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Creating a new pathway for change in the military using gender as process

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Abstract

Militaries have consistently struggled to integrate women into the profession of arms despite concerted, decades-long attempts at reform. We argue that this patchy progress is due in part to a conceptualization of gender as “category”, which has limited power to explain gendered inequalities. We propose that gender as process approaches must also be used to understand the current state of gender relations within militaries. A gender as process approach recognizes the dynamic, enduring, and complex set of gendered practices and systems that affect everyday interactions and social relations. Using this frame, militaries can develop an understanding of how these processes operate—particularly, as a form of resistance to gender equality in these “extremely gendered organizations”—and can develop improved strategies for change. We use the Australian Defence Force as our case study to illustrate how gender as category approaches dominate reform attempts and how the gender as process approach offers new insights on how to promote gender equality in the military.

KEYWORDS

Australian Defence Force, gender equality, gendered organizations, gendering processes, women in the military

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Western militaries have grappled with a complex set of challenges in their efforts to progress gender equality in recent decades. While positive changes have been made to reduce the barriers to women's integration, such as the removal of combat exclusion policies (Portillo et al., 2021), implementation of gender mainstreaming models (Johnstone & Momani, 2020), and the introduction of participation targets (Department of Defence, 2021c), Western militaries remain heavily male-dominated organizations (Doan & Portillo, 2019; Pendlebury, 2020). For instance, the average representation of women in national armed forces of NATO member nations in 2020 was 13% (NATO, 2020). Moreover, the military's culture and organizational structure remain largely defined by notions of masculinity and are resistant to change (Kovitz, 2021; van Douwen et al., 2022). The lack of significant cultural change accords with a growing consensus among scholars that progress toward gender equality in Western militaries has stalled (Duncanson & Woodward, 2016; Kovitz, 2021; Pendlebury, 2020; Portillo et al., 2021; Taber, 2020). We argue that the progress is hampered by the limited conceptions of gender employed in identifying, problematizing, and addressing gender equality issues. Specifically, we argue that Western militaries draw on categorical meanings of gender and in doing so have missed the complexities of gender as process and structure, rendering many of the subtle organizational gendering practices that undermine progress invisible. A categorical view (sometimes conflated with sex) tends to assume that gender is a fixed and unchangeable construct (Connell, 2006; Kimmel, 2013). In contrast to conceptions of gender as process and structure, enacted through processes both within and outside the individual, a categorical view of gender significantly narrows the possibilities available for change. This view results in policies and reforms that are likely to fail because they ignore how men and women enact gender in the military in ways that produce inequalities (Risman, 2004; Sasson-Levy, 2011; Sasson-Levy & Amram-Katz, 2007).

Using the Australian Defence Force (ADF) as a representative western military case study, we propose that by reframing gender as process in their approach to gender equality, militaries can develop greater insight into how gender operates, revealing opportunities for change. When gender is viewed as process, it facilitates the analysis of what occurs at the individual, interactional, and macro levels to reproduce inequality (Risman, 2004, 2018). Each site presents an opportunity for disruption and for thinking anew about how reforms might be realized in organizations that have traditionally had strong resistance to change (Portillo et al., 2021; Sasson-Levy, 2011). This theoretical approach allows us to interrogate how and why reforms designed to improve equality in militaries have resulted in patchy success. Our key contribution is that we bring multiple strands of theory and empirical endeavors into conversation with one another through the lens of gender as process and the ADF case study.

We begin by providing a brief background of the ADF to situate our case study. Next, we discuss conceptions of gender as category and as process. Then, we explore the gender as process framework in the military, followed by a discussion of other potentially transformative approaches, such as gender mainstreaming. Next, we turn to our case study, employing our two frames of gender to examine current approaches to gender equality in the ADF through discussion of three key themes (women's participation, sexual misconduct, and uniforms). We show that a categorical approach to gender equality is inadequate and that progress toward gender equality will remain stalled unless militaries rethink their understanding of gender.

2 | ADF BACKGROUND

In the last decade, the nature of women's military participation in the ADF has changed significantly. The catalyst for the most recent changes came in 2011, after a highly publicized incident at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA), widely known as the "Skype sex scandal",[1] triggered a series of reviews into the culture of the ADF (Wadham et al., 2018). A landmark multiphase review focused specifically on the treatment of women at ADFA and in the wider

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ADF (known collectively as the *Broderick Reviews*). At the time, then-Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick expressed concern that:

> Despite progress over the last two decades, today, I am not confident that in all the varied workplaces that comprise the ADF, women can and will flourish. That is the reality the ADF must change.
> (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2012, p. 1)

In response to these reviews, the ADF and Department of Defence initiated a defence-wide cultural change program, known as *Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture* in 2012 (Department of Defence, 2012). Since then, the ADF has implemented numerous strategies to promote the inclusion of women and progress gender equality, including the opening of all job roles to women in 2014, the introduction of more flexible working arrangements, and the introduction of annual reporting that measures gender inclusion against key performance indicators (Department of Defence, 2021c; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018). As a result, women's participation in the ADF has been slowly increasing (Department of Defence, 2021c).

