
From Naturalisation To Sidestreaming

How The Dutch Military's Online Recruitment Shapes Masculinity,
Femininity, And Approaches Of Gender Integration.

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Acknowledgements

Dear Alana,

Thank you for supervising me on this project, I have learned a lot about research and writing from you.

Hello dear reader,

I wanted to write a small, personal introduction to my thesis to bring you closer to the content of the following pages and me as a writer of these words.

In the world of academia and scientific inquiry, we often lose ourselves in overtly formal and impersonal writing that neither acknowledges the researcher who has poured their heart into their works, nor the reader who asks to be taken along on the journey of discovery.

I believe that adding a personal element to the work does not dampen neutrality or scientific objectivity. In fact, the more you, fellow reader, know about me as a writer, the better you can critically soak up the knowledge and perspectives I am laying out in front of you, because you understand where I come from. For this reason, there is also a dedicated section at the end of this thesis document where I reflect on my positionality and how it might have influenced the way I conducted my research.

Developing this research has challenged me in so many ways, yet I have grown to love the work. From the frustration of not moving forward with my project, over the joy in sharing my knowledge with friends and family, and the successes that boosted my academic confidence, all of it has become part of the work you are reading.

I warmly invite you to take this personal knowledge with you on your travels through my thoughts, to critically support, evaluate, oppose, or simply read the story I have written.

I hope you enjoy the piece I have created.

Nele

Abstract

Including women in security operations has positive effects, yet women are underrepresented in apparatuses like the military. Therefore, this study examined connections between gender and militarism as a source of these gender integration issues. Combining gender studies, military studies, and organisational psychology, the research focussed on how the Dutch military constructs definitions of masculinity and femininity within its recruitment page. These constructs were contrasted to the larger context of the Dutch military organisation by examining other online publications on gender, recruitment requirements, and diversity. Here, I used website analysis and discourse analysis. Through text and image, the Dutch military attempts to disconnect masculinity from militarism in its recruitment page to naturalise women in the force. However, subtle nuances in the presentation of the recruitment page and the other online publications delegate women to specialised places within the military. Thereby the Dutch military case reveals how gender may not be treated uniformly across one organisation and how equality in representation does not necessarily dismantle deeper gendered hierarchies. I suggest future research to explore the origins of this organisational mismatch and to investigate the long-term consequences of militaries' integration strategies for the inclusion of women in the military.

Key Terms: *gender, masculinity, femininity, military, organisational psychology, diversity*

Introduction

The consideration of gender in security sectors such as the military has seen a long wave of interest and attention, specifically picking up pace after the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) published their *Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security* (UN Security Council, 2000). With this resolution, the UN laid the foundations for wider international recognition of the interconnectedness between gender and conflict. Out of this, scholarly investigations erupted finding repeatedly that sensitivity to gender is good, if not necessary, to fully grasp the effects of conflict on local and global societies (Sjoberg, 2011 & 2016).

As an institution primarily involved in security topics such as conflict management, the military has repeatedly been called a heavily “masculine” and men-dominated environment (e.g., Agostino, 1998; Christensen & Kyed, 2022). Women were long denied access to join the military (Murnane, 2007), and this divide of the military as a “man’s world” is still visible today: for example, in 2021, the NATO reported an average of only 12.51% of their members’ forces to be composed of women (Adamczak, 2021), which is an arguably small amount. This statistic stands in contrast to the apparent will for greater diversity within the military, discernible through how a continuously increasing number of militaries is being opened for women to occupy all ranks (e.g., first participation of women in the Dutch military by 1944; Source 18, Appendix A).

It seems striking that there is such little presence of women in the military given the positive effects the inclusion of women seems to have on peace, settlements, and military operations: the inclusion of more female personnel can enhance the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations (Bridges & Horsfall, 2009); women contribute more to equitable and symmetrical solutions in disputes and armed conflicts (Ta-Johnson et al. 2022); and greater female representation in legislature after negotiated settlements can reduce the risk of conflict recurrence (Shair-Rosenfield & Wood, 2017). What connects these outcomes is not just the mere presence of women and their positive effects. There is an underlying call for the inclusion of women into these sectors. Because, essentially, the effect that women’s inclusion has is compared to the effect that a more homogeneous, less diverse, men-heavy crew of operators has. The topic then turns from investigating the effects of women in security sectors to investigating workforce diversity and the circumstances that lead to specific workforce compositions. This interest in workforce composition is reflected in debates such as the above-mentioned research into the military as a “man’s world”.

So, given the apparent positive effect of women in the security sector, a point of curiosity becomes what the origins are of the low participation of women in organisations such

as the military, and what could be possible avenues to draw more women (and people of diverse genders) into the recruitment pool. Research points towards the complex construction of gender, specifically the construction of ideals of feminine and masculine performance, as an underlying factor to this curiosity (e.g., Newby & Sebag, 2021; Pears, 2022; van Gilder, 2019). Therefore, this paper delves into studying gender, and specifically gendered performance in the military.

Societal Relevance

Securitisation concerns not just political actors and nations, but every person living under these systems. Decisions made by the military can have a lasting impact on the population it is protecting, especially as we see heightened geopolitical tensions that generate questions on the personnel strength of the military.

Within this, e.g., military budget is increased yet taken away from other sectors such as education (in the Netherlands; Rijksoverheid, 2024). Also, the question towards who would be suitable for service is posted. For example, to increase the number of available reservists, the German *Bundeswehr* reformulated their (voluntary) conscription in 2024 as a reaction to ‘the changing geopolitical situation’ (translated from German; Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 2024b). This reformulation of conscription has raised mixed feelings among Germans, some highly support the change while others disagree (Graf, 2024), showing the strong connection the military has to larger society.

It is not just any people that are affected by military systems, but people of diverse genders might be affected differently by decisions made. For example, the German conscription reformulation reveals an imbalance in the treatment of women and men in the German military: both women and men can do military service, but for women all steps are voluntary while men are obligated to fill out questionnaires investigating their suitability for service. Making the questionnaires (and possible subsequent service) mandatory for women would require changes in the constitutional law (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 2024a). This is just one of the many examples of differential treatment of women and men in the military.

Outside of the formal differences between what men and women can and cannot do in militaries, there is also informal struggles women face. There is a range of authors that highlight the difficulties women can face in the military: for example, Elaine Brown and colleagues (2021) found that women soldiers face issues of gender-based scrutiny and discrimination, are faced with an inadequate position and response to sexual trauma, or experience other disadvantages living in a male-dominated environment of the military. The authors argue that underlying these problems is the inconveniencing and disregarding of women’s unique needs

(Brown et al., 2021). Next, most accounts of sexual abuse within (military) peacekeeping operations happen mainly, though not exclusively, to women (Donnelly et al., 2022). Moreover, there is also an evaluation by Keshab Giri (2021) who argues that women are treated as a homogeneous group that experiences war uniformly, thereby hindering a deeper understanding of the multiple contingents such as identity and rank that may influence how a woman experiences war (Giri, 2021). Lastly, Newby and Sebag (2021) make the argument that attempts of mainstreaming gender into the military and peacekeeping after *Resolution 1325* (UN Security Council, 2000), have rather been stuck at “sidestreaming”. Sidestreaming is “the practice, deliberate or unintentional, of sidelining women and relegating them to specialized spaces [...] while attempting gender mainstreaming or increased gender integration” (Newby & Sebag, 2021, p.148). So, there seem to be specific problems that women face compared to men when navigating the (masculine) the military.

It is not just that the military is shaped by larger geopolitical streams, or that individuals within the military are subject to its masculinity or femininity, but also society in its ideas about being a man or women, or behaving masculine or feminine, can be influenced by the military’s narrative on gender (e.g., Gopal, 2023). For example, the elitism, pride, and exclusivity in advertisements for the US Marine corps advances the belief that being a soldier/marine (i.e. exhibiting this type of militarised masculinity) is a “rite of passage into manhood” (Brown, 2012a, p.167). This extends the militarised identity from being a soldier to being a man in general. Also, through appealing to new recruits and their parents by highlighting personal and educational growth benefits of joining the military (Christensen, 2016), the military sets standards for what it means to be a productive, grown member of society. Moreover, through descriptions such as “the motherland”, the female body has become the image of home and nation that needs to be protected, which shapes not only the goals of the military in its securitisation force, but perpetuates an image of the female-feminine as related to the home, care, and the need to be protected (Rashid, 2009; Martín-Lucas, 2014)

Lastly, focussing on recruitment as a mechanism to achieve gender diversity within the military becomes societally relevant when realising that many of the above-mentioned dynamics take place at the site of recruitment practices. The reformulation of conscription in Germany, and the constitutional imbalance between men and women it reveals, concerns the recruitment of people to increase the *Bundeswehr*’s personnel strength. The sidelining and inconveniencing of women within the military shows how successfully recruiting women does not automatically increase how welcomed women are within the military. And recruitment

practices such as job advertisements are a primary channel through which the military delivers its ideals of masculine performance and productivity to the broader public.

Ultimately, the military is not separate from ideas and values within the larger society, and it must therefore be closely examined to understand the dynamic construction of gender.

Scientific Relevance

This research adds to the scientific understanding of gender within the military by integrating three theoretical fields: gender studies, organisational psychology, and military studies. This interdisciplinary approach gives me a rich understanding of gender as it is shaped and performed within a military organisation. Here, gender studies provide the conceptual understanding and main topic for this research. Organisational psychology offers the lens through which these concepts are applied to organisational structures and practices. And military studies supply the empirical context for this investigation.

Gender studies form the theoretical and conceptual base of this research. The military presents an especially intriguing case for the analysis of gender (performance), because it is argued to constitute a site of gender extremes (Enloe, 2000; Christensen & Kyed, 2022), making it an important site for gender research (Connell, 2005). Showing gender extremes means that the military and its characteristics are not merely associated with masculinity like other professions or characteristics are (e.g., bricklayer or agency; Jaoul-Grammare, 2024; Ellemers, 2018), but that the military may be called to frame the ideal hegemonic masculinity (Agostino, 1998; Connell, 2005). These gender extremes within the military show that gender is a dynamic and sometimes instrumental (Brown, 2012a; Nagel, 2019) concept that can influence and be influenced by specific organisational (Ljungholm, 2016) and social-cultural contexts (Guo, 2024).

Organisational psychology brings two things to this research: firstly, it frames the topic of gender in one organisational domain (here: recruitment) not as an isolated analysis, but as part of a broader investigation of the military organisation. Previous research has demonstrated that individual organisational practices, such as recruitment, are influenced e.g., by organisational structures (Almeida et al., 2011), by informal norms and socialisation practices within the organisation (Koivunen et al. 2015; Björklund et al., 2012), or by external societal pressures (Holm, 2014). Therefore, this research investigates recruitment practices within the wider organisational context of the military. Thereby, I construct an interdependent understanding of gender and organisations.

Secondly, organisational psychology helps me to understand how the military organisation may differ from other organisations. I hereby analyse what characteristics, tasks, and values make the military unique (e.g. the task of intervening in (violent) conflict; Haltiner et al., 2004). Understanding the specific configurations of the military allows me to understand the specific pressures that form gender within the military (as concluded from Haring, 2020). Thereby, I may gain insight into how and why gender may be constructed, perpetuated, or changed differently within a military setting compared to other organisations.

Military studies provide the empirical framework for this research. Military studies frame the military as a specific context to which the theoretical frameworks of gender studies and organisational psychology are applied. Put simply, military studies provide my research with the case that connects the theoretical inquiries of gender studies and organisational psychology to lived practices.

By combining these three fields (organisational psychology, gender studies, and military studies) my research makes explicit the conceptual and organisational mechanisms that often remain implicit in gender analyses of the military. For example, Melissa Brown's work (2012a) – a continuous source of inspiration for my research – shows a similar interdisciplinary approach through investigating the representations of women in U.S. military recruitment advertisement. While Brown effectively engages with insights from gender and military studies, the influence of organisational psychology remains in the background. The author's findings highlight notable differences in how different military branches portray women, thereby indirectly pointing at organisational differences within the military. However, these organisational differences are not explored in depth, and the potential contributions of organisational psychology are left aside in the analysis. Taking inspiration from this gap, I want to add to the research on gender and the military an explicit understanding of organisational psychology, making the analysis of recruitment practices intentional and framed within the context of the larger military organisation.

Research Questions

Main Question

As a quick overview: this study dissects contemporary debates on gender inclusion in the military through using gender theories through the lens of organisational psychology. As becomes clear from the *Theoretical Chapter* later, the military was specifically chosen because it takes up an interesting place within organisational psychology with its specific organisational

structure and range of tasks. More so, these military characteristics are argued to uniquely influence and be influenced by beliefs about gender.

