children’ as analogous to ‘women’ strips women of their agency, negating their role as people responsible for their own lives separate from children and independent of men. Defining women alongside girls or children limits women’s ability to participate equally in society because they are defined as a grown-up girl or caretaker of children—let alone for their involvement in the restoration or rehabilitation of armed-conflict societies.

While the term ‘gender’ is also used, perhaps to overcome problems associated with using ‘women’ or ‘women and girls/children’, the agenda is targeted at women (and women and girls/children). As such, the use of ‘gender’ in the resolutions effectively comes to correlate with use of the word ‘women’. The tendency to use the terms ‘gender’ and ‘women’ interchangeably causes confusion over whether the resolutions are targeted at protecting all genders equally or whether they are about protecting women (women/girls/children).

Furthermore, it solidifies the concept of gender and women as equivalent which, as Rita Santos and her colleagues argue, ignores the relational dimension of gender, being ‘inter- and intra-masculinities and femininities’. Laura Wilcox considered this to be the ‘system of signification which creates social hierarchies based on associations with male and female traits’. This confusion may have been overcome if discourses surrounding the UN resolutions had sought to protect all vulnerable non-combatants in conflict, men and boys included.

The problems associated with defining women as a category separate to ‘women and girls/children’ or ‘gender’ is compounded by the omission of men from Resolution 1325. While clearly peripheral to the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda, there is no concomitant ‘men, peace and security’ agenda. Perhaps this is because, as Puechguirbal argues, ‘international relations had always been defined according to the masculine norm of reference … that [has] excluded women from power circles and decision making levels’.

The implicit reason behind having discrete policies for women but none for men is, as Ann Tickner suggests, because ‘men have been associated with defending the state and advancing its international interests as soldiers and diplomats, [while] women have typically been engaged in the ordering and comforting roles’. If this is so, creating an agenda that once more separates women from men fuels the unconscious bias towards men as protectors, and women as the protected.
This is exemplified by Article 8 of the resolution, which states that all actors involved in peace negotiation and agreement processes are to adopt ‘measures that support local women’s peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements’. This solidifies the perception of women as victims who require the protection and support of men to bring about peace and security in an armed-conflict environment, a goal which could not be achieved without the caretaking, peace-building skills of women.

Second, the perception of women as caretakers and peace-builders is problematic not only because it is both inaccurate and unfair to men who undertake caretaking and pacifist roles but also because it misrepresents women’s contribution to or perpetuation of violence. The emphasis on women’s involvement in peacekeeping operations can be considered somewhat ironic in light of the criticism of peacekeeping operations as contributing to the continuation of patriarchal cultures and social hierarchies which, according to Louise Olsson and Torunn Tryggetad:

In some cases involv[es] the exploitation of women and girls (as well as men and boys) in local communities, and the reproduction of spirals of violence resulting from difficulties in fulfilling expectations with regard to income generating mechanisms.21

Focusing on women’s involvement in peace and security rather than their involvement in wider social decision-making structures—including government and defence—confuses the issues of women’s equality and the need for peace in society. Emphasising the importance of the role of women in building a peaceful society overlooks the possibility that, in certain societies, peace may not be so peaceful for women.

Including women in the process to return to this ‘peace’ may not be as relevant as equal involvement in other arms of government that can ensure women have a chance at equality in a peacetime society.22 In this sense, the emphasis on women in bringing peace and security to armed-conflict situations should be secondary to the emphasis on women and men having equal opportunities to play decisive roles in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

**Taking the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda out of context**

Women and children account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements.

Preamble to UN Security Council Resolution 1325

The second issue with the implementation of Resolution 1325, and much of the discourse surrounding the UN resolutions more generally, is that they target women in armed-conflict environments but are implemented universally and out of this context. Women have differing levels of access to opportunities to play decisive roles in an armed-conflict environment than in a non-armed conflict environment. In some socio-cultural contexts, such as in armed-conflict zones throughout Africa, South America and the Middle East, many women are oppressed and violated.