Currently, Australia is at the forefront of women's military participation and performs strongly against comparable militaries. In 2020, Australia had the highest percentage of women among NATO partner nations with women comprising 19.4% of the ADF (NATO, 2020, p. 64). Among the three Services, only the Army has a significantly lower rate of female participation: 15.1% in 2020–21 (Department of Defence, 2021c). Each Service has a set of female participation targets (25% for the Navy and Air Force and 15% for the Army) to be achieved by 2023 (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018). These targets were recently revised to 35% for the Navy by 2035, 35% for the Air Force by 2030%, and 20% for the Army by 2035 after each service met or was expected to meet their target (Department of Defence, 2021c).

Defence has also taken steps to increase women's participation through the implementation of Australia's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (launched in 2012 with a second iteration from 2021 to 2031). Since its implementation, Defence has reported progress toward integrating gender perspectives across core business activities, but noted that there was still more to do (Department of Defence, 2018, p. 6). However, despite these positive changes, women remain significantly underrepresented in senior ranks, stark occupational segregation persists, and the ADF remains a male-dominated organization (Department of Defence, 2021c).

Complicating the ADF's progress further is the differing organizational structures and cultures that constitute it. The ADF comprises three distinct military services: the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), the Australian Army, and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) (Department of Defence, 2021a), each with its own distinctive character, military capabilities, purposes, and responsibilities that require different technologies to pursue. These differences shape women's integration and gender equality in unique ways as each service must grapple with a different set of related problems and issues. For example, gender problems in the RAN have centered around such issues as the close living quarters on ships and the heightened risk of sexual harassment and assault as well as the impact of long periods of time spent away at sea (Department of Defence, 2021c; Rumble et al., 2011). In contrast, the stronger focus for Army is on issues relating to the lack of women in the combat arms and the perpetuation of a hypermasculine warrior culture (Jenkins & Priday, 2017). For the RAAF, the cultural barriers faced by women in aviation, especially those trying to enter fast jet pilot streams, have been at the forefront of discussion (Gibbon, 2016). Ten years on from the beginning of major cultural reform, it is time to rethink why the ADF has not achieved its stated cultural change aims by assessing how gender is conceptualized.

3 | CONCEPTIONS OF GENDER: CATEGORY AND PROCESS

The term "gender" has multiple meanings, which are adapted and used in a variety of different ways. As Beckwith writes, meanings of gender emerge:

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> from stereotypes about male and female behavior; from characteristics and behaviors conventionally associated with women and men; from normative assumptions about appropriate behaviors of men and women; from assumptions about biological difference; and from social structures of power and difference.
>
> (Beckwith, 2010, p. 160)

Given the multiple meanings of gender, like Beckwith (2005), we also find it useful to distinguish between gender as category and gender as process. The former includes conceptions that see gender as two or more fixed categories of persons as determined by biology, or that otherwise view gender as a largely fixed and unchangeable construct (Connell, 2006; Kimmel, 2013; Lorber, 1994). Categorical meanings point us to gender as a property of individuals or as something that individuals are. This view of gender is ubiquitous in everyday life and is drawn upon readily in common usage (Britton & Logan, 2008). When gender is understood this way, gender essentialism may also be present because the differences between men and women are constructed as fixed and "natural". Gender essentialism is closely linked to stereotyping and underscores the process by which certain characteristics are ascribed to people occupying a category, irrespective of their differences or capabilities (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005).

Gender as process recognizes that gender is not a static concept nor a property of individuals. Rather, it is a dynamic, enduring, and complex set of practices and systems that affect everyday interactions and social relations among men and women (Connell, 2006; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). As Connell writes, gender is:

> a pattern of social relations in which the positions of women and men are defined, the cultural meanings of being a man and a woman are negotiated, and their trajectories through life are mapped out.
>
> (Connell, 2006, p. 839)

Connell (2006) adds that gender relations are always multidimensional and are a pervasive feature in all aspects of our lives. Further, she argues that gender is "organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction" (Connell, 2005, p. 71). The reproductive arena operates as a frame that informs gender relations, but gender is not determined by biology; rather, it exists "precisely to the extent that biology does *not* determine the social" (Connell, 2005, p. 71). That is, gender is not determined by sex but rather by the social meanings given to the reproductive arena. Many have argued that these gender relations and practices are the very mechanism by which inequalities are produced in everyday life, including in workplaces, because they tend to perpetuate forms of masculinity that construct women as subordinate to men (Butler, 1988; Connell, 2005; Lorber, 1994; Risman, 2004; West & Zimmerman, 1987). These differences and resulting power relations are constructed and maintained in subtle and insidious ways, often to the extent that gendering processes appear neutral and gender goes unnoticed (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

Building on these understandings of gender, Risman (2018, p. 30) argues that gender should be conceptualized as a social structure because it constitutes "a stratification system that has implications for the individual, interactional, and macro levels of analysis". The individual level refers to socialization and identity formation, interactional level to how gender is produced when humans encounter (or imagine encountering) each other, and the institutional level to rules and norms occurring at a broader cultural, legal and organizational level. Each level consists of many processes that interact and shape outcomes at other levels, which might help explain why, for instance, processes at the interactional level may reinforce or undermine processes occurring at the macro level (Risman, 2018). Risman's (2004, 2018) theory of gender as a social structure builds on our understanding of gender as process by providing a holistic framework that accounts for how gender operates across multiple levels of social life and the diverse range of factors that contribute to gender inequality. Similarly, Acker's (1990) seminal work on organizational gendering points to such processes as divisions along the lines of sex, the construction of symbols and images reinforcing those divisions, gendered interactions, and the formation and presentation of identity. Ely and Meyerson (2000) explain how formal rules, informal practices and norms, and workplace narratives and interactions can all subtly reproduce gender inequalities in organizations.