To turn this theoretical connection between organisational psychology, gender studies, and military studies into a practicable research question, the Dutch *Defensie* was chosen as the specific military for analysis. *Defensie* is an interesting case for studying gender, because there are special recruitment campaigns for women and every military personnel receives a basic course on gender within their training (Piccolo et al., 2022), yet also here women are the minority by making up barely 20% of all military personnel (Ministerie van Defensie, 2025).

Within *Defensie*, the focus is on recruitment practices, as recruitment practices can be argued to connect to underlying beliefs and organisational cultures around gender (Lewis & Simpson, 2010). To narrow down the topic of gender, the idea of the “masculine” military from the Introduction chapter is picked up to focus this study on gendered performance specifically.

Therefore, the main research question is:

- *How does the Dutch military construct definitions of masculinity and femininity specifically within their recruitment website?*

Sub-Questions

While this research question gives the subject of inquiry, it cannot immediately tell how to approach the study topic.

Firstly, to understand recruitment practices is not only to analyse these practices, but to understand where they come from. Specific recruitment practices are, logically, meant to draw in a certain type of new recruits. To understand *Defensie*'s recruitment practices is therefore also to understand what type of new employee *Defensie* is looking for. So, the first sub-question in the operational line of inquiry is:

1. *What character traits and performances does the Dutch military expect from its recruits?*

To connect the answer to this first sub-question to the general field of gender studies, the sub-question will be further substantiated by looking at:

- 1a. *How can these expectations be related to gendered performance?*

Next, this study is concerned with gender in recruitment as coming from gender inclusivity in the military. *Defensie* and the associated Dutch Ministry of Defence employ gender-based strategies that ultimately affect recruitment practices (Piccolo et al., 2022). An in-depth understanding of *Defensie*'s specific approaches to gender inclusivity thus helps to set findings on the recruitment page into context. Therefore, the second sub-question focusses on:

2. *Whether and how does Defensie address gender inclusion and women of their force?*

Together, the first and second sub-question form a knowledge base about gender and new recruits within *Defensie*. With this base, the study comes to its heart piece, which is analysing *Defensie*'s recruitment website specifically for its gendered content with the question:

3. *What are the notions of masculinity and femininity visible on the Dutch military's recruitment website?*

Lastly, the individual findings from the three sub-questions need to be combined to inform the answer to the main question. The combining of the sub-questions can also be phrased as:

4. *To what extent is there an overlap between what Defensie states they want with regards to (gendered) performance in new recruits (Question 1 & 2) and the message that their online presence sends (Question 3)?*

This last question helps to answer the main question by highlighting the possible interaction among gender- and recruitment-related sections of *Defensie*. To understand how a specific image of masculinity or femininity is constructed means both to understand what this image is and how it might have come about through the specific interaction of strategies, aims, and goals across the military organisation.

Theoretical Chapter

This part of the thesis constitutes the theoretical basis for the applied perspectives, assumptions, and connections that make up this research.

I built the background of this research by moving from the interconnectedness of conflict and gender, through advantages of women inclusion in the security sector, to gender diversity in (military) workforce composition. The societal relevance shows how the military tightly interacts with societal ideas about gender, while the scientific relevance pointed at the research fields gender studies, military studies, and organisational psychology that underlie this research topic.

What an avid reader might already know from the sections above, and what will become clear from the sections below, is that studying gender and the military has many facets. Gender is a complex topic and cannot be studied in isolation, and the military is a complex organisation and cannot be studied in isolation. Moreover, this study relies much on making inferences about the gendered content of the military's online presence. It would be bad scientific practice to base these inferences off narrow and/or short theoretical understandings of gender and the military organisation. Therefore, it is important to give a more elaborate description to the theories of gender and organisational psychology as applied in this paper.

The theoretical chapter starts with gender studies. The background of gender and sex theories is outlined, after which gender is broken down into the elements of identity, stereotypes, and performance. Then, organisational psychology joins gender studies. Here, the specific organisational structures and processes that make up the military are explained. Lastly, on military studies, it is shown how specific military organisational characteristics make for a unique interaction of the military with gender.

Conceptualising Gender

History Of Sex And Gender Theories

Much like current social, academic, and political debates are concerned with gender and sex, discussions on sex and gender have been around for many years. The history of theories on the topic(s) shows a considerable amount of variation with the coming and going of theories through changes in perspective, knowledge, and belief on gender. In fact, much of what is considered to be undoubtable “facts” about gender and sex today were approached fundamentally different in history.

Often dated to the pre-1700s, the *one-sex theory* was prominent that considered women’s and men’s bodies, specifically their genitals, to be fundamentally the same only in different versions (Schleiner, 2000). A woman’s genitals were the same as a man’s, but they were inverted (uterus, ovaries) in contrast to men’s outside features (penis, testicles), and the women’s version was considered underdeveloped compared to men’s (Laqueur, 1992; Schleiner, 2000). This idea about the fundamental sameness of the sexes/genders also influenced the characteristics that were attributed to either gender. For example, as they have the same body, pleasure and specifically an orgasm were highly regarded in both men and women, and occasionally even seen as essential for pregnancy (Laqueur, 1992; McLaren, 1993). This theory became outdated with the growing belief and evidence for the difference of male and female bodies, now considered to be “opposite sexes” (Laqueur, 1992). With this change towards the separation of the sexes, beliefs about characteristics also changed. Female pleasure and a woman’s orgasm were not considered necessary for pregnancy anymore and even became frowned upon in society (McLaren, 1993). The prude and modest women became the norm together with the active and strong man. This was even further supported by early evolutionary biology beliefs on the stronger selective pressures for men (e.g., war and sexual competition) making the female intellect less evolved (Bergman, 2002; Caleb, 2022).

Today, men’s and women’s bodies are still predominantly thought of as different, though research in biology has revealed that there are more than two genetic sexes and that the expression of a genetic sex does not necessarily lead to congruent bodily features (which is coined under the umbrella term *intersex*; Harper, 2020). For example, a person born with female XX chromosomes might not develop typically female genitalia (e.g., Cools et al., 2023), and another person might have a third sex chromosome such as XXY or XXX composition (e.g., Yang et al, 2017).

Another example on how the theories on gender and sex change today is discoveries on the active and not only passive role of the female egg in pregnancy. Previous beliefs about passive women and active men can be seen reflected in the active sperm-passive egg perspective of human reproduction (Metoyer & Rust, 2011; Ah-King, 2020); for example, both medical and nonmedical sources on YouTube perpetuate stereotypical gender roles (e.g., the heroic sperm winning the race) in their description of conception (Nettleton, 2015). However, the slow dismantling of female-passive and male-active connections pushed researchers to discover how the female egg has a large determining role in whether and how fertilisation happens (Metoyer & Rust, 2011) thereby providing more depth to the simplified passive egg-active sperm theory.

Over the last decades there has also been a shift towards separating sexed bodies (female/male/intersex) from the social and cultural component of gender (e.g., being a woman or man) (Nash, 2023). Colourful discussions are held on the question how much a body is determining a person's character and role in society and the other way around. Some theories, such as evolutionary psychology, defend the idea that biological sex determines (or at least influences) a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours: differences in people's behaviours stem from the different stakes each of the sexes have in survival and procreation (e.g., being sexually selective as a woman because pregnancy bears many risks for her body; Buss, 1995; Archer 2019). Others promote arguments for the complete independence of bodies from social norms and characteristics attributed to people, such as social constructivism: gendered behaviour is e.g., socially learned rather than determined (e.g., Carlson, 2010; Bettis & Ferry, 2016).

This brief delve into the history on theories about sex and gender is meant to illustrate how our perspectives, however "factual", "evidenced", or "true" they might seem, can change and have changed over time. It would be ignorant to assume definitions to be static and unchangeable, or to see them as independent of their historical and cultural context. How we see gender and sex today has been influenced by theories of the past and will change with new knowledge and approaches in the future.

Gender, Sex, And Related Concepts

Given the knowledge about the dynamic nature of gender theories, this following section sketches out the definitions of gender, sex, and related concepts that apply to this specific paper. So, to approach the difficult topic of defining gender and its related concepts, I will make my way from the most easily discernible concepts such as gender versus sex, into the more difficult spheres such as gender performance versus identity versus stereotypes.

Gender Versus Sex

In this paper, sex refers to biological components such as genes, hormones, or phenotype, that differentiate between female, male and intersex bodies. Gender, on the other hand, concern the individual, social, and/or cultural dimension of what a man, woman, or non-binary person is, how they think, feel, and behave, and the expectations put on them (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005).

As clear as this separation might sound, it is important to note that, while large dictionaries such as the Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press, n.d.) or the APA Dictionary of Psychology (American Psychological Association, n.d.) support the distinction between sex and gender, scientific and popular discourse use these terms more flexibly. There is a diverse use of the terms female, male, women, men, feminine, masculine, gender, sex, and other related terms (see reviews by Gartzia, 2024, and Lindqvist et al., 2021): e.g., “women” can refer to biological female sex in one paper (e.g., Wang et al., 2021), while referring to gender in another (e.g., Butler, 1998; van Well et al., 2005).

Additionally, even when sex and gender are treated as separate theoretical concepts, they might not be as separable in practice. Certain biological functions related to sexed bodies can influence a person’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (in this paper more related to *gender*). A typical example of this is the menstrual cycle in female bodies that has shown to impact people’s emotional sensitivity (Sundström-Poromaa, 2018), ability to concentrate (Souza et al., 2012), and social orientation (Wang et al., 2021) — showing how biology (sex) can influence individual’s psychology and social behaviours (incl. gender). Aggressiveness as a trait with its biological mechanisms is another example that shows the complex interaction between sex and gender. The trait is typically, though not exclusively, associated more with men than with women (Stanaland & Gaither, 2021; Fahlgren et al., 2021). However, not only can aggressiveness be linked to social (gender) norms for men (e.g., Gallagher & Parrott, 2011), but aggressiveness has also been related to biochemical processes such as the hormone testosterone (George & Rosvall, 2022) with a stronger link to male bodies than female ones (Geniole et al., 2020)¹. The conclusion is that characteristics associated with a certain gender are not independent from processes occurring in sexed bodies, but are rather complexly interacting with each other (see also discussions by Annandale & Clark, 1996; Vanwesenbeeck, 2009)

¹ Note: the connection of testosterone in the male versus female body to certain psychological traits is varied (e.g., Carré et al., 2017). Here, aggression as correlated to testosterone is meant to exemplify the connection between physiological and psychological mechanisms.

Therefore, it is even more important to define the concepts of gender and sex for this paper clearly, because it will allow for certainty when terms such as “women” or “female” are used. It also brings conceptual clarity to set this paper into perspective with the larger gender studies network.

Put simply, the perspective taken in this paper follows the approach that sex refers to biology and gender refers to the individual, social, and cultural dimension. From here on, when the terms “female”, “male”, or “intersex” are used, they refer to biological sex and bodies.

This leaves the definition of gender. Unfortunately, defining gender does not seem as simple of a task as defining sex. Saying “the individual, social, and cultural dimension” is still a rather broad definition of the concept. This is partially because gender and its various related concepts are diversely treated in popular discourse (e.g., Freed, 2014; Eskridge Jr. et al., 2021) as well as in academia (e.g., Gartzia, 2024). As becomes apparent in the section *The Elements of Gender*, gender can mean roles, stereotypes, performances, identity, and much else. The section aims to disentangle the different terms and definitions of gender, breaking the concept into smaller sub-sections that can be summarised on the individual, social, and cultural side of the sex-gender comparison. Breaking gender down into these elements makes it clear where masculinity and femininity are situated within gender for this specific study.

The Elements of Gender

This section has the purpose of providing an overview of gender research as well as providing the reader with a definition of masculinity and femininity for this research specifically. As should be clear from the sections above, gender and its definition are by no means fixed or stable as it they are subject to constant change. Therefore, the below definitions should be seen as a review of the current state of gender research and as products of the specific time and place this research was produced in². Within *gender*, the elements *identity*, *stereotypes*, and *performances* are commonly researched by academics³.

² 2025, in the Netherlands

³ The definition of these elements will be partially guided by the recent review by Leire Gartzia (2024), who was concerned with the conceptual clarity of (sex and) gender in research and who used psychological models to deconstruct gender into three parts.

Gender Identity

Firstly, there is gender identity which can be understood as what an individual subjectively understands by them being a man, woman, non-binary person, or other diverse gender person⁴ (Polderman et al, 2018; Lindqvist et al., 2021; Cosker-Rowland, 2023).

