

# In What Ways does the Distinction between Masculine 'Just Warriors' and Feminine 'Beautiful Souls' Reflect the Patriarchal Structure of International Relations?

Written by Katie Smith

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KATIE SMITH, DEC 22 2007

Gender is one of the most crucial aspects of individual identity and it is closely linked to ideas of war. Elshtain's 'Just Warriors' and 'Beautiful Souls', her portrayal of the ideal gender types for western society, make clear the war roles that each of us is encouraged to aspire to in peace-time society. Patriarchy refers broadly to rule by men and can be seen almost universally. In this essay I will examine the patriarchy of the international system and the international relations theory that serves to reinforce and recreate the male-dominated nature of this system.

I will argue that the patriarchy of international relations and the social construction of 'just warriors' and 'beautiful souls' are mutually reinforcing and reflect each other. Both ideas are fundamentally concerned with war and conflict which are arguably the most gendered of all political interactions. I will examine the social construction of men as protectors, which comes from the need to motivate soldiers for war, and which links social gender roles with patriarchy in international relations. I will then go on to look at one consequence of this, the hierarchy of gender, and how this creates homophobia.

In my analysis I will focus only on the western world. This is because both international relations theory and feminist theory are dominated by western thinkers.

### War and Gender

Conflict has been a much studied theme of human history; however, until recently, the gendered nature of war was barely noticed or, alternatively, dismissed as natural. This is perhaps surprising given the extremes to which war is gendered, and to which gender is based in ideas of war. There are, of course, biological differences between men and women which provide the basis for gender but these differences are relatively small and inconclusive. For

# **In What Ways does the Distinction between Masculine 'Just Warriors' and Feminine 'Beautiful S**

Written by Katie Smith

example, Goldstein asserts that the only significant biological differences linked to war roles are that men generally are bigger and stronger than women, and women give birth. Neither of these factors imply the division of the sexes in war, therefore, these divisions must be explained by social factors (Goldstein, 2001).

Elshtain's examination of western gender ideals leads her to the conclusion that the masculinity of the 'Just Warrior' and the femininity of the 'Beautiful Soul' are the aspirational basis for gender roles in our society (Elshtain, 1987). These distinctions are fundamentally based in war, the protective soldier and the vulnerable civilian, yet serve as the basis for everyday social interaction and peacetime identity. So why is it that the military exercises such influence over society? Goldstein argues that the universal presence of war-based gender roles in peace-time is a result of the universal potential for war and the necessity to prepare for it. Thus, the international context means that people are socialised into gender roles that have proved useful in the waging and maintaining of war (2001: 23). Although there is substantial theoretical argument concerning the universal potential (or not) for war, it is true to say that conflict is both common and widespread, and has been throughout history. Therefore, social preparation for war is understandable.

Socially constructed roles are reconstructed and reinforced subconsciously through people's desire to 'fit in' to society and a belief that roles are natural; identities can also be manipulated for power and gain. It is perhaps misleading to use the term 'construction' as if gender roles were designed at some point. Goldstein explains the development of social roles as a process whereby useful or effective elements of society are reproduced because of their success, a type of evolution perhaps (2001: 251). Bourdieu uses the term 'symbolic violence' to refer to this process where a historically specific (and highly restrictive) practice becomes seen as natural and therefore reinforces itself (in Steans, 1998: 45). As a result of the naturalisation of gender roles, they are resistant to radical or rapid change.

## **The Masculine Protector**

Perhaps the most fundamental gendered belief in both international and domestic society is that of 'the protector'; Elshtain's 'Just Warrior' embodies this role. The 'Just Warrior' is masculine, brave and reluctantly fights if it is necessary for the defence of the weak and innocent (1987: 127). Tales of such heroes are common within our society although the heroes themselves are relatively rare and certainly unrepresentative of the male population. The recurrence of the 'Just Warrior' in myths in the western world is linked to his portrayal in society as the ideal male that all men should aspire to become. (Steans, 1998: 92). The successful results of this type of man in war create a self-reinforcing myth (Stiehm, 1988: 102).

# **In What Ways does the Distinction between Masculine 'Just Warriors' and Feminine 'Beautiful Souls'?**

Written by Katie Smith

Stiehm argues that 'the protector' is successful in war is because, 'human beings will do more terrible things and will endure more terrible things on behalf of others than they will do or endure for themselves alone.' (1988: 101-2). This is linked to a form of morality entirely compatible with the idea of a 'Just Warrior'; the safety of vulnerable people (women, children and the elderly) at home is given the highest priority and therefore 'protectors' are exempt from normal moral standards and can use any means necessary to ensure that safety. Because of its basis in love (real or future/potential), the idea of being a 'protector' also encourages self-sacrifice. This gendered motivation to fight is therefore much stronger and more universally applicable than the motivation to fight to protect the state.