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Several processes identified as central to the reproduction of inequality are also useful to consider here. Schwalbe et al. (2000, p. 422–434) identify such processes as *othering*, *subordinate adaptation*, and *boundary maintenance*. Othering is the process through which a dominant group situates itself above another group, which it then constructs as inferior and/or subordinate (Schwalbe et al., 2000). In response to oppressive othering, members of subordinate groups may try to create distance between themselves and the wider subordinate group and align themselves with the dominant group, in what is known as "defensive othering". This has the effect of reinforcing the dominant group's superiority. Inequality is also reproduced through "subordinate adaptation", which refers to the strategies that people use to cope with their subordinate status. Although these strategies can challenge some inequalities, they reproduce others. The inequality between dominant and subordinate groups is then preserved through the process of boundary maintenance. Boundaries can be "symbolic, interactional, spatial, or all of these" (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 430). Labeling these processes provides a basis upon which we can begin to identify and disrupt the reproduction of inequality.

Each view of gender has different implications for how the problem of gender inequality in the military is framed. If gender is a category based on sex or identification, then the problem might be seen as inequality (e.g., in numbers or in treatment) between people of the male gender and people of the female gender. This does not draw attention to *how* the inequality is produced and misses opportunities to think about how gender might negatively affect both men and women. If gender is process and structure, the problem might be seen as how gendered processes (rooted in, but not determined by, biological sex) operate to affect the opportunities and experiences of men and women in the military, and in so doing potentially disadvantage one group over another. This offers more opportunities for both understanding and disruption/transformation. Next, we elaborate on some of the gender research that we place in conversation with our conception of gender as process to explain how gender operates within this frame. In doing so, we also illustrate some of the possibilities for change and what this could mean for militaries.

4 | GENDER AS PROCESS IN THE MILITARY

The fluidity and socially constructed nature of gender leads us toward "doing gender" approaches. Within this view, gender is defined as an unavoidable, yet changeable process enacted by individuals in everyday interactions (Butler, 1988; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Because "doing gender" is shaped by social and cultural constructions of what is appropriate for a particular sex category, it is also the basis upon which differences between men and women are constructed—although these "are not natural, essential, or biological" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137). Despite being socially and culturally constructed, the differences are pervasive and enduring. For example, in the military context, the ideal soldier is conflated with hegemonic masculinity. Constructions of hegemonic masculinity in the military typically embody combat-related ideals of physical toughness, resilience, strength, aggressiveness, heterosexuality, and emotional control (Enloe, 2000; Hinojosa, 2010). However, not all military men will embody the hegemonic ideal. Rather, research has shown the multiplicity of militarized masculinities with variations within and across branches, ranks, and job specializations (Barrett, 1996; Higate, 2003; Hinojosa, 2010). For example, instead of drawing on combat-related ideals, men in support roles emphasized characteristics such as their superior technical training to construct a form of military masculinity (Higate, 2003). As Hinojosa (2010) argues, military men draw on such characteristics to create loose masculine hierarchies in which they position themselves on top to assume symbolic dominance over others. Due to this hierarchical structuring, nonhegemonically orientated masculinities and femininities are subordinated, devalued, and sometimes cast as a threat to the stability of military masculinity (Kovitz, 2000). This is problematic as it suggests that women can only be accepted on the condition that they do not threaten hegemonic masculine culture; they must either behave more like men or accept their position as the subordinate "other", which ultimately results in limited patterns of inclusion (Sasson-Levy, 2003; Brownson, 2014; King, 2015; van Douwen et al., 2022).

As discussed above, gender also exists within institutional structures and processes (Acker, 1990; Risman, 2018). In militaries, policies and structures are defined by masculine ideals, creating a gendered organization that continuously

reinforces hegemonic definitions of masculinity and femininity that have institutionalized men's dominance over women (Enloe, 2000; Hinojosa, 2010). For example, women bear the brunt of reproductive labor for reasons that stem from the biological reality of gestation and breastfeeding. However, the social meanings given to this biological basis result in women taking the lion's share of the work of home and family. Once organizational expectations at the institutional level are added—for example, that military employees in certain roles be available for frequent overseas deployments—we can see that policies appearing to be gender neutral in fact have gendered consequences. Research supports the argument that women's military careers are limited by caring responsibilities (Dichter & True, 2015; Harris, 2009; Heinecken, 2022).

The degree of organizational gendering is different in each organization, and Sasson-Levy (2011) suggests that organizations with "low" gendering will be more responsive to gender equality reforms and changes, whereas organizations with "high" levels of gendering will be less so. As levels of gendering in the military are much higher than in other organizations, it is regarded as an "extremely gendered organization" (Sasson-Levy, 2011, p. 399). More recently, other scholars have extended this idea to other masculinized and militarized organizations in the Australian context, such as fire-fighting services (Tyler et al., 2019).