Admittedly, this previous definition might make it seem that gender identity is reducible to a label. However, it is by no means easy to define gender *identity*, as any small excursion into the (philosophical) discussions on identity can show. Some perspectives see it as stable, others as fluid and malleable, and yet other researchers might have a completely different understanding of the matter (see review by Ismail et al., 2025), just how a different person might have a very different understanding of their identity. Additionally, research, such as that of Polderman and colleagues (2018), who investigated the possible heritability of gender identity (combining sex and gender), shows that identity might always be clearly separable from other concepts such as physiology or performance.

For this research, I take the approach that gender identity is a person's individual understanding of what gender they may define to be and how they view the positioning of their gender within society. This understanding can be tied to sex but is not necessarily so. Framing gender identity in this way means that there is an ultimately personal aspect to gender. An individual thinks, feels, and behaves according to *their* understanding of identity.

The labels used to distinguish gender *identity* from the other elements in this paper are “women”, “man”, “non-binary”, “agender”, and “divers*”.

Examples of research on gender identity and its effects are the works by Segal (2000) on identity, sexuality, and masculinity in school discourse, the attitudinal gender model by Gartzia (specifically the *gender affect* dimension; 2024), the findings on how the military advertises support for enlistment by appealing to the gendered identity of being a mother by Christensen (2016), or Barbulescu and Bidwell's (2013) research into the jobs people with different gender identities apply to⁵.

Next, the other elements of gender elaborated on below show that gender identity may be influenced by outside/societal expectations (i.e. gender stereotypes), and personal behaviours (i.e. gender performance)⁶.

⁴ This list constitutes the largest groups of gender identity labels. It is important to note, however, that there are many more identity labels than this list provides and that this list of labels serves to bring conceptual clarity within this specific research paper.

⁵ It is worth noting that the concept of gender identity as defined here is not exclusively named “identity” within research, but can also be framed differently, such as Gartzia's “gender affect” (2024).

⁶ For a more in-depth, critical debate on what constitutes *identity* within gender studies, I can recommend Connell's works (2005).

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes, sometimes also called “roles” (van Well et al., 2005; Ellemers, 2018), are the expectations and prescriptions of what a woman, man, or non-binary person should think, feel, and behave like (e.g., competency for men and communality for women; Ellemers, 2018). Here, the ideas of gender stereotypes and gender roles, that are sometimes separated in research (e.g., Zhao, 2020), were grouped together into the category of stereotypes, because much of what is defined to characterise either gender roles or stereotypes comes down to expectations, pressures, and prescriptions both from within a person (e.g., that one wants to fulfil a certain role; Johnston & Diekmann, 2015; Master, 2021), or from the outside (i.e., societal expectations; Heilman, 2002; Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

The focus on gender stereotypes can be observed, for example, in Cunningham and Macrae’s (2011) study on the association of gender with specific colours, in van der Vleuten and colleagues’ (2016) work on gender ideology in adolescents, in Gomez-Borquez and colleagues’ (2024) investigation of female stereotypes and empowerment, in Feenstra and colleagues’ (2023) work on managerial stereotypes, and in Morgenroth and colleagues’ (2024) findings on how heterosexuality norms negatively pressure people of non-conforming identities (e.g., people of the LGBTQIA+ community) to conceal their identity.

The large evidence on existing stereotypes on gender shows how there are prescribers and motivators to identifying and performing gender in a certain way. For this study specifically, gender stereotypes show that the individual (gender identity) is far from independent from their surroundings. How one defines themselves to be a gender is subject to (perceived) social and cultural pressures.

Gender Performance

In contrast to stereotypes as motivators and prescriptions, gender performance concerns the actual behaviours that a person exhibits. Here, the most prominent labels are masculinity and femininity, which are the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours typically associated with and exhibited by women and men, respectively (Priola, 2010; Bettis & Ferry, 2016; also visible in Annandale & Clark, 1996, and Polderman et al., 2018).

Though masculinity and femininity are often used when referring to gender stereotypes, this paper chose to use the terms “masculinity”, “femininity”, and “ambivalent” with regards to performance only. This decision was guided by the observation that much of the stereotype literature that handles masculinity and femininity, in essence, talks about the expectations about masculine and feminine characteristics (e.g., Feenstra et al., 2023; van Well et al., 2005), thereby employing a stereotype *onto* performance.

The link between gender and performance, or seeing gender as performative, in Butler's terms (Butler, 1988 & 1990)⁷, means that acts have meaning to them (for gender). The position one's body assumes, the type of emotional reactions one has, the clothing one wears, or the specific logic to one's beliefs can all be seen as signifiers of gender (Butler, 1990; Lloyd, 2015): e.g., the purposeful sway of someone's hips might create a sense of femininity, and through thinking more competitively than communally a person might foster masculine-coded behaviour (e.g., Ellemers, 2018).

Gender performance differs from gender identity in that it describes a more *active* component to one's personal, social, and cultural gender. Here, the definitions of, beliefs about, and associations with gender are formed by the very behaviours a person exhibits (Butler, 1990). The treating of gender not simply as a fact but as a dynamic construction underlies works by e.g., Vanwesenbeeck (2009) in their report on the difficulties of considering gender in sex research; by Duncanson (2009) and the narratives of alternative peacekeeper masculinity they assess; or by Malmio (2022) and their finding on the masculine fraternisation practices for Swedish cadets.

Comparing gender identity and gender performance further, it is handy to quote Raewyn Connell's (2005) words:

"If we spoke only of differences between men as a bloc and women as a bloc, we would not need the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' at all. We could just speak of 'men's' and 'women's', or 'male' and 'female'. The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' point beyond categorical sex difference to the way men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender." (p.69)

Connell thereby argues that masculinity and femininity, in this paper coded under *gendered performance*, are not merely the acting out of a specific gender identity or sex, but that masculinity and femininity showcase a spectrum of behaviours that can be exhibited beyond what a person defines themselves to be (Connell, 1995 & 2005).

In short, gender is not just a static concept but constitutes a dynamic construct. When evaluating how masculinity and femininity are constructed within the military, this paper

⁷ *Performing* gender is argued to be different than calling gender *performative*. The first one means that a gender identity can be acted out, whereas the latter means that acts themselves create gender (from an interview with Judith Butler; Big Think, 2011). For this paper, the important takeaway from the performance-performativity discussion is that gender cannot only be seen as something static (identity) but may strongly be characterised by behaviours (performance).

therefore employs this perspective: how people *behave* can be indicative of, and construct, gender.

To summarise this part on theoretical underpinnings of gender: gender, in this paper, concerns a social construct that relates to sexed bodies. Gender is personal, dynamic, and subject to motivations and expectations. Understanding and constructing gender means to pay attention to people's descriptions of themselves, expectations about others, and behaviours. Next, this understanding of gender is applied to the military organisational setting.

Organisations, Gender, And The Military

The text before theoretically frames gender as something that is performed, changeable, and subject to personal, social, and cultural contexts. A specific lens through which gender can be applied to the military context is organisational psychology.

A definition of organisational psychology: organisational psychology investigates how different characteristics of an organisation and its people may influence e.g., productivity, marketing success, possibility for change, communication effectiveness, and (for this specific research) gender (Arnold, 2001; Hollway, 1994).

Firstly, I describe the characteristics of a military organisation. Then, the connection between the military's characteristics and its tasks as an organisation (protection and engaging in conflict) is made. Moreover, the norms and values the characteristics and tasks create are described. After this, the connection between the military organisation and gender is made. The organisational characteristics, tasks, and culture of the military explain how specific phenomena surrounding gender, e.g., the military being a "man's world", come about.

The Military Organisation

Within organisational psychology, the military provides a curious case. The military has quite a unique combination of organisational characteristics, tasks, and norms and values that make it interesting as an organisation in general and for the study of gender in particular.

Organisational Characteristics

Firstly, what type of organisation is the military? With regards to the organisational characteristics, Holmberg and Alvinus (2019) present a useful overview of the type of organisation the military is:

In their view, the military shows a highly *bureaucratic* organisational structure that "functions through a web of regulations", and where "relations are, in the ideal, impersonal"

(p.134). An example of this high level of regulation is the existence of strict dress codes that military personnel must not deviate from (e.g., Source 22, Appendix A)

The military is also highly *hierarchical*, focussed on status, rank, and competency to exercise discipline and internal control (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019). An example would be the many hierarchically organised ranks the military personnel can occupy with titles like sergeant, captain, or major (Ministerie van Defensie, 2021)

Additionally, the military is *narcissistic*, which means that the military is perceived and perceives itself as particularly important and worthy of attention (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019). This narcissistic characteristic can be seen in e.g., the of media coverage military missions, wars, and security summits receive (e.g., the Ukraine-Russia war, Israel-Palestine war, or Den Haag NATO Summit).

Lastly, Holmberg and Alvinus (2019) mention how the military is a *greedy* organisation. A greedy organisation demands high commitment, loyalty, and often also identification with the organisation of its employees. In the case of the military, an example would be codes of conduct for military personnel that are to be adhered to at work and in private life (e.g., Gedragsregels Defensie; Source 13, Appendix A).

All these characteristics (bureaucracy, hierarchy, narcissism, and greed) make for an organisation that is highly structured, control-seeking, exclusive, and demanding: a combination of organisational traits that are not easily found elsewhere (Haltiner et al., 2004)

Militaries' Tasks

Secondly, what tasks and pressures have made the military into the type of organisation that it is? I argue that the controlled and exclusive structure of the military roots from the specific tasks of the military and the associated need for legitimacy that come with these tasks.

The military is the national organ that is tasked with the protection of civilians and the intervention in (violent) conflict such as war (Haltiner et al., 2004). Being a protector and intervener necessitates that the military manages to deal with, and understands, the uncertainty of war. In different words, the military “have been exposed to exceptional pressure to impose certainty on ambiguous, dangerous, swiftly changing, and highly consequential conditions of instrumental action” (Hasselbladh & Ydén, 2020, p.481).

A way to gain oversight over the uncertain situations is to impose high levels of control; a characteristic that comes with bureaucratic and hierarchical organisational structures (Hasselbladh & Ydén, 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that the strict and control-seeking (hierarchical and bureaucratic) characteristics of the military come from the need to make the ambiguous manageable.

Alongside ambiguity fuelling control, there is also a strong need of the military to legitimise its actions, which connects to the military's narcissistic characteristics. This need for legitimacy is rooted in the potentially devastating consequences of military action such as the displacement of people, political instability, or humanitarian crises (Alexandra et al., 2024). Legitimation of the military's actions maintains the moral and legal authority of the military organisation (Ayres & Thurher, 2018). Therefore, another task of the military is to uphold its legitimacy.

The need for legitimacy is reflected in the narcissistic and greedy organisational characteristics of the military. Attributing high importance to the (military) organisation, so being narcissistic about the organisation, can be considered a mechanism of legitimising the organisation (Brown, 1997). Additionally, being greedy as an organisation, so drawing in people that are highly loyal to and identify with the organisation and its causes, also helps to legitimise the military. For example, the "extent to which an individual identified as a veteran was positively associated with the belief that legal institutions are fair, based on shared values, and should be obeyed" (Gallagher & Ashford, 2019, p.146). This means that the military's task of legitimisation is supported by its characteristics to attribute importance to the military's missions and by demanding internal support in the form of loyalty and identification.

Translating this to recruitment practices – the subject of this research –, the pressure on the military organisation to control the ambiguous means that the military needs to recruit people that are controllable: people that are obedient, strategic, and with a drive for action rather than hesitation (e.g., Wolfendale, 2007a & 2007b).

Informal Norms And Values

Thirdly, what norms and values are created by the military's organisational structure and tasks? Characterising the military is not only to elaborate on its formal structures and tasks, but to also be attentive to informal practices within the military organisation that take the form of norms and values.

Research by Jansen & Kramer (2018), who qualitatively investigated the education process of new recruits and officers within the Dutch military, shows nicely what informal norms and values are practiced within the military. For example, there is a high emphasis on personal potential and responsibility. Another value of cadettes was developing a strong military identity and sense of belongingness to the military. Additionally, soldiers possess a strong jargon unique to their military sphere (Jansen & Kramer, 2018).

The high drive for belongingness, personal development, and establishing a military identity connect to the greedy and narcissistic characteristic of the military organisation. In

Jansen and Kramer's words on loyalty and belongingness (i.e. *greed*): "From the beginning, the recruits learn that the team is more important than the individual [...] and are drilled to support each other 'no matter what'" (2018, p.520). And, relating to the narcissistic importance of the military, the authors say:

"Furthermore, cadets are told, from recruitment to graduation, to be exceptional; the crème de la crème of society, gifted with great talent, and endowed with an exceptional sense of morality. They un-learn their bad habits from civilian life and learn to be outstanding cadets by memorising and trying to behave according to the (military) values. Perhaps unsurprisingly, over time, most cadets start to feel a personal sense of perfection." (Jansen & Kramer, 2018, pp.521-522)

This vivid description exactly points at the narcissistic character the military has, by instilling its recruits with the mentality to be exceptionally valued and important within society.