In other contexts, where there is no armed conflict, such as in Australia, women experience oppression and violence but not to the same degree. In a non-armed conflict environment such as in Australia, problems of sexism and discrimination permeate society but cannot be treated by the same formula as the problems experienced by women in armed-conflict societies. The agenda that targets issues of sexism and gender-based violence in an armed-conflict context should not be applied to a peacetime context; solutions in one environment may be inappropriate and harmful when applied to the other.

As outlined earlier, the preamble to Resolution 1325 states that ‘the vast majority of those affected adversely by armed conflict’ are women, who are ‘increasingly targeted by combatants and armed elements’. This section outlines three reasons for this statement and similar statements that call for the protection of women’s ‘particular needs’ and ‘special forms of protection’ found throughout the resolutions, to be regarded as counterproductive to achieving equality for women and men in a non-armed conflict environment, such as in Australia.
First, women in Australia are not exposed to the same type of discrimination, violence and oppression as women in armed-conflict zones. Second, these statements exclude women from consideration of their role in perpetrating violence or their role as combatants. Third, it denies men agency in creating peace, and fails to acknowledge the overwhelming loss of men’s lives (combatants and non-combatants alike) in armed conflicts.

The application of the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda in a non-armed conflict context likens the treatment of women in armed conflicts to those outside these contexts. This is unhelpful to both situations. For example, in armed conflicts throughout the world, women’s bodies are seen as another battleground on which to wage war and terror. Puechguirbal writes of war-torn Somalia, where:

Two parties in conflict use a form of negotiation that is called the dayeh (blood money); the dayeh for a woman is half the dayeh for a man. However, if a pregnant woman is killed, or if her fetus dies, then the dayeh for the fetus is equivalent to the dayeh of a male adult. In addition, we often talk of the involvement of Somali women in conflict resolution by stressing the fact that women are exchanged between enemy tribes as a way of sealing a peace accord. Once again, the woman is seen in her role of mother exclusively since this exchange will translate into a happy ending when she gives birth, as illustrated in the Somali saying meel xinijir lagu bururiyay xab baa lagu bururiya (a baby should be born in the spot where blood has been split). Here again, we see a pattern taking shape in many societies that define the woman as a minor who is dependent of [sic] the goodwill of her clan, family, husband or father and cannot enjoy an autonomous life.

The view that women in armed-conflict zones are minors or dependants and are exposed to horrendous violence and discrimination is reiterated by Patricia Hynes, who argues that ‘widows of war, women victims of landmines, and women refugees of war are particularly vulnerable to poverty, prostitution, the extortion of sex for food by post-war peacekeepers, and higher illness and death in the post-conflict period’. In this context, it is understandable that Resolution 1325 calls for ‘special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict’.

In Australia, women are not ‘particularly vulnerable’ to poverty, prostitution or sexual extortion by peacekeepers. The Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety published statistics from a 2012 survey on rates of violence against men and women since the age of 15. The survey showed that while 20 per cent of women had experienced sexual violence (compared to 5 per cent of men), 50 per cent of men had experienced physical violence (compared to 33 per cent of women). These statistics, in part, show the different characteristics of discrimination and violence in the Australian context, compared to an armed-conflict context.

This leads to the second point concerning the implementation of a National Action Plan based on the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda outside an armed-conflict context. The incorporation of the same problematic language from the UN resolutions neglects women’s roles as combatants and perpetrators of violence, and perpetuates stereotypes that may be counterproductive in achieving women’s equality in Australian society. This is apparent in the fact that three of the National Action Plan’s five strategies arguably solidify the biases of the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda.

For example, Strategy 1 calls for the integration of ‘a gender perspective into Australia’s policies on peace and security’ which, as discussed earlier in this article, fixes notions of women’s perspectives as different to those of men. Strategy 2 requires the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda to be embedded ‘in the Australian Government’s approach to human resource management of Defence, Australian Federal Police and deployed personnel’. This is problematic because it seeks to embed an agenda targeted at an armed conflict into a domestic (and non-conflict) context. Finally, Strategy 3 requests support to ‘civil society organisations to promote equality and increase women’s participation in conflict prevention, peace-building, conflict resolution, and relief and recovery’. In doing so, it perpetuates the myth of women as inherently
peaceful beings by emphasising their role in peace-building and caretaking, and neglects the equal role women should play in all arenas in order to achieve true equality.