The creation of 'the protector' relies necessarily on the creation of 'the vulnerable'; Elshtain's 'Beautiful Souls'. Soldiers cannot be motivated to fight for someone capable of defending themselves to the same extent that they can be motivated to fight for dependents (Goldstein, 2001: 283). 'Beautiful Souls' are innocent and pure and therefore very vulnerable; their attributes of beauty and peacefulness correspond particularly neatly with the traditional and still common view of ideal femininity. Their existence (as ideal types) is essential for the existence of the 'Just Warrior' to be possible. Motivation is also lessened if there are plenty of soldiers to fight for each dependent as the necessity for 'ruthlessness and self-sacrifice' is removed. Therefore, the 'protectors' must be the minority to be truly effective (Stiehm, 1988: 102). This may help to explain the underlying reason for the exclusivity of the military despite the lessening need for strength and mental toughness usually associated with young men.

## **The Masculine State**

Ideas of protection and vulnerability are also present at state level; protection can be seen clearly in the development and rationale of the modern, western state. Political theory is full of ideas for the promotion of 'the good life' within the state, a good life that would not be possible if the state did not exist. Citizens are protected, by the institutions of the state, from the dangerous anarchic system 'out there' which must be managed by a select group of brave individuals. The social construction of gender norms means that this sphere for bravery necessarily excludes 'Beautiful Souls' who instead provide the rationale for protection. Thus international politics is male dominated.

The male dominance of international relations reinforces itself through international relations theory as well as through social gender roles. Women's social and political portrayal as victims allows them to be effectively written out of international relations theory both because they are barely present in decision making and because it is assumed that they never will be; women's passive role is naturalised (Grant and Newland, 1991: 1). Theories such as Hobbes' 'state of nature' and Morgenthau's 'Political Man' draw on masculine identities for their construction of human nature as a result of gender assumptions of their time. Tickner points out the striking absence of women or children in the

# **In What Ways does the Distinction between Masculine ‘Just Warriors’ and Feminine ‘Beautiful S**

Written by Katie Smith

state of nature and how this allows theorists to draw conclusions about human nature from the socially constructed identity of only half the population of the time (Tickner, 1992: 45). Similarly, Waltz's state system can be viewed as inherently masculine; he portrays states as autonomous entities which are reliant on physical force and self-help. These state characteristics have a striking resemblance to the portrayal of forms of masculinity (Tickner, 1992: 17). Again, these are examples of Bourdieu's 'symbolic violence', in which historical situations have become naturalised (in Steans, 1998: 45).

The conclusions of theories such as those mentioned above are often accepted without questioning the gendered assumptions on which they are based. This allows them to recreate the masculine world they describe and reinforce women's exclusion. An example is the notion of the dangers of anarchy mentioned earlier. The instability and likelihood of conflict in international relations justifies the exclusion of 'Beautiful Souls' from the international arena; this exclusion allows international theories to be constructed with no reference to women; and this in turn creates masculine theories that play up the 'manly' aspects of international relations such as conflict and autonomy; to complete the circle this then recreates the perception of conflict and instability in anarchy used to justify women's exclusion. Thus the patriarchy of international relations is asserted and constantly recreated, while simultaneously reinforcing social gender norms and ideas about women's suitability for war (Grant and Newland, 1991: 5).

## **Gender Hierarchies**

There are naturally many consequences of gender divisions; as gender roles are integral to the identity of an individual, they have a profound affect that individual's thoughts and social interactions. In this section I will focus on only a small area of the consequences, the creation of gender hierarchies and the homophobia that results from this, particularly in the military.

The hierarchy of gender is closely tied up with the 'Just Warrior'-'Beautiful Soul' / protector-protected distinction, where the male role is portrayed as superior to the female role. Male dominance in society reinforces this superiority because, in a patriarchal system, masculinity is celebrated and hegemonic masculine attributes are taken as virtues (Tickner, 1992: 128). Thus, the masculine ideal, or hegemonic masculinity, is set up as a standard against which men can measure themselves and others (Steans, 1998: 92). Placing women in a subordinate category creates the need for men to continually prove their masculinity in order to stay in the superior group and be socially accepted.