Common to extremely gendered organizations are deeply ingrained hegemonically masculine norms. Thus, gender reform policies are often viewed as a threat to the core masculine identity and can be resisted by those within the organization (Kovitz, 2000, 2021; Sasson-Levy, 2011). Although van Douwen et al. (2022) argue that cracks are beginning to show in the hegemonic masculine identity of the military, resistance to change is still enacted through a variety of subtle, discursive, and sometimes contradictory processes that are difficult to identify and disrupt (Sasson-Levy & Amram-Katz, 2007; van Douwen et al., 2022; Wilén & Heinecken, 2018). For example, Portillo et al. (2021) found that toilets emerged as a space for men in US Army Special Operations units to reassert masculinized notions of the military, preserve male exclusivity in combat units, and restrict women's access to previously male-only workspaces. This resistance occurred in direct response to the removal of restrictions that had previously excluded women from serving in combat positions. Wilén and Heinecken (2018) argued that despite women's increasing representation in the South African National Defence Force due to top-down inclusion efforts, women are "othered" using aspects of their civilian and sexual identity (including motherhood) as well as being positioned as victims in need of male protection. Interviewees of both sexes appeared to value women for the contributions of their "feminine" qualities, while simultaneously denigrating and othering them for those same qualities (Wilén & Heinecken, 2018). Kovitz (2021) explains this seeming contradiction by linking sexual misconduct in the military to the very basis on which soldiers are prepared for war, overcoming their resistance to putting themselves in harm's way. To create a group of individuals willing to enter lethal combat has necessitated the construction of strict dichotomies linked to the essentialization of sex differences—the male defender and the female defended—thus requiring "resistance to embodiments of the feminine considered inimical to operational effectiveness" (93). In this context, Kovitz (2021) argues that the very processes that create soldiers are also gendered processes, requiring maintenance of the boundary between masculine and feminine. One manifestation of these processes is verbal and physical forms of sexual misconduct, which have proved persistent in militaries worldwide.

This tension is described by Sasson-Levy and Amram-Katz (2007, p. 106) as the "dual process of degendering and regendering", whereby organizational attempts to create an equal opportunity environment and "degender" the organization are contested and resisted from some within the organization who engage in practices to "regender" the institution (Sasson-Levy & Amram-Katz, 2007). For Doan and Portillo (2019, p. 1), the subtlety of resistance often renders these practices invisible—a process they describe as organizational obliviousness that "exists at the individual level; it becomes reinforced at the cultural level; and in turn, cultural practices are entrenched institutionally by policies". Here, Doan and Portillo (2019) draw our attention to the multidimensional nature of gender and illustrate how it operates in the military to continuously reproduce gender inequalities.

Taken together, the theories presented allow us to interrogate how and why reforms designed to improve equality in militaries have resulted in patchy success. Although many of the theories presented are not new and have been used to investigate militaries for decades, our linking of these theories to our conception of gender as process serves

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as a way of piecing together those elements that are currently missing from the ADF's approach to gender equality. It is only through a multilevel analysis of gender that the subtle processes that maintain and reproduce gender inequalities begin to be more readily identified and eliminated (Doan & Portillo, 2019; Risman, 2018). Using this frame, the ADF and like militaries can develop an understanding of how these processes operate—particularly, as a form of resistance to gender equality—and can develop strategies for change that, in considering those processes, will be less likely to face resistance or fail altogether.

5 | TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

As we have argued, despite concerted efforts to improve gender equality in militaries, transformative change is yet to be realized. Connell (2006) is critical of an organization's ability to address gender inequality where an understanding of gender as process is not adopted. Connell (2006, p. 838) argues that when gender is understood in categorical terms—in her argument, as men and women defined by biology—"the statistical margin of difference between these two categories is the measure of any gender problem". This underpins the "add women and stir" approach, where increasing the numerical representation of women and reducing the margin of difference is seen to be a key indicator of gender equality. While increasing the number of women in workplaces is a necessary condition for advancing gender equality, it is not a sufficient measure of equality on its own (Connell, 2006; Duncanson & Woodward, 2016). Women may make up 50% of an organization and still struggle to reach higher levels of leadership, be clustered into occupational categories, and experience disproportionate levels of sexual harassment. Increasing female participation also does not automatically lead to diminishing male influence within organizations, as Verhoeven et al. (2022) found in their social network analysis of Australian corporate board networks.

According to Ely and Meyerson (2000), the tendency to measure progress toward gender equality in problematic ways stems from the limited approaches to gender equality employed by organizations. They argue that organizations traditionally problematize gender equality within the following three frames: (1) fix the women, (2) value the feminine, and (3) create equal opportunity. In all three frames, gender is understood in categorical terms, so Ely and Meyerson (2000, p. 113) propose a fourth frame, which defines gender as a "set of social relations through which the categories male and female, masculine and feminine, derive meaning and shape experience". By adopting the fourth frame, which accords with our view of gender as process, Ely and Meyerson (2000) argue that organizations can bring about transformative changes through incremental interventions.