The third point is that the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda exists without a complementary men’s version, which compounds what scholars such as Adam Jones have argued is a social taboo in contemporary discourse surrounding violence and discrimination towards men in armed conflict.\textsuperscript{26} Jones claimed that gendercide—that is, gender-selective mass killing—which targets males has ‘attracted virtually no attention at the level of scholarship or public policy’, despite the fact that non-combattant men, particularly ‘battle-age’ men, are the ‘most frequent targets of mass killing and genocidal slaughter, as well as a host of lesser atrocities and abuses’.

In claiming that women are the most adversely affected by armed conflict, it is as though the agenda disregards the long history of mass killings and atrocities inflicted on men in armed conflicts. As Errol Miller asserts, men have historically been selectively killed, castrated and enslaved on a greater and more brutal scale than women in armed conflict.\textsuperscript{27}

Similar to the way in which women are stereotyped as peaceful and caretaking, men are likewise labelled as violent and combative. The use of terminology such as ‘battle-age’ essentially defines men’s identity, depicting men as perpetrators of violence or even the legitimate targets of violence, while women are defined by their capacity to have violence inflicted upon them or as victims.\textsuperscript{28} Perhaps this is partly the reason the much greater loss of men’s life in armed conflict is not emphasised—being ‘battle aged’ they were ‘asking for it’ and therefore it is far more heinous when violence is inflicted on women, who are helpless victims.\textsuperscript{29}

To overcome these harmful stereotypes, which are harmful to men and women’s identities equally, and to ensure men and women are considered equally in their status as combatants or non-combatants, the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda should not overemphasise the adversity experienced by women. This would discontinue the perpetuation of myths of men as warriors, and women as victims because, as Jones has asserted:

The most vulnerable and consistently targeted population group, through time and around the world today, is non-combatant men of a ‘battle age’, roughly 15 to 55 years old. They are nearly universally perceived as the group posing the greatest danger to the conquering force, and are the group most likely to have the repressive apparatus of the state directed against them.

The ‘non-combatant’ distinction is also vital. Unlike their armed brethren, these men have no means of defending themselves, and can be detained and exterminated by the thousands or millions. The gender of mass killing, moreover, likely extends beyond the age range specified. Elderly males are probably more prone than elderly women to be caught up in the ‘maelstrom’ of war, and modern warfare, with its relentless press-ganging and criminality, extends ever further down the age ladder in the hunt for child soldiers and street thugs—overwhelmingly boys.

**Unconscious bias**

This article has established a number of fundamental problems with the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda itself: it misrepresents women in the language used, is taken out of context and applied to non-armed conflict situations, and it neglects the severe and brutal impacts of armed conflict on men, particularly male non-combatants. This final section will argue that compounding the shortfalls of the agenda is the misunderstanding of the vulnerability of women in armed conflict, compared to peacetime.

Women are not necessarily more vulnerable during or after armed conflict. As Santos \textit{et al} explain, ‘they become more vulnerable because of pre-existing inequalities, originating from gender power hierarchies, which are also present in so-called peaceful societies’.\textsuperscript{30} The unconscious bias within society to treat women as peaceful, caretaking victims of armed conflict is both the reason for and the bias of the agenda. It is this bias that perpetuates women’s exclusion from powerful decision-making roles in peacetime contexts. One such role—that of a warrior or armed service member—will be analysed briefly in this last section in examining the problems associated with the implementation of the National Action Plan in the ADF.
The ADF has numerous obligations under the whole-of-government action plan, by and large because it is an organisation that deals directly with armed conflict. As such, a Defence Implementation Plan was developed to facilitate the implementation of the 17 actions and 11 measures for which Defence is responsible, specifically being tasked to:

Provide greater emphasis and focus on gender mainstreaming activities — to integrate gender perspective into armed forces, military operations and missions and planning processes and align with the intent of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions.\(^{31}\)

This task is problematic because, in the language of the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda, gender in this instance is coterminous with women, reinforced by the requirement to align with the intent of Resolution 1325, and therefore perpetuates the separation of women’s and men’s tasks within the armed forces. The requirement to incorporate a ‘gender perspective’—a woman’s perspective—into armed forces, military operations and missions and planning processes perpetuates the categorisation of all women together (despite age, class, race, religion, culture or background) and therefore the stereotype of women having a perspective (being peaceful and caretaking beings).

