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Reproducing the military and heteropatriarchal normal: Army Reserve service as serious leisure

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journals.sagepub.com/home/sdi**Sergio Catignani** 

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Abstract

The notions that military violence engenders security and that military service is a selfless and necessary act are orthodoxies in political, military and scholarly debate. The UK Army Reserve's recent expansion prompts reconsideration of this orthodoxy, particularly in relation to the suggestion that reservists serve selflessly. Drawing on fieldwork with British Army reservists and their spouses/partners, we examine how this orthodoxy allows reservists to engage in everyday embodied performances, and occasionally articulations, of the need to serve, in order to free themselves up from household responsibilities. This supposed necessity of military service necessitates heteropatriarchal divisions of labour, which facilitate participation in military service and the state's ability to conduct war/war preparations. However, while reserve service is represented as sacrificial and necessary, it is far more self-serving and is better understood as 'serious leisure', an activity whose perceived importance engenders deep self-fulfilment. By showing that the performances of sacrifice and necessity reservists rely on are selfish, not selfless, we show how militarism is facilitated by such everyday desires. We conclude by reflecting on how exposing reserve service as serious leisure could contribute to problematizing the state's ability to rely on everyday performances and articulations of militarism and heteropatriarchy to prepare for and wage war.

Keywords

British Army, embodied performances, heteropatriarchy, militarism, reservists, spouses/partners

Introduction

Reserves Day is the moment to celebrate the . . . sacrifice and service of all those who give up their spare time to protect our nation's security at home and overseas. (Fallon, 2015)

Recent scholarship highlights the 'pressing need to reinvigorate a focus on militarism and its co-constitution with security' (Stavrianakis and Stern, 2018: 15) and some of the consequences of

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states equating military prowess with national security (Basham, 2018). For the UK, as encapsulated in the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), militarism – the ability to prepare for, normalize and legitimate war (Stavrianakis and Stern, 2018) – remains integral to its national security agenda. While the SDSR mandated defence cuts owing to economic recession, the Army Reserve has expanded to obviate personnel reductions in the regular armed forces, which suggests that maintaining military strength remains a priority (Army, 2013; Ministry of Defence [MoD], 2011, 2013).¹ Greater reliance on civilians giving their ‘spare time’ to serve in the military, usually alongside employment and family commitments, raises important questions about what motivates people to contribute to state militarism via part-time military service. The quote above suggests that a primary reason is sacrifice and service – that is, selfless commitment to the necessary defence of others. Such notions are evident in the Armed Forces Covenant (MoD, 2000), which calls on British society to appropriately compensate, and support, reservists in exchange for their sacrifices,² and are often repeated in politicians’ discourse, during Parliamentary debates (House of Lords, 2017) and on days that honour military service, such as Armed Forces Week, Remembrance Day and Reserves Day (May, 2018).

What motivates people to serve in militaries has also concerned academia, with the salient idea being that those who serve make commitments that transcend the self to the benefit of others (Coker, 2007; Dandeker, 2000; Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960; Strachan, 2003). Army recruitment literature stresses the importance of the collective and that the ‘key purpose’ of the Army is ‘to defend the interests of the UK’ (Army, n.d.: 6–7). Edmunds et al. (2016: 128) similarly characterize reserve service as ‘primarily transactional in nature’, with incentives such as self-development, pay, adventure, travel and play/recreation being emphasized but in the expectation that these are exchanged for some form of selfless commitment, mainly in the guise of more routine training.

Selfless commitment has become an orthodoxy in military, political and academic discourse.³ This matters because, as we argue and demonstrate below, this orthodoxy plays a significant role in normalizing the frequent absences reservists have from the home to conduct war preparations, which normalize and legitimate such preparations (and, by extension, war) as routine, mundane activities. While other scholars show that ideas such as sacrifice and heroism ‘are often projected into the mind of the soldier by both politicians and social scientists’, rather than reflective of their lived experiences (Gibson and Abell, 2004: 873),⁴ such discourses of sacrifice and selfless commitment enable reservists to shirk other responsibilities in order to engage in war-preparedness activities.