Duncanson and Woodward (2016) identify a similar trend in the military context and argue that early feminist critiques regarding women's military participation focused on two strategies for change: inclusion (an increase in women) and reversal (valuing characteristics and tasks traditionally associated with women, e.g., caring and nonviolence). The former risks requiring women to assimilate to dominant masculine norms, while the latter emphasizes difference in ways that risk essentializing men and women. Neither transforms the gender structure by disrupting binary ways of thinking. As Connell (2006, p. 845) argues, taking an oversimplified categorical view of gender is limited "in that it ignores the known complexities of gender categories, identities, and practices".

While we concur with the notion that categorical approaches to gender equality are inadequate (Connell, 2006; Duncanson & Woodward, 2016; Ely & Meyerson, 2000), we acknowledge that gender as category is a useful first step for quantifying some of the issues of inequality—for example, understanding and tracking vertical and horizontal disparities over time. However, it does not provide a full understanding of why these disparities persist. Process approaches give us a multi-level frame through which we can identify the ways gender inequalities are produced and maintained, such that they are more readily identified and eliminated, moving toward a more transformative approach (Doan & Portillo, 2019; Risman, 2004).

Gender mainstreaming has been put forward as a transformative approach to gender equality, particularly in military contexts (Caglar, 2013; Duncanson & Woodward, 2016; Rees, 2005). Gender mainstreaming gained prominence when the United Nations (UN) Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security

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(WPS) in 2000, which called on member states to mainstream gender perspectives into all peacekeeping and security operations (Johnstone & Momani, 2020). The transformative *potential* of gender mainstreaming is linked to the promotion of gender equality and the incorporation of gender perspectives into planning and policymaking processes (UN, 1997). The integration of a gender perspective is intended to improve policies "by making visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes, and outcomes" (Walby, 2005, p. 321). In this way, both gender mainstreaming and our conception of gender as process can be seen as advocating for a radical rethinking of the status quo, rather than surface-level changes, as an approach to progressing gender equality (Tiessen, 2007). However, without a strong theoretical basis in conceptions of gender as process, meanings of gender and the mechanisms to achieve gender equality have been obscured within gender mainstreaming approaches, effectively stripping away its transformative potential (Caglar, 2013; Paterson, 2010; True & Parisi, 2013).

In practice, gender mainstreaming has more often resembled an integrationist rather than a transformative or "agenda-setting" approach (Caglar, 2013). Integrationist approaches are those where a gender perspective is simply applied to existing structures and policies, whereas an agenda-setting approach seeks to restructure or challenge existing policies (Walby, 2005, pp. 322–23; Paterson, 2010). Hence, integrationist approaches are considered easier to implement as they only require women to be included into the prevailing system, rather than changing the existing structures of the organization (Tiessen, 2007). While Johnstone and Momani (2020) found that an integrationist approach could bring modest yet valuable changes to male-dominated organizations, they maintain that it cannot bring about fundamental changes to the prevailing culture.

As Duncanson and Woodward (2016, p. 8) argue, gender mainstreaming in national militaries has typically been operationalized as a fix for "a set of technical issues such as increasing the number of women in militaries …or an increase in the number of times women and gender are mentioned in operation mandates". Thus, militaries have reinforced essentialist understandings of gender by implementing gender mainstreaming in a way that does not fundamentally challenge the existing systems and structures (Paterson, 2010), producing only surface-level changes rather than having a transformative effect (Caglar, 2013; Duncanson & Woodward, 2016; Johnstone & Momani, 2020; Newby & Sebag, 2021; Rees, 2005). The limited change to militaries unequivocally supports the need for rethinking of how gender is conceptualized and problematized within the military context.

6 | WOMEN IN THE ADF

In the subsequent sections, we draw on extant research and policy documents to analyze current conceptions of gender used within the ADF. For the purposes of elucidating how gender as process might affect gender equality in the ADF, we have selected three focal areas where there are both sufficient available data to discuss the issue and scope to examine the issue from the perspective of gender as process. These themes are women's participation, sexual misconduct, and uniforms. This was done via the authors' combined expertize on gender and the military supported by JW's lived experience. We discuss the implications for change when conceptions of gender as category are employed and the limitations of such an approach. In doing so, we also aim to make visible the gendering dynamics that are continually enacted within the ADF to produce and reproduce inequalities, which is essential for developing a new way forward and realizing meaningful change (Lewis & Simpson, 2012).

6.1 | Women's participation

The ADF has been somewhat successful in increasing women's participation. However, while increasing the number of women in militaries is essential, this alone is not sufficient to disrupt the gendered culture of the military nor is the proliferation of egalitarian policies (Doan & Portillo, 2019; Duncanson & Woodward, 2016; Enloe, 2000). Focusing on numerical targets as a measure of success against policy outcomes indicates an oversimplified view of gender that insufficiently recognizes the gendered experiences and barriers members face in their ADF careers.