This stereotype is perpetuated throughout almost all of the Defence Implementation Plan’s materials. For example, the Australian Civil-Military Centre released a ‘Women, Peace and Security Introductory Training Manual’, aimed at helping ‘to raise awareness about the importance of the women, peace and security agenda, [and] ensuring that women play a central role in all aspects of the peace and security processes’.\(^{32}\) The fact that women should play a central role is not questioned, due to this unconscious bias, despite the fact that no mention is made of men playing an equal role—or women playing a role in the business of warfighting itself. Warfighting, it seems, is still a man’s domain, while women are central to peace and security processes.

While most employment categories in the ADF were opened to women in 2013, current policy states that by early 2016, ‘direct entry female recruits will be permitted to enlist in all Services’, meaning that all employment categories would be open to women.\(^{33}\) A related risk assessment was published in August 2013, titled ‘Risk Log–Removal of Gender Restrictions on ADF Combat Role Employment Categories’, which is a direct reflection of the unconscious bias against women as a homogenous group within both the ADF and the wider Australian society.\(^{34}\)

In that assessment, the top three Defence risks were identified as damage to government reputation as a result of the decision to remove restrictions; damage to Defence’s reputation; and negative community perception. Last on the list was the ‘low take up of women in formerly restricted roles’—the least of Defence’s concerns. The prioritisation of perception risks over injury risks reveals a reluctance to allow women to fill combat roles, which exists despite the express intent announced on numerous occasions by senior Defence leadership that women will only be accepted into these roles where they meet the same standards as their male counterparts.

Nowhere is the implicit exclusion of the role of women as warriors more evident than in the declaration by then Prime Minister Tony Abbott in 2015 that the 330 ADF personnel and 143 New Zealand Defence Force personnel deployed to support a two-year training mission in Iraq will be ‘splendid sons of Anzacs’.\(^{35}\) Language and discourse play a significant role in excluding those who are not of the dominant group within the ADF—the Anglo-Australian male. Elizabeth Thompson outlined this in her 2014 report, ‘Towards inclusion: language use in the Department of Defence’, in which she argued that:

Formal, officially endorsed language plays a key role in perpetuating and maintaining social norms, particularly those of the dominant group within the Defence culture. Particular language choices that privilege some values and types of people over others conspire to build an exclusive identity for the organisation. That identity does not represent the community that Defence serves, which is far more diverse and inclusive. While Defence argues that the organisation is becoming more inclusive, the formal language of leadership appears to be
maintaining and perpetuating the male Anglo-Australian status quo. Unless this is addressed, it will counter attempts at cultural change.36

The iconisation of certain types of people (hero worship) and the exclusion of those who are different (the unconscious bias of affinity) is potentially excused in the team-based work environment of the ADF because of the occupational need to build strong group bonds. These bonds are built through social interaction of a certain group standard, which Thompson argued can work to exclude those who do not meet the criteria set by the dominant group.

As Thompson’s study showed, these normative language practices that value the Anglo-Australian male above all other groups are not just perpetrated by a few ‘bad apples’ but throughout the ranks including the ADF’s senior leadership. This said, it seems counterintuitive that the solution is the creation of targets and other positive discrimination measures, as they can be seen as further fuelling social perceptions of women as victims who need assistance to succeed. Elizabeth Broderick, in the Review on the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force, argued that targets are necessary, despite many women in the ADF believing they are harmful to their experience of equality, contending that:

> Obviously, identical treatment works if a level playing field exists. Where it does not, however, identical treatment can lead to greater inequality, especially where existing policies and practices are assumed to be neutral but, in fact, are grounded in a ‘male norm’. In these areas, we have made recommendations, including the use of targets, to level the playing field.37

**Conclusion**

With only a 1 per cent increase in the recruitment of women into the ADF over the past decade, despite the targets already in place, it seems unlikely that further positive discrimination measures will do much more than boost statistics, far less create equality between men and women in the ADF.38 Instead, the unconscious bias that thrives on positive discrimination measures, used to assist women over men, needs to be reconsidered.

