

New Approaches to the Persistence and Prevalence
of Institutional Gendered Violence

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Existing legal responses to sexual assault and harassment in the military have stagnated or failed. New approaches are needed. Current advocacy and policies dwell on the inherently masculine military, in its statistical composition and its institutional culture. To begin equality advocacy in this place is deeply problematic because it perpetuates a myth of universal male integration. This article proposes a “symbiotic institutional equality” approach. This approach recognizes that there are collateral consequences to imposing law reforms on heavily masculinized institutions without contemplating the underlying masculinity norms that dominate the institution. Institutional law reforms must avoid provoking hyper-masculine acts or exacerbating problematic masculine imperatives. This approach begins by debunking the myth of universal male integration. Embedded within contestations of the masculine military culture is the unstated assumption that its culture privileges or benefits most of the men that operate within it. This entry point creates a false gender binary framing women as outsiders breaking into a male military institution and men as insiders defending the male military culture, often in the name of military efficacy. Perpetuating this myth of universal male military integration is not only divisive and unproductive, it yields flawed law reform proposals that actually stand to worsen and entrench gender inequality. This myth is harmful to men, women, and military efficacy. The payoffs to this new approach would be transformative. It reveals that sexual assault, domestic violence, and even mass shootings are hyper-masculine expressions of violence in response to the relative deprivation of masculinities cultivated by masculine institutional cultures. The Military Justice Improvement Act and current domestic violence reforms exacerbate problematic masculinities, threatening women’s safety and integration. We must paradoxically achieve women’s military integration by adding men to the frame.