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For example, women have been stigmatized for needing assistance to meet the Army's physical standards. Hammond (2020) reported a strong stigma attached to a course designed to increase the recruitment of women. The course focused on building (potential) female recruits' physical fitness and resilience to meet the fitness standards required to enter the Army. However, many perceived it as an indicator that the Army was lowering its standards and it was often referred to as "fat camp" (Hammond, 2020). Concerns relating to the lowering of physical standards due to women's integration have been frequently mentioned in various ADF-wide reviews (AHRC, 2012; Jenkins & Priday, 2017). Cohn (2000) argued that while these arguments are usually framed as a gender-neutral concern for the organization, men employ these discourses on physical training standards to subtly reassert gender differences and their dominance over women who are deemed inferior for not meeting the same standard. This can be understood as a process of boundary maintenance, which as Eisen and Yamashita (2019, p. 806) argue is continually enacted by men to reinforce notions of hegemonic masculinity to "maintain a gendered system of power and domination". Similarly, hegemonic masculinity is reinforced within the ADF through the operation of gender protection norms on deployments. The *Australian Deployed Women* report (Curtin-Bibb et al., 2021) details that harmful gender protection norms, which refer to the idea that women need greater protection by virtue of being women, are still prevalent. The operation of essentialist discourses that position women as in need of protection and men as the protectors means "female soldiers' military identities are subordinated to their civilian identities as potential victims" (Wilén & Heinecken, 2018, p. 680). By othering women in this way, hegemonic masculinities are reinforced and women's full participation in the ADF is again limited. An understanding that these kinds of discursive practices constitute part of the gender structure helps to explain why apparently gender-equitable policies have contributed little to improve women's participation.

Women also continue to be overrepresented in traditionally feminine roles, such as health and support roles. In 2021, the representation of women in the "Health" and "Enterprise and Command Support" (previously termed "Administration") occupational groups was over 50% and 40%, respectively. For all other occupational groups, representation was below 30%, and less than 10% in the "Engineering, Technical, and Construction" group and the "Combat and Security" group (Department of Defence, 2021c, p. 55). Despite an overall increase in representation, there has only been a marginal increase in combat-related roles over the last four financial years (Department of Defence, 2021c). This stagnation suggests that sex segregation in occupations (horizontal segregation) is becoming a long-term feature of the ADF despite egalitarian policies.

The persistence of occupational segregation maintains inequalities because the types of roles men and women occupy shape their military experiences in different, and often inequitable, ways. For example, where women choose to break from traditional roles they encounter considerable resistance, especially in combat units (Jenkins & Priday, 2017; Portillo et al., 2021; Sasson-Levy & Amram-Katz, 2007). As a review into the attitudes of ADF personnel about women entering Army combat brigades noted:

> Overwhelmingly members describe the opportunities in Army as open to people from all backgrounds. This is underpinned by an attitude that everyone is welcome, as long as they meet the required standards and conform to the existing norms. Or, as one member put it, 'if you want to join a club you have to act like the club'.
>
> (Jenkins & Priday, 2017, pp. 9–10)

More bluntly, another ADF member commented: "you can find a chick that loves that shit and she can do it…as long as we don't have to shift any of our way that we behave (Jenkins & Priday, 2017, p. 10)." In other words, the acceptance of women is conditional on them not disrupting the status quo.

Relatedly, a subtle gendered "othering" occurs through demarcation of "warfighters" and logistical and support roles. As Pachernegg (2020) illustrates, the term warfighter was traditionally used as an all-encompassing gender-neutral term, describing any service member of the ADF. However, over time, the cultural use of the term became more synonymous with personnel serving in combat roles. This accords with the valorization of the capacity for violence as a technique for determining who qualifies for membership in dominant groups (Schwalbe et al., 2000).

Women are overwhelmingly employed in the implicitly subordinate non-warfighting group, as “support”, limiting their opportunity to be seen as full participants in the ADF.

On the interactional level of the gender structure, this requires women to do gender the same as men to fit in. As Thomson (2014) found in her examination of ADF and Department of Defence language use, styles of banter familiar to those who are socialized male were standard practice in ADF workplaces, with the result that those who knew how to negotiate and respond to banter could fit in and those who did not understand it or resented it (often women) felt excluded or bullied. Schwalbe et al. (2000) argue that regulating discourse in this way can be a powerful tool for reproducing inequality and maintaining boundaries between groups. Women reported using belonging strategies such as “be like the boys” (Thomson, 2014, p. 119) or subordinate adaptation strategies such as “batting the eyelids” in order to “play the gender card”. Thomson (2014, p. 122) challenged readers to consider “whether the socialization practices of Defence should remain practices which are dominated by the Anglo-Australian male”.

The disparate effect of *horizontal* segregation on men and women's experiences is also illustrated by the subsequent *vertical* hierarchical segregation within the ADF. For example, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions in the ADF and particularly in senior leadership, with representation having only slightly improved since 2015 (Department of Defence, 2021c). According to Carreiras (2017), this segregation in militaries worldwide is the result of technical and combat related occupational groups being more closely related to the warfighting functions of the military, which consequently confers greater prestige and opportunities for promotion to members who occupy those roles. The Broderick Review confirmed that this occurs in the ADF, which has traditionally drawn personnel from male-dominated and warfighting roles for appointment to the most senior positions (star-ranks) (AHRC, 2012). It identified that dozens of star rank positions were reserved for personnel from the combat/operator/pilot specializations, meaning they could only be accessed by personnel from those groups. While this policy appears technically gender-neutral, it clearly has gendered effects due to gendered processes operating at all levels of the gender structure. Despite more positions having since been opened to women from noncombat/operator/pilot backgrounds, women's ascent to the star-ranks remains sluggish with only 31 positions held by women out of 202 (Department of Defence, 2021a). Thomson (2014, p. xii) noted the presence of an unconscious bias in ADF cultural practices, deeply embedded in ADF cultural codes and language, such that when ADF personnel think of leaders, they think of males.