Another norm that strongly connects to military organisational characteristics is a dislike for thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that appear to deviate from the norm. For example, Croce (2021) illustrated how femininity is marginalised over the prominent masculine heteronormativity, and van Douwen and colleagues (2022) show how Dutch marines resist the introduction of women into their unit; both are examples of behaviours and people that differ from the norm. Though this dislike for difference is contested by some researchers (e.g., Rusu, 2023), there are frequent examples on conformity being fostered within the military (e.g., Wu et al., 2023; Hunter, 2021). This desire for conformity is not surprising given the previous descriptions of the military as a highly bureaucratic, hierarchical, and control-seeking organisation: behaviours that deviate from the desired norm can prove a challenge to the (organisational) order established (Kura et al., 2023). A practical consequence of this high standard of control is this informal practice of censoring deviance.

So, the military is an organisation that seeks control, structure, and exclusivity. These characteristics stem from the specific ambiguous tasks of protection and conflict intervention that demand legitimisation. Together these characteristics and tasks create an environment of strong adherence to norms, identification, and personal development across all employees.

For this study, these characteristics, task, and culture are assumed to run through the entire military organisation. Though small differences across departments and branches might

exist, the military is seen as an internally cohesive organisation. For example, it is to be expected that every branch or division has similar hierarchical chains of command (Haltiner et al., 2004). The high degree of homogeneity within the organisation also means that one part of the military can be seen as (largely) indicative of the rest of the organisation – as was also mentioned in the Scientific Relevance chapter on organisational psychology. Relating this to the research question, the sentiments presented in the recruitment advertisement and other online presence of *Defensie* are assumed to stretch over the entirety of the Dutch military organisation.

Gender And Militarism

As was mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the military is often called a masculine organisation (Christensen & Kyed, 2022). Underlying this is the argument that the military organisation is gendered — that its specific characteristics, tasks, and norms and values are indicative of a certain gendered performance. The following section shows how the particular organisational characteristics of the military make for a distinct understanding of masculinity, femininity, and gender hierarchies.

Militarising Gendered Performance

Firstly, militarising masculinity can be argued to constitute a mechanism of legitimising the greedy and narcissistic organisational characteristics of the military.

Saying the military is masculine likewise means that the masculine is militarised. This signifies that the military and military service are closely linked to, and advertised as, masculine performance (Dvorak, 2025). Characteristics typically considered masculine, such as physical fitness, are turned into glorified and idealised traits for being a soldier, and, likewise, characteristics that are associated with being a soldier are argued to portray the ideal masculine performance (Hale, 2011). In Gopal's (2023) words: "The claim that characteristics stereotypically associated with masculinity may be learned and demonstrated through military duty or action, and battle in particular, is what is meant when the term 'militarised masculinity' is used" (p.35). This means that gendered performance, particularly masculinity, is purposefully shaped and framed to connect to the characteristics of military service.

This phenomenon of "militarised masculinity" can relate to the military's need for legitimisation and the strive to make military service desirable. By presenting the military as a standard for hegemonic gendered performance, militarised behaviours such as violence are now not only a characteristic of the military, but a characteristic of a group of gendered people. The resulting desirability, the "looking up" to the male-masculine soldier as the ideal man (e.g.,

Lowe, 2019), may counteract the critique the military could receive for its use of violence (Wegner, 2021).

Victoria Basham (2016) analysed exactly this connection between militarised masculinity and legitimacy, showing “how armed forces continue to rely on gender constructs to motivate predominantly male soldiers to conduct acts of violence sanctioned by the state” (p.29). Basham further concluded that “perhaps, therefore, the most important function of the reinforcement of longstanding military norms, in which heteronormativity and masculine domination are promoted, is to make the very existence of militaries possible by normalizing war as a manly pursuit” (2016, p.41).

So, advertising military performance as the ideal masculine performance does not only serve to attract new male recruits (Brown, 2012a), but is a means to legitimise the military task of exercising violence (Wegner, 2021).

Gender Hierarchy

Not only does the military shape ideas about who the ideal gendered soldier is, but by glorifying combat and the masculinity needed for combat a hierarchy of genders is established. More specifically, femininity and the performance of women, in contrast to masculinity and the performance of men, can be seen as disadvantageous to the military’s aims (van Gilder, 2019). Here, femininity and women may be seen as a threat to military effectiveness to the degree that feminine people/women ought to conform to masculinity (Hale, 2011).

The favouritism towards masculinity and men within the military is visible in Gopal’s (2023) work, where the author argues that what it means to be a woman soldier is contrasted to not explicitly to what being a man soldier is, but is contrasted to what it is like being a soldier in general. Thereby, the default soldier becomes a man, while woman soldiers are an exception. Likewise, in Brown’s (2012a) analysis of recruitment advertisements of the U.S. Military, women were pulled into the military by assurances that their “femininity” would not be compromised by the service. This, Brown argues, shows how masculinity is assumed to be the default performance for soldiers. The advertisements assume that people worry they might not be suitable for service because they relate to femininity rather than masculinity (Brown, 2012a). So, the military has the potential to create hierarchies of gendered traits and performances, a frequent configuration being that masculinity is favoured over femininity.

These gender hierarchies intersect with the military’s hierarchical structure. The military functions on, and therefore actively seeks out, a division of power (i.e. hierarchy; Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019). A hierarchical organisation of gender does the same: it creates a division of power (Connell, 2005). So, the military organisational characteristic of hierarchy matches up

with the hierarchy of gender, because either hierarchy means to favour certain behaviours, people, and performances over others⁸. In this case, favouring masculine performance over feminine performance.

Moreover, not only is there a parallel of organisational hierarchy with gender hierarchy, but there is also a connection of the military's need for control and avoidance of uncertainties with gender hierarchies.

To combat the uncertainty of war, the military is strongly focussed on reducing ambiguity, keeping control, and preventing anything that can sabotage the chances of mission success (Hasselbladh & Ydén, 2020). However, women, female bodies, and femininity are stereotypically thought to be weaker (e.g., menstruation being considered inconvenient for service; Stern & Strand, 2022) and are not frequently associated with markers of effective combat (e.g., endurance, being able to be the protector, or toughness.; Ellemers, 2018). Feminine performances are therefore seen as a “threat” to military effectiveness (Van Gilder, 2019) and ultimately disfavoured over more suitable, “masculine” performances⁹.

This gender hierarchy therefore can also be argued to stem from the military's need for control, reducing ambiguity, and being effective in complex situations.

Femininity Contrasting Masculinity

The creation of a gender hierarchy also signals something about the conceptual treatment of gendered performance within the military.

Here, masculinity and femininity often stand in opposition to each other. For example, van Gilder (2019) found that femininity is perceived a threat to military effectiveness, where the masculine is praised and the feminine blamed for shortcomings.

Moreover, the way feminine attributes are sometimes handled in the military can signal “othering” (Croce, 2021; Vastapuu, 2025), which means that feminine and non-masculine performing individuals are sidelines and/or grouped together into a specialised category. Othering thereby, again, shows how masculinity and femininity are differently treated and conceptualised within the military.

For example, through its practices, the military continuously connects masculinity with violence (Basham, 2016) or reinforces gender divisions by separating women from the imagery

⁸ An interesting note: Linstead and colleagues (2005) wrote an intriguing paper that includes gender hierarchies in the organisational setting. Here, disavouring femininity is not just suppressing women, but suppressing entire categories of thinking, feeling, and acting that can be exhibited by any gender. These findings, again, connect gender hierarchies to organisational hierarchies.

⁹ It is important to note that this does not only concern the actual potential for failure or reduced effectiveness — as was evidenced in the very beginning of this paper, women's inclusion can actually enhance mission success and prevent conflict recurrence — but the mere *perceived* or *believed* potential for reducing operational effectiveness is already enough for the military to turn away from certain performances (Van Gilder, 2019).

of war and connecting masculinity and warriorhood (Brown, 2012a & 2012b). Thereby masculine performance is rendered as oppositional, if not at least distinct, to feminine performance.

To summarise the gender configurations brought in connection with military organisational characteristics: masculinity and men are frequently associated with militarism (a means to legitimise the military), and feminine performance is disfavoured, othered, and seen to oppose desired masculine behaviours (a consequence of hierarchical and control-seeking structures).

Next in this paper is the Methods section. Here, I explain which methods I used to investigate masculinity and femininity within the (Dutch) military's recruitment practices to gain insight into the conceptualisation of gender across the military organisation.

Methods

This research is a case-study of the Dutch military *Defensie*. It combines a literature review, discourse analysis, and website analysis to answer the main question “How does the Dutch military construct definitions of masculinity and femininity specifically within their recruitment website?”.

Through this research question, the thesis connects the military’s communication strategies with organisational and societal beliefs about gender, probing how the military may perpetuate a hierarchy of gender, or how it might relegate femininity to specialised spaces. Therefore, to support this aim, the focus of this research lay on the intersection of the institution with society: openly available publications, documents, and websites.

The choice to combine discourse and website analysis was grounded in their ability to access both the explicit and implicit messaging within institutional communication. Both discourse and website analysis enable a deeper understanding of how gendered concepts are constructed, maintained, or potentially challenged within *Defensie*. Together, the analyses offer a lens on how gender ideas are both verbalised in official discourse and visuals through web design and digital content.

Review

To better recognise the concepts of femininity and masculinity I compiled a list of feminine and masculine attributes that I came across in my literature search. Just as the theoretical chapter aimed at providing the knowledge to make informed inferences about gender performance within *Defensie*, this list or review had the purpose of substantiating and guiding my research, too. Having a list on characteristics, stereotypes, and behaviours associated with masculinity and femininity in other researchers’ works helped to anchor my (subjective) understanding of gender in a broader scientific context.

Discourse Analysis

To answer sub-questions 1) “What character traits and performances does the Dutch military expect from their recruits?”, and 2) “Whether and how does *Defensie* address gender inclusion and women of their force?”, I relied on discourse analysis. To understand both sub-questions means to investigate *Defensie*’s communications/publications on the topic of recruit requirements and gender inclusion.

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method that focusses on how language shapes meaning (Johnstone & Andrus, 2024). Rather than just analysing what is said, discourse

analysis explores how things are said, what is left unsaid, and the assumptions underlying the language used (Johnstone & Andrus, 2024). It is particularly useful for examining institutional or public texts as it reveals how social identities and power relations are constructed through language (Hjelm, 2021). In this case, it helps to uncover how *Defensie* constructs gender and expectations for military identity through *Defensie*'s formal communication.

Using discourse analysis allowed me to examine not just what *Defensie* communicates about gender, but how that communication reinforces particular views of masculinity and femininity, whether that may be through assumptions about e.g., physical fitness, leadership, teamwork, or diversity. For example, I paid attention to the (un)balanced use of feminine, masculine, or neutral pronouns in texts, to see whether an imbalance may reveal the favouring of one gender over the other.

In detail, openly available, online documents published by *Defensie* on their general website (<https://www.defensie.nl>) and their recruitment portal (<https://www.werkenbijdefensie.nl>) were analysed for their explicit and implicit mentions of: the physical and psychological requirements for new recruits, codes of conduct, composition of the force (e.g., number of men and women, mentions of “diversity” within the force), visions of and plans for the future of *Defensie*, and other documents that appeared under the search terms “women”, “gender”, “men”, “diversity”, and “inclusion”¹⁰.

Website Analysis

The core of this research was to analyse the primary websites of *Defensie*'s recruitment portal. This method served to answer sub-question 3) “What are the notions of masculinity and femininity visible on the Dutch military’s recruitment website?”. Specifically, it was a content analysis encompassing the interpretation of text, imagery, videos, and composition of the website(s)¹¹.

The qualitative method website analysis refers to the systematic examination of a website’s design, structure, and content, including text, images, videos, layout, or navigation (Kalan, 2025). Similar to discourse analysis, it focuses on how visual and textual content is structured and presented, and what assumptions, values, and norms are conveyed through design choices (Kalan 2025). Rather than treating websites as neutral containers of information, website analysis sees them as intentional communicative spaces that relate to and shape

¹⁰ As translated from their Dutch equivalents: “vrouw[en]”, “gender”, “geslacht”, “man[nen]”, “diversiteit”, and “inclusie”

¹¹ This method may also be called a “visually informed’ critical discursive psychology” approach. For an in-depth overview of this specific approach and how it can be used in gender research see McCullough (2024).

organisational identity (Rowley, 2004; Lyons & Marler, 2011). Both what is shown and how it is shown are considered.