This is linked to military practice and the necessity for creating effective soldiers. The 'Beautiful Soul' ideal is weak, dependent, naïve, and pure, and as a result completely unsuitable for fighting a war. Therefore, feminine

# **In What Ways does the Distinction between Masculine 'Just Warriors' and Feminine 'Beautiful S**

Written by Katie Smith

characteristics have to be repressed to create a masculine identity that is suitable for war. Because of masculinity's roots in military effectiveness, the military is the clearest example of immense pressure being placed on men to repress femininity (Steans, 1998: 93). This is done through constant degradation of femininity and a carrot and stick approach of punishment for feminine behaviour and reward for masculine behaviour. Often this reward can be acceptance by the group (Goldstein, 2001: 265, 269).

Socialisation of boys to be suitable potential soldiers starts early with parental pressure to repress emotion, seen in the popular belief that 'big boys don't cry', and continues with bullying and teasing of effeminate boys throughout school. It is notable that gender roles are enforced much more strictly for boys than girls, both by their parents and their peers (Maccoby in Goldstein, 2001: 235-6). This can be explained in military terms in that an effeminate boy is seen as completely unsuitable to be a soldier, while a boyish girl is seen to still have the potential to be a good mother.

Further pressure is placed on men in combat through the common military practice of portraying the enemy as feminine (Trexler in Goldstein, 2001: 357). Again this is based on a masculine-feminine hierarchy where aggression towards the enemy is encouraged because he is inferior yet is challenging for the dominant position. In other words, 'War borrows gender as a code for domination-submission relationships', a practice only possible in a male dominated environment and reliant on a belief in the inferiority of femininity (Goldstein, 2001: 333; Steans, 1998: 94; Stiehm, 1988: 97; Segal, 1990: 158). Most commonly this can be seen in language, such as the underlying discourse of castration that McBride identifies in American political and military circles at the time of the 1991 Gulf War (in Goldstein, 2001: 358). However, the widespread rape and castration of men and boys in both Bosnia and Kosovo is a clear example of a practical expression of feminisation (Pettman, 1996: 101). Although principally aimed at soldiers, this feminisation of the enemy can extend into society through the language of politicians and the media and therefore is not restricted to military circles.

The widespread belief in the inferiority of femininity and the common practice of gendering enemies as feminine creates great pressure on men to prove themselves. 'Manliness' shows not only superiority within a society but psychologically separates men from the hated enemy. It is this idea that provides the basis for the extremely high levels of homophobia in the military.

## **Homophobia**

Segal points out that 'institutions as sexually segregated as the army regularly display an apparently chronic

## **In What Ways does the Distinction between Masculine 'Just Warriors' and Feminine 'Beautiful S**

Written by Katie Smith

homophobia.' (1990: 142). Despite widespread acceptance of homosexual rights in western countries, until very recently only the Netherlands fully accepts openly homosexual recruits. Most other countries have operated an official policy of not asking about sexuality (although 'gay baiting' remains common in practice) but discharging any recruits who are openly homosexual (Pettman, 1996: 152; Goldstein, 2001: 377). So why is it that, despite clear evidence of the capability of homosexual recruits (many homosexual personnel are discharged after years of service), homophobia is so institutionalised in the military? For reasons of space I will only examine the phobia of gay men which is common for three principal reasons: the hatred of femininity; the cultural threat from homosexuality; and the fear of being viewed as a sexual object. All are based in the gender hierarchy examined in the section above.

As with other aspects of identity, gay identity is a social construction particular to its time and place. Thus, homosexuality in ancient Greek armies was believed to enhance masculinity and performance in wars, but in modern western culture, homosexuality is seen as effeminate and inappropriate for war (Goldstein, 2001: 374-5). Modern, effeminate homosexuality is an imagined stereotype, similar to the 'Just Warrior' and 'Beautiful Soul' in the way it is assumed despite limited evidence, and in its power to shape identities and reinforce itself.

This social assumption of effeminacy allows gay men to be grouped with women in subordination to masculinity. Military training that involves the crushing of feminine characteristics in order to mould effective soldiers, is as frequently homophobic as it is misogynous. Gerzon's study of the American military shows the close association created between homosexuality and femininity in the terms of abuse hurled at underachieving recruits (in Goldstein, 2001: 265). The emphasis on masculinity and the social pressure to crush effeminacy allows an institutional development of homophobia that is on a different scale to that developed in society. Many authors note the prevalence of homophobic bullying in the military applied to both gay and straight, non-effeminate or only slightly weaker men; This included verbal and physical abuse, death threats and, in extreme cases, murders (Osburn and Beneke, 1997; Weinstein and White, 1997). Segal argues that, 'society, at least such an internally regulated society as the military, needs its symbolic deviants; actual deviants may be beside the point.' (1990: 144). Thus the military attacks some of the weaker men for their effeminacy in order to push the majority to toughen up; homophobia is a tool with which to create tough and disciplined soldiers.