Similarly, gendered expectations associated with motherhood have impacted women's career progression. ADF women have noted barriers they face in being mothers in the military and trying to progress through the ranks, including the lack of support mechanisms available, criticism faced from colleagues and friends when deploying away from children, and their careers being subjected to a “motherhood penalty” (Department of Defence, 2021a, 2021c). Organizational structures and policies, such as inflexible promotion pathways that disproportionately impact women, also reinforce the construction of women's primary identities as “mothers and wives” rather than as soldiers (Wilén & Heinecken, 2018). Consequently, women are reinforced as “other”, which prevents them from being seen as full participants of the military and further limits their opportunities for career progression.

6.2 | Sexual misconduct

Sexual misconduct, which includes sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual offenses, remains prevalent within the ADF despite the implementation of targeted policies and interventions. Moreover, women remain disproportionately represented in the data. In 2020–2021, women were identified as the impacted person in more than 80% of reported incidents (Department of Defence, 2021b). A recent report by the Inspector General of the ADF (IGADF) identified that the prevalence of experiences of sexual misconduct among women in the ADF had increased from 11 to 15% in the previous three years (IGADF, 2021, p. ii). While this prevalence was lower than similar research conducted with women in civilian workplaces, the increase in sexual misconduct is significant considering the increased representation of women in the ADF as it confirms that increasing women's representation has done little to quell gendering practices that reinforce the subordination of women. For example, highly sexualized

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and derogatory "banter" in the ADF remains a salient feature of the ADF culture (Jenkins & Priday, 2017; see also IGADF, 2021, pp. 71–77). The trivialization of sexual harassment as banter validates and normalizes the behavior, thus preserving the gendered power relations of the military (Kovitz, 2021; Sasson-Levy, 2003) and diminishing the effectiveness of cultural change policies.

The ADF's current approach to addressing the issue overwhelmingly relies on categorical conceptions of gender. As identified in the IGADF (2021) report, training and policy are victim-centric. While it is important to support victims, an exclusive focus on victims risks reifying rather than breaking down traditional gender stereotypes of men as perpetrators and women as victims (Tinkler, 2012). Further, it focuses on victims' choices at the expense of understanding perpetrators and their behaviors. For example, a female RAAF student commented that "the onus is on the women to be safe. It's all about how we dress or how we have to be careful with alcohol" (IGADF, 2021, p. 71). To understand the gendered dynamics of both victimization and perpetration, equal focus on both is required.

Further, it is still not clear whether policy or training has contributed to any significant reduction in sexual harassment in the ADF as this has never been evaluated (IGADF, 2021), despite ADF members continuously expressing concerns about the quality and delivery of such training (AHRC, 2012; Jenkins & Priday, 2017). Other studies have shown that the quality and delivery of training are important for policy diffusion and effectiveness as it significantly influences the way service members interpret, construct, and implement those policies (Doan & Portillo, 2019). For example, the Broderick Review found that sexual misconduct was at times trivialized by ADFA cadets who used the phrase "'E&D'ing' someone" (equity and diversity) to refer to making a complaint or reporting inappropriate behavior. Some women suggested that it was a woman's responsibility to avoid harassment and "situations" that could lead to it. Others suggested that mistreatment was to be expected and women should accept this as the way things are, with one commenting: "…there will be men that will mistreat you. (Women) just need to be educated on the fact that this is the culture that you're entering into and make sure that you enjoy that environment" (AHRC, 2011, p. 4). These examples indicate how ineffective policies and training have been in changing the broader organizational culture surrounding misconduct.

Further, these examples also indicate that women adopt "masculine" behaviors, trivialize sexual harassment, position themselves as different from other women, and downplay their gender identity as women while emphasizing their identity as "professional" soldiers in the careful construction of their gendered identities to "pass" in the masculine space (Archer, 2013; Sasson-Levy, 2003; Silva, 2008). This can be understood as defensive othering—"doing gender" in ways that simultaneously distance them from femininity and bring them closer in alignment to the dominant masculine group. Through this strategy, women acknowledge their subordinated status by suggesting that sexual harassment is part and parcel of the masculine culture, but that if women do not expect differential treatment and instead become "one of the boys", they are safe from these aspects of the culture because the subordinated status of women does not fully apply to them. However, by distancing themselves from femininity and aligning themselves with the dominant group (in this case, men), women reinforce the masculine as the norm (Sasson-Levy, 2003).