In this case, website analysis is used to understand how *Defensie*'s recruitment portal constructs and communicates gendered ideas through its design. This enables a closer look at how masculinity and femininity are represented visually and narratively (see also McCollough, 2024). Moreover, it can help to understand what the gendered representations imply about the kinds of people the military seeks to attract as well as what they may imply about *Defensie* as an organisation. For example, I paid attention to the colours used for the text, images, and website background, and investigated whether these colours are representative of a certain gendered performance (e.g., blue for boys/men; Cunningham & Macrae, 2011).

Specifically, the focus was on the homepage as well as the first three subpages of *Defensie*'s recruitment portal, as these are the most directly accessible for any viewer visiting the site. The choice for analysing these first pages was informed by research findings that show how people form opinions about a website within the first second(s) of viewing it (e.g., Pengnate & Sarathy, 2013). Therefore, to mimic how an average observer might perceive and interpret the gendered elements within the online presence of *Defensie*, the decision was made to pursue the upfront online content by *Defensie*.

These are the sites analysed: the homepage of *Defensie*'s recruitment portal *Werken bij Defensie* (<https://www.werkenbijdefensie.nl>), and the sub-pages "Bekijk Mogelijkheden" ['View Possibilities'] (<https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/baanmogelijkheden>), "Ontdek Defensie" ['Explore Defensie'] (<https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/inspiratiegebieden>), and "Bekijk Vacatures" ['View Vacancies'] (<https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/vacatures>). These sub-pages were chosen as they are the first central sub-pages presented to a viewer when navigating the homepage^{12&13}.

Comparison

The last step was to investigate Sub-Question 4) "To what extent is there an overlap between what *Defensie* states it wants with regards to (gendered) performance in new recruits (Sub-Questions 1 & 2) and the message that its online presence sends (Sub-Question 3)? This Sub-Question necessitates a comparison between the discourse analysis and website analysis from before. The approach here was to look for similarities and differences in how gender and

¹² The website(s) change over time. The specific version of the website(s) analysed in this study was last online on June 15, 2025. All previous website versions can be found at *Defensie*'s site archive (<https://defensie.sitearchief.nl>)

¹³ As the website version that was online during the data collection phase of this research is now out-dated, there is a dedicated explorative section in the Discussion chapter that theorises the impact of the newer website version on gendered performance.

recruitment requirements are conceptualised across the different online spheres of *Defensie*. For example, I probed whether both, either, or neither of the recruitment portal and the other online publications delegated women to specialised places.

Comparing findings from the discourse and website analysis allows me to understand whether the conceptualisations of gender and recruitment requirements are consistent across the different online spheres of *Defensie* (i.e. the recruitment portal, main website, and other online publications). Inconsistencies may suggest that gendered expectations are context-dependent or strategically tailored for different audiences, while alignment across platforms could point to an organisation-wide purpose in how gender roles and recruitment ideals are constructed and communicated. In this way, examining (in)consistencies transforms the analysis from a descriptive account of gendered concepts within individual parts of *Defensie* into an integrated understanding of the larger organisation.

Programmes Used

The programme Microsoft Excel was used to establish a list of terms commonly associated with femininity and masculinity in previous literature. The programme Atlas.ti (Version 25.0.1; available at <https://atlasti.com>) was used to code both the recruitment website and other group of documents, publications, and online presence of *Defensie*.

Discussion

The interpretation of the findings follows this structure: the (sub)questions of this research are individually answered and discussed, starting with the sub-questions in order and ending with the main research question. Each section mentions the (sub)question of interest and a short version of its respective answer, followed by an explanation of said answer. Since *Sub-Question 4* already addresses a comparison of the individual findings, this sub-question is answered within the discussion of the main research question.

Findings And Interpretations

Recruitment Requirement

Sub-Question 1: What character traits and performances does the Dutch military expect from its recruits? *Part 1a:* How can these traits be related to gendered performance?

Short answer: *Defensie* asks a basic level of physical fitness, mental and bodily health, communality, willpower, discipline, and flexibility from new recruits. While psychological requirements are not listed in detail, the physical requirements are listed extensively. The factually listed expectations reflect typical skills needed for military combat service, yet also for other occupations such as logistics and medical training. The factual, neutral description of requirements makes the needed skills and competencies seem gender neutral.

Factual Competencies and Skills

Employees and new recruits of *Defensie* must adhere to specific physical and psychological standards.

The physical requirements encompass mainly fitness and bodily health. For example, the recruitment page lists in detail the minimum fitness levels new recruits need to fulfil, such as marching for 20min with a 25kg backpack, or running 2.2km within 12min (Source 7, Appendix A). Additionally, medical assessments measuring e.g., sight and hearing ability are included in the entry examination (Source 9, Appendix A). These fitness and health standards are listed publicly on the website for any visitor and potential recruit to understand.

The psychological requirements are not listed as directly as the physiological ones. The information page explaining the psychological examination within the recruitment procedure lists themes that will be assessed rather than hard requirements: psychological resilience, social competency, motivation, discipline, and communication skills (Source 8, Appendix A). However, not much more information is given on the specific desired psychological skills that are assessed in the examination.

There are more psychological “requirements” distributed across various documents, such as the codes of conduct (Source 12, Appendix A) or future visions (Source 10, Appendix A). These documents mention personnel’s behaviours and character traits not only within the recruitment procedure but generally throughout the duration of their employment. For example, *Defensie* expects their recruits to have comradeship and be trustworthy (e.g., Source 12, Appendix A).

One requirement, that is repeatedly mentioned and matches the bureaucratic-regulated characteristic of the military organisation, is rule adherence. The existence of various codes of conduct, dress codes, and other standardised procedures shows how regulated behaviours within *Defensie* are. For example, *Defensie*’s code of conduct for social safety (Source 13, Appendix A) includes a passage saying:

‘Working at *Defensie* comes with expectations and responsibilities, and you must behave accordingly, at work and in your private life. By taking the oath, you have sworn or promised obedience to the laws and submission to military discipline.’¹⁴ (p.2)

Though certain requirements may fit the stereotype of militarised masculine behaviours, such as physical strength and comradeship (van Douwen et al., 2022), the neutral, factual, and personally addressed method of listing the requirements makes for gender neutral undertone (Gabriel et al., 2018). At no point are requirements and desired behaviours tied to the strengths or weaknesses of certain genders (e.g., “men are naturally very strong”), nor is acquiring certain military skill promoted as the way to become the ideal version of a specific gender (e.g., “rite of passage into manhood”). The expectations and requirements of recruits’ behaviours are therefore detached from any gender, presenting as neutral requirements that any recruits, regardless of gender, should fulfil.

Overall, the character traits and performances that *Defensie* asks of its recruits can be said to reflect what is generally needed to perform well in a soldier and civil military setting. The character and behaviour expectations range from good physical fitness to care and respect between soldiers (and between soldiers and the societies they are protecting). The requirements appear to be listed detached from gendered connotations.

¹⁴ Original Dutch quote: “Als je bij Defensie werkt, brengt dit dus verwachtingen en verantwoordelijkheden met zich mee en dien je je op een bepaalde manier te gedragen, zowel in werk- als privé-tijd. Bij het afleggen van de eed of belofte heb je gehoorzaamheid aan de wetten en onderwerping aan de krijgsmacht gezworen of beloofd.” (Source 13, p.2, Appendix, A)

Documents And Other Publications

Sub-Question 2: Whether and how does Defenseie address gender inclusion and women of their force?

Short answer: *Defenseie* addresses women and their inclusion in the military through various ways such as discussions on suitable uniforms, the history of women in the forces, and *Defenseie*'s striving for a more equitable workplace. However, *Defenseie* also delegates women to specialised places within the force by (indirectly) comparing them to the default man soldier. Also, gender inclusion is presented to be mainly a women's issue instead of thinking of the large range of gender diverse people, which shows a more stereotypical, binary understanding of gender (men-women, masculine-feminine).

Delegating Women To Specialised Places

As Newby and Sebag (2021) proposed with their concept of "sidestreaming", the integration of women within the military – within *Defenseie* – is stuck at sidelining women and delegating them to specialised places while attempting to be appreciative of their contribution to the force.

Positively, many publications, news articles, and information documents highlight the contribution of women within the military in general and *Defenseie* in particular. For example, interested persons can acquire information about being a woman in the military on topics like being pregnant, having equal opportunities, and much more (Source 31, Appendix A). These articles aim to address women's concerns towards being in the military and highlight the positive impact they can have on *Defenseie*'s missions. Another example is an article on creating uniforms and backpacks that are more suitable for a female body than the male standard uniforms used so far (Source 17, Appendix A). This shows another way to pay special attention to the needs of women.

However, while the above-mentioned publications aim address women's needs and concerns within *Defenseie* and show an appreciation of women within the force, these publications also delegate women to a special position within *Defenseie*. To illustrate this point: for any information page and mention of being a woman within *Defenseie*, there is no such equivalent for being a man within *Defenseie*, which consequently differentiates (*specialises*) women from men.

Additionally, not only is this *specialisation* of women indirectly perpetuated by positive discrimination, but there are also more explicit instances of sidelining women within *Defenseie*. An example of constructing men soldiers as the default can be found in the dress code for marines, that states: 'In this regulation, the soldier is described in the he-form. Where female

soldiers are concerned, – she –should be read where appropriate.’ (Source 24, p.6, Appendix A)¹⁵. This is not merely an indirect conceptualisation of the female-women soldier as the other, but a direct statement seeing the male-man soldier as the default.

So, I argue that the online documents and publications of *Defensie* engage in positive discrimination, which, however, is still discrimination. And for this particular case of *Defensie*’s online publications on recruitment and gender, the discrimination of women within *Defensie* – what potential women hold and how they should be appreciated – constructs women to be different from men, from the norm, thereby effectively sidelining them.

Gender Binaries And Stereotypes

In their online presence, *Defensie* indeed talks about the difficulty of gender diversity and integration in the force, but it seems to be that gender is understood in a more stereotypical/traditional manner instead of a more nuanced manner. Two things speak for this interpretation:

Firstly, as an attentive reader might have noticed, all the interpretations given in this *Discussion* section mix the terms for sex, gender performance, and gender identity, using combinations such as “male-men” or “women-feminine”. This was not done to ignore the different conceptual meanings of these terms (as meticulously outlined in the *Theoretical Chapter*), but because it best represents how *Defensie* treats the topic of gender within its force. For example, a FAQ section about being a woman (gender identity) within *Defensie* (Source 31, Appendix A), answers questions about make-up and nail polish (stereotypical feminine gendered performance), as well as pregnancy and menstruation care (female biological processes). Lining up the feminine, female, and woman like this is argued to constitute a rather traditional and stereotypical view on gender (Nash, 2023).

Secondly, where gender differences are highlighted, the genders are presented through stereotypical imagery and in a binary manner. For example, statistics about the number of personnel in each branch of *Defensie* (of March 2025; Source 11, Appendix A) categorise only into men and women, distinguishable by portrait figures with short versus long hair, which indicates a more outdated binary understanding of gender differences (Krylova, 2016). Moreover, female-women soldiers are required to distinguish themselves from male-men soldiers by wearing skirts and heels (both considered traditionally feminine; Ellemers, 2018) and different hats as their formal attire – exceptions only possible with specific permissions (e.g. Marine’s dress code; Source 24, Appendix A).

¹⁵ “In dit voorschrift is de militair beschreven in e hij-vorm. Daar waar het vrouwelijke militairen betreft dient in voorkomend geval – zij – te worden gelezen.” (Source 24, p.6, Appendix A).

Thus, while men and women are represented (mostly) equally throughout *Defensie*'s online publications, the genders are conceptualised with their stereotypical connotation being binary and tied to sex.

Image 1

Dresscode Differences Between Male And Female Air and Space Force (Luchtmacht) personnel (Class DT1) (Source 23, p. 22, Appendix A)



Dagelijks tenue (DT1) met jas, broek / rok, pet / hoed

Diversity As A Women's Issue

Not only is gender seen in rather stereotypical categories, but the topic of diversity – which technically includes multiple genders among other issues such as race or age (see e.g., Cunningham, 2023) – is repeatedly skewed to be a women's integration issue.