Steans presents a further reason for military homophobia; homosexual identity is seen as a subversive type of masculinity which presents a direct cultural attack on the mainstream masculinity (1998: 93). Connell terms this mainstream idea of masculinity the 'hegemonic masculinity', taken from Gramsci's theory of social hegemony. The 'hegemonic masculinity' is a culturally specific form of masculinity which occupies the dominant position in a society, an example would be Elshtain's 'Just Warrior' (Connell, 1995: 76-7). Homosexual masculinity is seen as inferior to

# **In What Ways does the Distinction between Masculine ‘Just Warriors’ and Feminine ‘Beautiful S**

Written by Katie Smith

hegemonic masculinity but its presence in society, with its alternative example of what it means to be a man, is threatening to proponents of the mainstream. Thus, military culture is assumed to be threatened by the inclusion of soldiers who are openly gay and therefore associated with a culture that subverts military ideals. Military homophobia can be seen in part to be a defensive reaction to this.

A third explanation for homophobia is masculinised men’s fears of being seen as a sexual object. As I have shown throughout, militarised, or hegemonic, masculinity is based in ideas of domination and superiority over women. One of the principal ways in which this is understood is sexual control; military brothels, sexual harassment of female military personnel, and social stigmatisation of ‘loose women’ are all reflections of masculine sexual dominance and control (Meola, 1997: 145-9; Stiehm, 1988: 98-9). The simultaneous myths of military women as ‘lesbians’ and ‘whores’ are an example of methods used to control women even when they are in equal or superior positions. Sexually active women can be labelled ‘whores’ to degrade them, and women who refuse sex can be degraded and potentially lose their jobs through homophobic labelling as ‘lesbians’ (Stiehm, 1988: 98-9).

Homosexual men present a threat to this assumption of dominance because their relationships require sexual submission by a man rather than a woman. This recodes the masculine identity from a ‘sexual subject’, as assumed in hegemonic masculine culture, to a ‘sexual object’, a degrading, feminine and weak position that hegemonic masculinity rejects (Goldstein, 2001: 379; Pettman, 1996: 150). The closeness and bonding that is encouraged between soldiers brings the idea of being seen as a ‘sexual object’ closer to home, and open homophobia and assertions of heterosexuality can help heterosexual men feel more comfortable together (Segal, 1990: 142).

Thus, ideas of male superiority and female inferiority create an institutionalised homophobia in the military, where homosexuality is seen as effeminate.

## **Conclusion**

Patriarchy in international relations and the social construction of gender ideals constantly mirror, recreate and reinforce each other. Both are fundamentally based in ideas of war and military effectiveness and have served to naturalise and entrench gender divisions in western identity and society. The creation of male ‘protectors’ or ‘Just Warriors’ in society helps states fight wars effectively through the use of gendered methods to motivate soldiers but relies simultaneously on the vulnerability of society’s “Beautiful Souls”. This then creates the norm for society and for politics, with women excluded from all ‘dangerous’ professions including international relations. I have shown how the exclusion of women is recreated and reinforced by male-centred theory which plays up the masculine characteristics

# In What Ways does the Distinction between Masculine 'Just Warriors' and Feminine 'Beautiful Souls'?

Written by Katie Smith

of international relations.

I then examined the role of protector-protected divisions in creating a gender hierarchy which is used to toughen up men in training and to encourage aggression towards a feminised enemy. The combination of these uses, creates a necessity for military men to prove their masculinity. I then went on to look at three reasons that this hierarchy contributes to a culture of institutionalised homophobia in the military; the idea of gay men as effeminate that puts them in a subordinate position along with women; the cultural threat posed by alternative, gay, portrayals of manliness; and the fear of becoming a 'sexual object' that makes men uncomfortable.

I have shown that the patriarchy of international relations and the creation of 'Just Warriors' and 'Beautiful Souls' reflect and reinforce each other through their common link with gendered roles in war and conflict. The consequences of this are huge and I have demonstrated how they create a phobia of gay men in the military.

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Written by Katie Smith

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