‘Women, peace and security’ policies that ‘ensure increased representation of women’, ‘appoint more women as special representatives’, and ‘provide to member states training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women’ fuel this unconscious bias in contexts such as the ADF. Instead of focusing on what makes women different from their male counterparts, policies should focus on how individuals capable of meeting specific employment standards, regardless of gender, should be employed in those categories. Not only does this shift the focus of gender mainstreaming away from women, it relieves men of the burden as society's protectors—as ‘the splendid sons of Anzacs’.

As described in this article, the role of language and context are critical to eliminating unconscious bias. The association of women with ‘peace and security’ fixes women’s roles as peace-builders and caregivers, and perpetuates stereotypes of women as victims who need protection. This is problematic because of the inaccuracies associated with the vast generalisation of women as a homogeneous group, and the issue of excluding inter-gender and transgender people from this discussion.

Furthermore, by focusing on women as the agents of peace, particularly when peace does not necessarily mean equality, problems arise where women are excluded from peacetime decision-making mechanisms. This is particularly problematic in armed-conflict contexts, where claims that women are the most ‘adversely affected by armed conflict’ are factually inaccurate and perpetuate stereotypes of women as victims and men as warriors who should fight (and die) for their country or cause.

This leads to issues with applying the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda to the Australian context, and particularly to the ADF. In this context, it is not so much the overt violence and discrimination against women that hinders their equal treatment, as is the case in an armed-conflict context, but the unconscious bias against women and against diversity more generally. While overt violence, discrimination and bullying are widely understood as unacceptable in
today’s ADF, it is the insidious and unconscious elements of discrimination—still widely accepted—that obstruct equality.

The ‘women, peace and security’ agenda is a product of this unconscious bias; as long as it is considered a hallmark for women’s equality, it will continue to propagate the same messages and myths it is heralded as defeating. With this understanding, the ADF should focus its efforts on eliminating unconscious bias. The first step is rethinking the ADF’s approach to an agenda that may not help women achieve equality, and cannot guarantee peace or security.

*Captain Denna Fryer graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon in December 2010. She deployed to Afghanistan as a troop commander in 2013 and as a mentor in 2015. She completed a Masters of Philosophy through the University of NSW in 2015, researching issues of ethnic conflict. She is currently posted to the 1st Intelligence Battalion.*
Notes


6 Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, ‘Gender mainstreaming: strategy for promoting gender equality’, UN [website], August 2001, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet1.pdf> accessed 27 September 2016. This definition is provided by the UN Women’s website, and not the UN website, which can be seen as perpetuating conceptions of discussions of gender being discussions of women’s issues.


13 C. Enloe, quoted in Santos et al, ‘Missed connections’.


16 Puechguirbal, ‘Women and children’.
Santos et al., ‘Missed connections’.


Puechguirbal, ‘Women and children’.

A. Tickner, quoted in Puechguirbal, ‘Women and children’.

Louise Olsson and Torunn Tryggetad, quoted in Santos et al., ‘Missed connections’, p. 18.

Moreover, the analysis of key UN documents on peace operations reveals the masculine norm underpinning these processes: Puechguirbal, ‘Women and children’, p. 174; also Santos et al., ‘Missed connections’, p. 18.


Jones, ‘Gendercide and genocide’.


Jones, ‘Gendercide and genocide’.

Jones, ‘Gendercide and genocide’.


Department of Defence, ‘Removal of gender restrictions on Australian Defence Force combat role employment categories’.


There has been a 2 per cent increase in the ADF’s recruitment of women over the past 20 years.