For example, a news article published by *Defensie* called 'More diversity makes *Defensie* stronger' ["Meer diversiteit maakt *Defensie* sterker"]¹⁶ speaks of the potential of a diverse and inclusive force yet only mentions the integration of women and no people of other diverse and intersectional identities. This ultimately connects women's integration to diversity and inclusion problems. Equating diversity issues with women's issues is a frequently criticised

¹⁶ The article has been deleted from the main website and is not accessible anymore, therefore I am not able to give a reference to this article. However, in the Atlas.ti file for the document analyses, you will find a downloaded version of the article.

understanding of gender that overlooks both the unique needs of women as a gender and neglects the unique needs of other groups such as racially or ethnically diverse people (e.g., Hanappi-Egger, 2013; Hankivsky, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989).

So, *Defensie* very much addresses the topic of gender diversity and integration, by highlighting how valuable women in the force can be, how they have integrated over time, and even by acknowledging some of the problems women face within the military. However, outside of this description and glorification of women within *Defensie*, the military does not succeed at integrating women and their femininity properly, as women are still treated to be exceptional to “normal” men soldiers and homogenised under the diversity umbrella. Women are acknowledged yet sidelined and delegated to specialised placed.

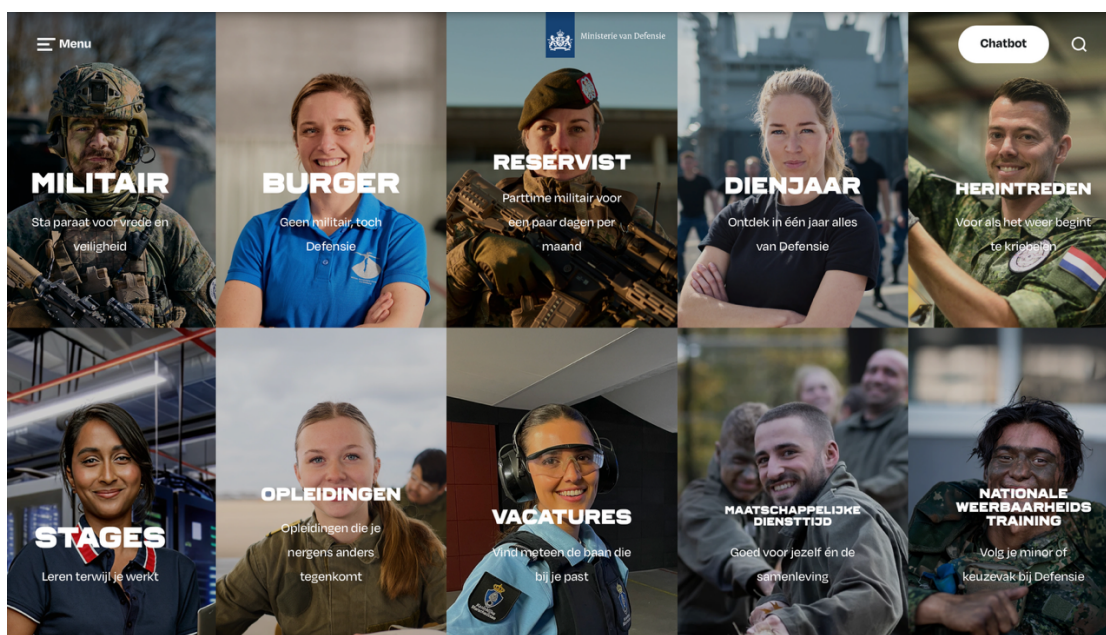
The Recruitment Website

Sub-Question 3: What are the notions of masculinity and femininity visible on the Dutch military’s recruitment website?

Short answer: The recruitment website functions to *naturalise* women (and thereby femininity) as part of the military by disconnecting military performance from masculine performance, thereby making military performance gender neutral. However, finer details of the recruitment site still show a tendency to relate men to soldiering or militarism and women to more domestic roles.

Image 2

Subpage “Bekijk mogelijkheden” of Defensie’s recruitment portal (Source 6, Appendix A)



Disconnecting Masculinity From Militarism

Through its recruitment website, *Defensie* (attempts to) disconnect militarised behaviours from their gendered undertone. This means that *Defensie* goes from “military masculinity”, meaning the strong behaviours exhibited within the military as a sign of masculine-men’s behaviours, to “military performance”, meaning the strong behaviours as the desired/current behaviours of the military in general. The focus goes from these behaviours as being “masculine” to these behaviours as being “military”.

The disconnect between militarised behaviour and masculine behaviour can be observed through e.g., the approximately equal number of men and women portrait photographs used on the recruitment website. Additionally, the disconnect of gender and militarism is supported by showing these men and women in various roles with no immediately visible separation into civil versus combat roles, as would be expected if one were to think of the stereotypically more feminine role of domestic behaviours and masculine role of combat behaviours (e.g., van Gilder, 2019). For example, men’s portraits are shown for the roles of ‘parttime military’ and ‘master the technology’, and women are shown with the sections ‘protect what’s important’ and ‘adventure on and under water’¹⁷ (Source 4, Appendix A). All these roles can be argued to represent action-related combat roles, traditionally associated with masculinity and men (e.g., Duncanson, 2009) and now detached from gender. Furthermore, the front pages of the recruitment website address any viewer directly by using terms like ‘you/yourself’ (Dutch: *je/jezelf*), thereby avoiding gender-coded pronouns such as she/her, he/him, or they/them.

So, through repeating strong, dark, combat-oriented militarised behaviours but showing these as exhibited by both men and women, *Defensie* attempts to disconnect militarism from gender to *naturalise* the participation of women (and femininity) in the force. For this paper, I define naturalising as an approach where there is no separation, no specialisation, between genders in the degree to which they belong in the military¹⁸.

Attempting Gender Neutrality

The part above hinted at *Defensie* attempting this separation between men-masculinity and militarism. However, I argue that *Defensie* is not fully successful with the separation of masculinity and militarism.

On the surface, the recruitment website seems gender-balanced or neutral, showing men and women in all types of roles. However, a closer analysis of the recruitment website shows

¹⁷ Translated from Dutch: “word parttime militair”, “beheers de techniek”, “beveilig wat belangrijk is”, and “avontuur op of onder water”

¹⁸ Often, the term “mainstreaming” is used for what I call naturalising in my paper (see e.g., Newby & Sebag, 2021)

that the website is not as gender neutral as it seems: though the roles presented by women and men seem balanced across the recruitment website at first, civil-style clothing is only worn by women, and the more civil occupations such as education and medical training are presented in combination with photos of women, and not men. Women are shown in (combat) uniform, which makes them equal to men with regards to combat-oriented roles, but the fact that only women are shown in the more civil roles strengthens, if not at least repeats, the delegation of women – and not men – to the civil domain. This separation of men and civil roles exactly fits into the traditional/stereotypical narrative of the masculine-man soldier that is made for combat, action, and strength (e.g., Duncanson, 2009; van Gilder, 2019).

Moreover, the cosmetics and hair styling of the men and women on the website reflect stereotypical separations of masculine and feminine behaviours. The men have predominantly short hair and the occasional camouflage face paint, whereas the women have long hair (often tied back) and wear makeup. This styling is repeatedly associated and exhibited by men and women, respectively (e.g., Brown, 2012a) but may not reflect the full spectrum of men's and women's, masculine and feminine, behaviours¹⁹. Thereby, *Defensie* limits itself to the degree with which they successfully naturalise all genders and gender performances into the organisation.

Additionally, while the individual portraits of the recruitment websites are somewhat failing at a gender neutrality role division and styling, the homepage of the recruitment portal sends an even stronger message about gender and militarism: the video clip that plays immediately after launching the homepage shows a young man standing out from a crowd, jumping from scene to scene of military service. The editing of the video as well as the scenes themselves – that start off with a shaky outdoor combat scene using weapons – give the impression of an action-packed, combat-related, and versatile experience working in the military. Showing these scenes with a man protagonist may reproduce the image of military service as acts of (ideal) masculine-man behaviours, because it immediately reminds of the stereotypical connection between men and service instead of military service as a gender-neutral affair.

So, it can be argued that the effectiveness with which *Defensie* presents itself to viewers with gender-neutral militarised behaviours is dampened by the underlying separation of men and civil roles, stereotypical masculine and feminine styling, and the perpetuation of the men-militarism connection through the homepage video. In other words, while the attempt at

¹⁹ I hereby refer back to the Theoretical Chapter that conceptualised femininity and masculinity as performances that can be exhibited independently of gender identity.

detaching militarised behaviours from their gendered undertone seems to work within parts of the recruitment websites, other parts of the website merely repeat the men-militarism connection.

Comparison

Sub-Question 4: To what extent is there an overlap between what *Defensie* states they want with regards to (gendered) performance in new recruits (Question 1 & 2) and the message that their online presence sends (Question 3)?

Short answer: The recruitment website attempts to naturalise women's participation in the military, and the neutrally phrased physical and psychological requirements support this naturalisation. However, *Defensie's* other online presence narrates gender, diversity, and integration in a stereotypical/traditional understanding (binary, sex tied to gender), delegating women to specialised places within the military. Thereby *Defensie* contradicts itself in the perspectives it takes on (gender) diversity.

Similarities

Both the recruitment website and other online publications present *Defensie* as an organisation that seeks out recruits who are physically fit, disciplined, adaptable, and team oriented. For example, the recruitment website lists physical fitness and rule adherence (see Sub-Question 1). Thereby, the recruitment website matches up with demands listed in documents such as the codes of conduct that highlight responsibility, discipline, and communality (e.g., Source 13, Appendix A). Both in the recruitment page and in the other online publications, these requirements and demands are (mostly) described without explicit references to gender, suggesting that such qualities are expected of all recruits regardless of identity.

Furthermore, the different areas of *Defensie* show elements of a binary and stereotypical/traditional understanding of gender. The recruitment website shows typical gender performances (i.e. styling), while the other documents clearly name only men and women as the two genders (e.g., Source 16, Appendix A) and represent these in typical performances (e.g., long versus short hair), too. Thereby, the online presence I analysed is mostly in its construction of gender (binary) and performances (trad. masculine or feminine).

Differences

Though the psychological and physical requirements are framed in a considerably gender-neutral way across all the online content I analysed, there are differences regarding the approach towards gender inclusivity and diversity.

The recruitment website attempts *naturalising*, trying to not differentiate women from men. The other documents, however, show instances of *specialisation*, where women are differentiated from men both in positive (e.g., how gender diversity makes *Defensie* stronger; Source 15, Appendix A) and negative ways (e.g., Source 24, Appendix A)

This mismatch shows that different online content of the military can, to some degree, be representative and match across organisational spheres, yet that there are nuances to be found and different areas of the military organisation may use different approaches to address the same topic.

Main Research Question

Main research question: How does the Dutch military construct definitions of masculinity and femininity specifically within their recruitment website?

Answer: Through its recruitment portal, *Defensie* constructs neither a clear definition of masculinity nor femininity but attempts to disconnect militarised behaviour from gendered behaviour. Here, *Defensie* utilises the presence of women in their portraits to naturalise different genders into the military. However, the photos, wording, and other compositional elements of the recruitment website also show an underlying connection of women with civil roles and men with militarism.

Defensie constructs definitions of masculinity and femininity on its recruitment website through a combination of inclusionary and traditional elements. On the one hand, *Defensie* attempts to detach militarised behaviours from their traditional association with masculine-men performance by portraying men and women in comparable combat-oriented and action-related roles. Equal representation in imagery, the addressing of the viewer with gender-neutral pronouns, and the neutral description of recruitment criteria work together to naturalise women within *Defensie*. This reflects an approach that seeks to position women (and femininity) as an integrated, non-exceptional part of the military.

However, subtle yet recurring patterns differentiating (*specialising*) genders are visible. Women are shown more frequently than men in civil-oriented roles where also only they appear in civil clothing. Styling – long hair and makeup for women, short hair and camouflage for men – reflect conventional gendered performances of femininity and masculinity. The homepage video, with its male protagonist in action-packed military roles, further reinforces the traditional link between men and militarism.

When compared to *Defensie*'s broader online publications, the recruitment website at times lines up and at other times diverges from *Defensie*'s overall messaging. For example, the

recruitment website mirrors the tendency to conceptualise gender in stereotypically binary terms. Conversely, the recruitment website diverges from the other online publications by attempting to neutralise the masculine-coded image of military service.

So, *Defensie*'s recruitment website presents an ambivalent construction of masculinity and femininity: one that promotes militarism as a gender-neutral/-inclusive affair while underlying nuances show masculinity and men remain more closely aligned with militarised behaviours.

Alternative Findings: A New Website Version

The recruitment website *www.werkenbijdefensie.nl*, which constitutes a big part in this study, is constantly changing. The version that was online during the data collection phase of this study was last live on June 14, 2025 (view www.defensie.sitearchief.nl for a record of all previous versions of *Defensie*'s websites). Since then, the content, and specifically the gendered content of the site has changed significantly: the homepage now²⁰ includes a primary button saying 'As a woman at Defensie' ["Als vrouw bij Defensie"]. Contrasting the previous version, the website now directly refers to gender as a main feature instead of referring to gender as an additional point of information buried in the depths of specific sub-sites. It is therefore important to spend some time on how this newer version of the website might change the conclusions of this research.