6.3 | Uniforms

Uniforms are another way the ADF reinforces categorical constructions of gender that emphasize beliefs about the apparently "inherent" differences between men and women (see Kovitz, 2021 for a discussion of similar issues in the Canadian military). Military uniforms are typically designed for a standardized male body and act as a marker of masculinity against which women are differentiated. Consequently, this practice limits women's ability to be recognized as "real soldiers" (Strand et al., 2022). These stark categorical constructions of gender are formalized at the institutional level of the gender structure through ADF dress manuals and policy, which have implications for identity formation and gender performance at the individual level.

As noted in the Navy dress instructions: "any reference to a male applies also to a female unless otherwise specified" ("Defence FOI 244/19/20" 2020, p. 4). Both the Navy and Air Force stipulate that a member's dress and

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grooming must adhere to either male or female requirements based on their identification with either the male or female gender. The Air Force states that "for most Air Force members, gender identity corresponds with their biological sex, so gender in relation to the Air Force uniform refers to masculine or feminine." ("Defence FOI 244/19/20", 2020, p. 253). This indicates an understanding that gender does not always correspond to biological sex but conformity to one category is still required. The Navy instructions also make clear that where members identify as "gender x (indeterminate/intersex/unspecified)", they must choose either the male or female uniform and state that "the combination of male and female dress and grooming standards is not to occur" ("Defence FOI 244/19/20", 2020, p. 24). The Army Dress Manual (see Department of Defence, 2013) does not explicitly define gender, but certain items of uniform and rules are applied to women only—reinforcing male as default and female as different, but also as "other". In the RAAF and Navy, certain headwear cannot be worn by women and vice versa. Further, in some cases, the default uniform is based on a masculine body type with no tailoring option to fit female figures, for example, around hips or bust. This is compensated for by permitting women to undo a certain number of their lower shirt buttons to accommodate their hips ("Defence FOI 244/19/20", 2020). In this way, women are constantly reminded that the uniform they are wearing was not designed for them. The grooming standards for men and women across all three services also vary significantly with women typically granted more choice.

There is no inherent or biological reason for these gendered dress standards. The rules are based on either biological sex or gender identity, but in both cases, they reinforce men and women as socially distinct categories. An analysis of gender as process reveals that gender hierarchies are created and reinforced by these types of arbitrary rules that (a) require men and women to behave in different ways and (b) treat them as "the same", while clearly being based on a male default. A truly transformative approach might allow people to perform gender beyond the binary—or even to destabilize long-held associations between dress and gender. For example, the ADF could make available a range of shirts, trousers, dresses, and skirts tailored to a range of body shapes and permit members to choose items according to their own preferences and the practical requirements of the workplace or activity to be performed. Grooming standards could apply equally to all, for example, allowing men to have the same range of longer hairstyles as women and the option to choose to wear jewelry or nail polish.

While the ADF has recently indicated that it will shift from a "one size fits all approach" to a "fit to perform" approach when fitting servicewomen with combat clothing and equipment (Department of Defence, 2021c, p. 53), it is unclear whether there are plans to extend the policy's reach beyond combat clothing and equipment to all uniforms.

7 | CONCLUSION

Militaries globally have struggled to address gender inequality. We have shown that gender processes on the individual, interactional, and institutional levels of the gender structure have all impeded the ADF's progress toward gender equality. Reform will require attention to the ways that men and women perform and shape gender at the individual and interactional levels, and how gender is also created and reinforced at the institutional level. There cannot be a focus on "fixing the women" without commensurate attention to how men create gender in the military. Understanding these gendered processes will require targeted research not just evaluations of current interventions.

To make progress, there needs to be movement and realignment at each level of the gender structure. Changes at each level have effects on the others (Risman, 2004) and progress at one level may be stymied by resistance or backlash at another level. To take just a few examples, at the individual level, ADF identity formation needs to be less tied to notions of hegemonic masculinity. At the interactional level, a reduction in aggressive or sexualized banter may reduce the othering of women and other marginalized groups, while also reducing the need for adaptive strategies, such as defensive othering (becoming "one of the boys"). At the institutional level, star rank positions might be fully opened to those with noncombat/operator/pilot backgrounds, reducing the prestige and differentiation of the male-dominated "warfighter" career path and opening senior positions to more women. A presumption of equal parenting and generous leave entitlements for fathers might reduce the career-limiting effects of motherhood.

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Further, changes to rigidly gendered uniform requirements may reduce the male default/female other by allowing men, women, and those who identify beyond the binary to perform gender differently.

An understanding of gender as process—as a multi-level system that is constantly being created and reinforced by the actions of individuals and institutions—is the most promising approach for assisting the ADF and militaries around the world to move on from their patchy, stalled progress toward gender equality. While we have shown that gender is very "sticky", there is also hope in a process view of gender, as processes are amenable to change. Through understanding gender processes and enacting policy and cultural change aimed at altering them, we hope that opportunities can be opened up for women (and those who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity) to participate fully in the ADF.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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ENDNOTE

[1] The Skype Sex Scandal refers to an incident at ADFA where a male cadet secretly filmed a sexual encounter with a female cadet and livestreamed it via Skype to several other cadets nearby. This incident became widely publicized and the ADF attracted intense scrutiny from the public about its culture and the treatment of women at ADFA and within the ADF more broadly.

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