Website Details

These are the details of the new "Women in Defensie" section: The section specifically acknowledges that there are gender differences in e.g., the chances and wages women and men have as employees. The section presents *Defensie* as an organisation where equal chances, resources, and responsibilities for women are present. Furthermore, there is a FAQ section that answers to questions about larger equality and diversity (e.g., 'Will I be treated differently as a woman within Defensie?' ["Word ik als vrouw anders behandeld bij Defensie?"]), and about practical matters that might concern women (e.g., 'Am I allowed to wear makeup and nail polish while working?' ["Mag ik make-up dragen en nagellak op doen tijdens het werk?"]). Then, there is a section where readers can learn about other women soldiers' specific experiences by watching mini documentaries about their trajectories within *Defensie*. Lastly, different

²⁰ Update from August 15, 2025: The recruitment website has changed yet again, and the version I am discussing in this section was only online for about one month (June 14, 2025 – July 20, 2025). Since then, the website has changed to a version similar to the one I originally analysed. The specific reference to women in *Defensie* has been removed, but I still wanted to include this alternative discussion in my paper because it carries interesting insights about the conceptualisation of gender within *Defensie* and about *Defensie* as an organisation.

opportunities such as education, reservist positions, and other vacancies within *Defensie* are advertised.

New Interpretations

Firstly, while the previous website version seemed to *naturalise* gender diversity, not highlighting the potential discriminatory gendered effects of soldiering and the military, the new version explicitly acknowledges the differential treatment of women and men in the military; it creates *specialisation* by *appreciating* the unique needs of women in the military. Here, *Defensie* does not hide the existing inequalities by assuming equality to be a natural part of the organisation.

This *appreciation*, contrary to the previous recruitment website version, does not attempt to disconnect masculinity and militarism to make militarism a gender-neutral affair. Contrastingly, the website now makes militarism a specifically womanly affair. Instead of disconnecting the “masculine” from the “military” like the previous version did, this website version adds “femininity” (i.e. women) to militarism, making militarism a diversely gendered concept as opposed to a singularly gendered or neutral concept.

Next, the new website version could also feed into the practice of delegating women to specialised places within the military – unlike the naturalisation that the previous version attempted. I argue that this new approach of the *appreciation* of specific genders’ needs and talents, like it is done on the newer version of the recruitment website, also constitutes a form of delegation to *specialised* places. This is because the website now specifically highlights women within *Defensie*, which ultimately makes them stand out from the other, male, soldiers. The attempt to appreciate women’s unique needs and talents, though putting military women in a positive light, still discriminates them as a gendered group.

So, while the new website version thus avoids glossing over the unique needs and talents of women within *Defensie* and aims to include women and femininity within militarism, it nevertheless perpetuates the sidelining, or “sidestreaming” of women within the military by explicitly accentuating women’s contributions to the organisation.

Connecting The Larger Theoretical Background

Since I emphasised strongly that gender and the military are complex topics and need a rich theoretical background to be fully understood, the following section aims illustrate instances where the findings to my research question relate to the larger theories I elaborated on earlier.

Beyond Previous Research

Contrary to previous research, the constant changes *Defensie* makes to their recruitment page are an indication for the willingness to adapt as an organisation. First, *Defensie* employed a strategy of naturalising women within the force, then the website changed to appreciatively specialise women. This dynamic behaviour of *Defensie* goes counter to what many researchers argue: the military is often seen as an organisation that resists change and specifically change with regards to gender (van Douwen et al., 2022; Hasselbladh & Ydén, 2020), yet *Defensie* shows clear signs of trying to adapt.

The Problem Of Legitimacy

Following the evidential willingness of *Defensie* to adapt, change, and reformulate gender integration practices. I pose that the inclusion of women in *Defensie* has connections to the military organisation's need for legitimacy, as this inclusion constitutes a case of adaptation of the military to fit changing societal norms.

It has been discussed by scholars that the military started to include women into their force not only out of internal motivation, but because of external, e.g., societal, pressures (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019; Rusu, 2023; Clark, 2016) or shortages in the workforce (Brown, 2012b; Jester, 2021)²¹. The inclusion of women in *Defensie* can therefore be argued to reflect a striving to keep up with societal changes, which ultimately upkeeps the legitimacy of the military (Kucera, 2017). To quote Holmberg and Alvinus (2019):

“If the military organization fails to recognise the value changes among the segment of the population that it is supposed to attract it is not successful in its recruitment. If the military organization are allowed to continue demanding excessive costs from its personnel and fail to perceive larger societal trends when it comes to norms, the consequences will also be a lack of attraction as an employer. The narcissistic and greedy character of the military organizations are thus challenged.” (p.137)

Thereby, the authors basically argue that the military needs to adapt to societal expectations in order to be successful in their recruitment and their attractiveness as an organisation, and therefore to be continued to be seen as a legitimate organisation.

²¹ For an example of non-military combat groups that recruit women under the pressures of specific internal and external circumstances, I recommend Shelli Israelsen's (2020) paper. There, she assesses during what conflict phases rebel groups recruit female combatants for which purpose.

Sidestreaming Gender

Moreover, *Defensie* constitutes an example for what Newby and Sebag (2021) call sidestreaming. The recruitment website and other online content of *Defensie*, as well as its recruitment requirements, make an attempt at appreciating and naturalising women into the military. However, through this attempt at mainstreaming, *Defensie* also perpetuates (intentionally or unintentionally, according to Newby and Sebag, 2021) men-militarism connections and delegates women to a special place within the military, thereby disregarding their true unique needs and qualities as a gender group (Brown et al., 2021)

Even alternative interpretations of the findings do not better the instance of sidestreaming within *Defensie*: here, while the findings so far discussed how militarised behaviour can be reformulated to include both femininity and masculinity (or be detached from both gendered performances), an alternative explanation would be that *Defensie* constructs women to exhibit masculine behaviours, too. This means that instead of disconnecting masculinity from militarism, a different effect could be that masculinity (incl. militarism) is a behaviour that can also be exhibited by women. Thereby *Defensie* supports contemporary debates in gender studies that argue that masculinity and femininity are a spectrum of behaviours that can be exhibited by people of any gender identity (e.g., Connell, 2005). However, in this interpretation, *Defensie* makes no attempt at disconnecting the – sometimes problematic (e.g., Croce, 2021; Vastapuu, 2025; Donnelly et al., 2022) – connection of masculinity and militarism, but aims to include femininity (i.e. women) in militarised masculinity.

This broadening of masculine militarised behaviours to women is as much an instance of sidelining as my original interpretation. This is because including women in militarised masculinity, does not allow for potential feminine behaviours to emerge. Behaviour, regardless by whom it is exhibited, is prescribed to match that of the masculine gender performance, effectively pushing women's (and men's) femininity aside.

So, with both interpretations – *Defensie* either detaching militarism from its gendered undertone or *Defensie* making militarised masculinity accessible to women – *Defensie* displays sidestreaming as elaborated on by Newby and Sebag (2021).

Supporting Previous Findings

Lastly, in accordance with previous research, the Dutch military also conceptualises women (and thereby femininity) in contrast to men (and masculinity). The evidence for this lies in the online publications and documents that sideline women, and in the new recruitment page

that specialises women. Though explicit instances of gender hierarchies are rare (e.g., marines' dress code; Source 24, Appendix A), the undertone to the conceptualisation of gender (women, femininity, men, masculinity) within Defensie follows previous findings on gender hierarchies within militaries (e.g., van Gilder, 2019; Hale, 2011; Brown, 2012a).

Epilogue

Limitations

Though my research has produced intriguing findings, I do not shy away from outlining my methodological and theoretical limits. Looking at my research critically, I see that my findings can help to explain the mechanism and approaches towards gender integration into the military but cannot be used as a judgement as to these approaches' effectiveness. This criticism is explained in the section below and followed up on in my suggestions for future research.

Knowing Approaches, Not Outcomes

Though my Introduction started with the problems of women's integration into the military, and my research therefore carries the undertone of contribution to the reduction of this problem, the research I conducted cannot provide an indication of the "best" way to approach gender diversity and gender integration within the military. The data collected, and its respective interpretation, outline different approaches taken toward increasing gender diversity, but cannot evaluate the effectiveness of those approaches in achieving meaningful integration.

To show the complexity of evaluating such approaches: the *specialisation* of women within *Defensie* – evident in certain online publications and discourses by *Defensie* – can have both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it may raise awareness of the specific challenges women face within the military (Spijkers et al., 2024), potentially prompting targeted efforts to address systemic discrimination (like UN Resolution 1325; UN Security Council, 2000) and fostering a more inclusive environment (Spijkers et al., 2024). On the other hand, this approach risks reinforcing the notion that women are different from the (male) norm (Duncanson & Woodward, 2016). This can result in women being perceived as exceptions rather than integral members of the military, effectively sidelining them (Newby & Sebag, 2021). In this way, positive discrimination may still reproduce exclusionary practices.

Conversely, the *naturalisation* of women within the ranks – visible, for instance, on the older version of the recruitment website – suggests a different approach. By portraying women as a regular part of the military without drawing special attention to their gender, this strategy can promote the idea that any person, regardless of gender can be part of the military (Kamberidou, 2019). While this avoids the pitfalls of positive discrimination, it may also gloss over the specific barriers and gendered challenges women face in the military and as soldiers (Brown et al., 2021; Giri, 2021) - issues the specialising approach explicitly aims to address.

Thus, both approaches come with positive and negative consequences, and it is difficult to predict which will ultimately be more effective in fostering gender integration. This complexity is compounded by a key methodological limitation: my research captures only a snapshot in time. It is based on the analysis of online materials as they existed during the period of study, rather than on long-term observations. Therefore, it cannot determine whether the consequences of either approach are currently materialising within *Defensie*. Following *Defensie*'s strategies over an extended period is needed to reveal whether and which of its approaches is (un-)successful in increasing gender diversity and the integration of women into the force.

Future Research

This research showed how understanding gender in the military is also understanding the military as an organisation. From these findings, the following research could be built up:

Firstly, it would be interesting to investigate the origins of the mismatched approaches towards gender within the different online elements of *Defensie*. While *Defensie*'s recruitment website attempts gender neutrality or *naturalisation* (old version) and gender *appreciation* (new version), other publications very much delegate women and people of diverse genders to *specialised* places outside of the male norm. This mismatch hints at underlying differences in gender conceptualisation within the military organisation. I recommend researchers to explore organisational characteristics that might have led to the mismatch, such as organisation size and characteristic (e.g., see Hasselbladh & Ydén's on change within military organisations; 2020). And I further recommend examining the possible instrumental value of gender (e.g., Christensen's analysis of utilising the gendered identity of mothers to support children's enlistment, 2016), that could influence where in the military organisation gender imaged are used and how. Exploring the origins of the mismatched approaches could reveal interesting findings for the theoretical field of organisational psychology or help to understand gender integration issues in the military on a deeper level.

Secondly, other researchers could make use of my findings to explore the long-term effects of different approaches to gender integration. As already mentioned in the limitations, my research constitutes a momentary record of *Defensie*'s strategies and their effects on gender. Using long-term approaches and approaches that include measures of effectiveness for the different strategies of *naturalisation* and *specialisation* (incl. *appreciation*) could bring the much-needed insight on the consequences of each strategy. The results from such research could help to inform better approaches for achieving gender integration and equality within the

military, so that the positive effects of women's inclusion in security apparatuses can be fully utilised.

Lastly, one avenue for future research could be to investigate the structures and processes within militarism itself that hinder women from entering the military. My research was focussed on gender integration problems within the military. The findings showed different approaches for broadening militarism to be exhibited by both men and women. However, these approaches do not question the nature of militarism. They attempt to either change militarism to be gender inclusive or changing women/femininity to include militarism. Newby and Sebag (2021) summarise the critique on these approaches: "attempting to gender mainstream in security institutions means working within a system based on masculine gender norms" (p.152). Thereby, the authors effectively highlight how militarism itself (within security institutions) might be a gendered undertaking. Duncanson and Woodward (2016) have held similar debates on what should happen with the gendered content of the military organisation, and they suggest a "regendering" of the military. Regendering, in their words, means to "go beyond gender as we currently know it" (p.12) and to foster that "a variety of bodily performances without *one* category – that associated with a particular form of masculinity – [is] being valued over all others." (p. 12). I would be intrigued to see future researchers focus on the origins of militarism and to consider proposals such as Duncanson and Woodward's (2016) regendering of the military organisation so that the effect of militarism on gender can be understood to a richer extent.

Conclusion

This research analysed how the Dutch military constructs femininity and masculinity through its recruitment website, revealing a mismatch between promoting gender neutrality, sidesteaming women, and perpetuating underlying traditional conceptualisations of gender. While *Defensie*'s recruitment website and other uses visual and linguistic approaches to detach militarised performance from masculine performance, subtler elements in styling or clothing, and the tone of stereotypical binary understandings of gender continue to associate militarism with masculine performance – at last also narrated by other online publications and documents of *Defensie*. Within this, however, *Defensie* also shows a strong motivation to adapt as an organisation and attempt different approaches towards gender inclusion.

Scientifically, the research connects gender studies, organisational psychology, and military studies. Here, my study offers an interdisciplinary understanding for analysing gender and recruitment practices that shows how the analysis of the conceptualisation of gender within

one part of the military organisation – in this case recruitment – reaches a new depth when contrasted to other areas of the military organisation.

Societally, my findings contribute to ongoing debates about gender inclusion in security institutions by showing that equality in representation does not necessarily dismantle deeper gendered hierarchies. My research can therefore be used to understand subtler gender dynamics within the military and the security sector, so that women may be integrated further into the military and may better share their positive contribution to conflict, peace, and security outcomes.

Ultimately, the case of *Defensie* shows a broader conclusion: true integration is not only about who appears in the picture or how neutrally texts are written, but also about how the images and concepts are composed. The images, words, and narratives used to invite new recruits matter, because these techniques not only aim to fill positions in an organisation but also send a message about who belongs and where.

Reflections And Positionality

Below you will find some of the most relevant elements of my person, background, and experiences that needed consideration in this research project.

Gender

In a study that is primarily concerned with gender and how people's gender performances are constructed by the military, my own gender identity and experiences might be of influence. I identify as a woman and, due to experiences (which I will not elaborate on, thank you very much), have become quite sensitive to recognising even the most minute sexist or degrading notes. Therefore, my research might have received a more critical than nuanced undertone.

I do recognise how *Defensie*, compared to other militaries, might showcase a more progressive view on femininity and masculinity, but the instances where *Defensie* still "failed" at gender integration felt more striking during my data collection.

Dealing with my position: I was aware of my gender's role in the interpretation of *Defensie* from the start, because the problems I saw with gender integration in the military felt connected to larger gender equality problems in society, that I, as a woman, am affected by. Therefore, I tried to be careful to anchor my interpretations in a very elaborate theoretical framework and collect the list of common terms associated with masculinity and femininity. Both these anchors let me check whether my interpretations were still in line with a substantiated theoretical understanding of the subject gender in military organisations.

Educational Background

My Bachelor's was in psychology and a psychological approach to this project is obvious. Knowing that there is no such thing as a neutral message became the underlying method to my research. For everything I read of *Defensie*, I analysed its effect on the reader, and not just for the gendered notions. Rooted in my experiences in psychology, I think that it is necessary to understand a large context to the subject one studies (hence the elaborate theoretical framework), but I also understand that this view is not shared by all researchers of all fields. Therefore, while I intentionally used psychology in my thesis, I want to acknowledge that there might be other lenses with which one could approach the topic of gender within the military.

Then, my educational background in psychology confronted me with something else: I had never done qualitative research before this project. Every project I did for my Bachelor's

was a quantitative analysis, and I struggled to understand qualitative analyses (and still do at times). I followed a qualitative methods course during the Master's to catch up, but it did not help much, sadly. So, I often noticed how my data collection, data analysis, and writing reflected quantitative approaches. For example, I struggled a lot with finding concrete "evidence" for my observations (like a statistical number in quantitative research would give you), but the methods I chose for this thesis were more based on interpretations and hidden meanings than yes/no answers. Therefore, I am fully aware that the quality of my work might have been affected by the steep learning curve for qualitative research I had to face.

I am still not sure whether I like the qualitative research methods that I used, but I know now how to conduct qualitative research should I ever come across a situation where that is needed. And that is a skill that is quite nice to acquire within only one year.

My Cultural Background

I am German and only lived in the Netherlands for the past five years. My cultural background could have affected my research in two ways:

Firstly, being a national of one country analysing another country's national military allows me to have an outsider's perspective that is free of the Dutch cultural lenses. On the other hand, because of this outsider's perspective, I might have not been able to recognise some Dutch cultural nuances and references embedded in the websites and documents, because I precisely did not grow up with the Dutch culture but had to learn it over the last years. Nevertheless, after five years of living in the Netherlands, I feel like I have a good enough grasp about the cultural similarities and differences that I felt I could analyse *Defensie* with the proper sensitivity to the Dutch context without needing to take extra measures to not let my own cultural origin cloud that of *Defensie*.

Secondly, Dutch is not my first language, yet the documents and websites I analysed were written in Dutch. Therefore, I needed to engage in a lot of translation and sometimes ask friends about the specific meaning of words in the specific context of what I was reading. And while I noticed how I grew better at Dutch over the course of this project, it took me a while to understand the specific jargon of *Defensie*. So, it could be that my Dutch abilities influenced how I interpreted texts with regards to their gendered undertones because of language barriers and translation issues.

Motivation

The last factor I want to talk about – that I believe is often forgotten in reflections and positionality statements – is motivation. My emotions towards this project ranged from anywhere between excitement and confidence to anger and frustration. With regards to the time I had to finish my thesis, I could have easily finished at the first deadline. But my motivation was not there. Many moments, I sat down on my desk not because I was excited for the project, but because it had to be done. Other moments, I excitedly annoyed my peers with the most recent progress I made. So, it was a rollercoaster.

My varying motivation was especially noticeable at two times during this thesis project:

Firstly, I started the year off strong with wanting to find an internship at a Germany embassy abroad. Fast-forward to today, I did not do an internship to save my mental health (10/10 can recommend prioritising mental health). Therefore, my project cannot offer a connection to any institution or organisation. But, being freed of the burden of finding an internship, I could also regain some of my enthusiasm for research which then also affected to quality of my work.

Secondly, during these last weeks now, I just wanted to get this thesis done. What I found, so my findings and interpretations, was not affected by this desire (they were settled before August started). But how I wrote these findings down was certainly affected. For the discussion section, I did not engage in as many revisions of my written work as the first half of the paper received. In the end, knowing myself and hearing it from others, in any motivational state I try to produce high-quality work.

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<https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201214.462>

Appendix 1: Website And Document Sources

These are the specific websites, subsites, publications, and documents I analysed in my study. The sites were all last retrieved on August 18, 2025.

Homepages

Source 1: Werkenbijdefensie (n.d.). *Werken bij Defensie*. Ministerie van Defensie.

<https://werkenbijdefensie.nl>

Source 2: Werkenbijdefensie (n.d.). *Defensie.nl*. Ministerie van Defensie.

<https://www.defensie.nl>

Site Archive

Source 3: Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Sitearchief – Defensie*.

<https://defensie.sitearchief.nl/#archive>

Website Analysis: Recruitment Portal

Source 4: Werkenbijdefensie (n.d.). *Ontdek Defensie*. Ministerie van Defensie.

<https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/inspiratiegebieden>

Source 5: Werkenbijdefensie (n.d.). *Vacatures: Werken én leren bij Defensie*. Ministerie van Defensie. <https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/vacatures>

Source 6: Werkenbijdefensie (n.d.). *Bekijk mogelijkheden*. Ministerie van Defensie.

<https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/baanmogelijkheden>

Discourse Analysis: Recruitment Portal

Source 7: Werkenbijdefensie (n.d.). *Veelgestelde vragen: Fysieke eisen/functie eisen*.

Ministerie van Defensie. <https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/contact/veelgestelde-vragen/fysieke-eisen-functie-eisen-16>

Source 8: Werkenbijdefensie (n.d.). *Alles over je sollicitatie: Psychologische selectie*.

Ministerie van Defensie. <https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/alles-over-je-sollicitatie-psychologische-selectie>

Source 9: Werkenbijdefensie (n.d.). *Alles over je sollicitatie: Aanstellingskeuring*. Ministerie van Defensie. <https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/alles-over-je-sollicitatie-aanstellingskeuring>

Discourse Analysis: Dutch Military Webpage

- Source 10:** Ministerie van Defensie (2020, October). Defensievisie 2035: Vechten voor een veilige toekomst.
<https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/publicaties/2020/10/15/defensievisie-2035>
- Source 11:** Ministerie van Defensie (2025, March 1). *Antallen personeel*.
<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/overdefensie/het-verhaal-van-defensie/aantallen-personeel>
- Source 12:** Ministerie van Defensie (2018, December 4). Gedragscode Defensie.
<https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/publicaties/2018/12/04/gedragscode-defensie>
- Source 13:** Ministerie van Defensie (2019, April 26). Gedrageregels Defensie: Sociale veiligheid & integriteit.
<https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/publicaties/2020/12/21/gedragsregels-defensie>
- Source 14:** Ministerie van Defensie (2021, June 12). Plan van aanpak: Versterking van de sociale veiligheid binnen Defensie.
<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/integriteit/downloads/rapporten/2021/07/12/plan-van-aanpak-sociale-veiligheid>
- Source 15:** Ministerie van Defensie (2025, February 20). *Nederland verlengt actieplan voor belang vrouwen wereldwijd*.
<https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2025/02/20/nederland-verlengt-actieplan-voor-belang-vrouwen-wereldwijd>
- Source 16:** Ministerie van Defensie (2024, June 6). *Onderzoek: Integratie van vrouwen in krijgsmacht verliep stroef*.
<https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2024/06/06/onderzoek-integratie-van-vrouwen-in-krijgsmacht-verliep-stroef>
- Source 17:** Ministerie van Defensie (2024, February 9). *Passende uitrusting voor vrouwelijke militairen krijgt vorm*. <https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2024/02/09/passende-uitrusting-voor-vrouwelijke-militairen-krijgt-vorm>
- Source 18:** Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Periode 1944-1978*.
<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/militaire-geschiedenis/vrouwen-bij-defensie/1944-1978>
- Source 19:** Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Periode 178-1990*.
<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/militaire-geschiedenis/vrouwen-bij-defensie/1978-1990>

Source 20: Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Periode 1990-2022*.

<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/militaire-geschiedenis/vrouwen-bij-defensie/1990-2022>

Source 21: Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Vrouwen bij Defensie*.

<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/militaire-geschiedenis/vrouwen-bij-defensie>

Source 22: Ministerie van Defensie (2024, December 5). Tenuevoorschriften Koninklijke Landmacht.

<https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/richtlijnen/2024/12/05/tenuevoorschriften-landmacht>

Source 23: Ministerie van Defensie (2019, March 26). Tenuevoorschriften Koninklijke Luchtmacht.

<https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/richtlijnen/2019/03/26/tenuevoorschriften-luchtmacht>

Source 24: Ministerie van Defensie (2017, June 30). Tenuevoorschriften Koninklijke Marine.

<https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/richtlijnen/2017/06/30/tenuevoorschriften-marine>

Source 25: Ministerie van Defensie (2024, February 28). Draagvlakmonitor Defensie tweede helft 2023.

<https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/rapporten/2024/02/28/draagvlakmonitor-defensie-tweede-helft-2023>

Source 26: Ministerie van Defensie (2024, June 13). *Openluchtconcert voor diversiteit: “Laat vrouwen niet in hun eentje vechten”*.

<https://www.defensie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2024/06/13/openluchtconcert-voor-diversiteit-laat-vrouwen-niet-in-hun-eentje-vechten>

Source 27: Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Divisie personeel en organisatie Defensie*.

<https://www.defensie.nl/organisatie/dosco/eenheden/divisie-personeel--organisatie-defensie>

Source 28: Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Grenstoezicht*.

<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/taken-in-nederland/grenstoezicht>

Source 29: Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Leadership development journey*.

<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/defensieacademie/opleidingen/loopbaanopleidingen-idl/leadership-development-journey>

Source 30: Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Wat doet Defensie?*

<https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/overdefensie/het-verhaal-van-defensie/wat-doet-defensie>

Source 31: Ministerie van Defensie (n.d.). *Veelgestelde vragen: Vrouwen.*

<https://werkenbijdefensie.nl/contact/veelgestelde-vragen/vrouwen-19>

Source 32: Stichting Homoseksualiteit en Krijgsmacht (n.d.). *SHK: LHBT+ network van Defensie.* <https://www.shk.nl>

Source 33: Stichting Homoseksualiteit en Krijgsmacht (n.d.). *Activiteiten.* <https://www.shk.nl/wat-doen-we/>