Drawing on qualitative data with British Army reservists and their spouses/partners, and joining other critical security scholars who question familiar tropes around militarism and militarization (Howell, 2018; Stern and Zalewski, 2009), we argue that the chief contributions that reservists make to war capabilities are not their sacrifices but their routinized, embodied performances of preparing for war. These normalize militarism and contribute to the notion that military violence is both necessary to state security and somewhat banal. Furthermore, we argue that their embodied performances normalize and maintain the heteropatriarchal social order within British society, which, as Enloe (1983: 11) argues, is ‘supposedly necessary to ensure national security’, conceived as not only the ‘protection of the state and its citizens from external foes, but . . . primarily the maintenance of [a] social order’ that is reliant on gendered designations that reinforce militarism.

We employ the concept of the ‘military normal’ – the fact that preparing for war is so routinely and uncritically accepted as necessary (Lutz, 2009) – to demonstrate how the orthodoxies that war is inevitable and thus military service is a self-sacrificial act normalize (and are normalized by) reserve service, which perpetuates militarism within British society. Moreover, following feminists such as Enloe (2000) and Peterson (2018), we argue that the ‘military normal’ is co-constituted by

heteropatriarchy. Heteropatriarchy is that assemblage of practices and processes through which binary gender relations, masculinity and heterosexuality become normalized and privileged within society. Heteropatriarchy infuses and links household, market and state so that in most families, regardless of members' sexual orientations, heteropatriarchal divisions of labour persist and mirror market relations of resource distribution and state regulatory powers (Peterson, 2018). That is, the 'heteropatriarchal state imagines a household with a male breadwinner and a mother-housewife' (Khazaal, 2018: 212), whereby the former engages in meaningful activity in the public sphere, such as military service, while the latter engages in devalued but relied-upon labours in the private sphere. In a 'heteronormative society, the hierarchical relations ascribed to "valuable" paid labor and the less valued domestic labor are deeply inscribed around stereotypes of male dominance and female submission' (Downing and Goldberg, 2011: 103). The model of 'woman as caretaker' sustains heteropatriarchal 'militarism . . . because it builds on gender opposition' generated by heteropatriarchy 'to contain women' and those who demonstrate non-masculine traits (Kaplan, 1994: 124).

As we show below, the militaristic state imagines and requires such heteropatriarchal households in which men (or masculinized subjects) can leave to participate in war because women (or feminized subjects) will remain behind to sustain the home. Even with women joining the military in increasing numbers, the military has not become 'degendered or gender-neutral because of their presence' (Via, 2010: 44). As Enloe in the 1980s depicted the military as more patriarchal 'than other patriarchal institutions . . . [that is,] a *male* preserve, run by men and for men according to masculine ideas' (Enloe, 1983: 7, emphasis in original), so too has Basham's more recent research shown that although the British military 'has made changes to recruitment and personnel policy in the last 20 years or so', it is 'an institution that is still overwhelmingly dominated by white personnel, men and – it is assumed – heterosexual members . . . where heteronormativity is constantly supported' (Basham, 2013: 7, 138).⁵

Securing the state by preparing for war via military training has been perceived as a productive masculinized activity owing to the co-constitution of militarism and heteropatriarchy. The commitment of socio-economic resources to war (preparations) has long been a male-dominated project (Kaplan, 1994: 123–124), and the conception that war is inevitable is based on masculinized assumptions about human nature that have been perpetuated partly by the historic exclusion of women from the public arena (Basham, 2016). The normalization of engaging in military service thus relies on the equation of military power with security, the equation of serving with sacrifice, and the gendering of military service as a meaningful, rational public act. Put simply, reservists can periodically leave the home to participate in military activities because of gendered orthodoxies that war preparedness is rational and involves soldiers' selfless commitment and that society, especially families, should support militarized and masculinized subjects involved in war preparations.

While feminist international relations scholars have repeatedly demonstrated how distinctions between the private and the public spheres are flawed (see, inter alia, Enloe, 1989; Youngs, 2000), the heteropatriarchy underpinning them is very resilient. The iterative practice of masculinized soldiers leaving the home for war preparations while spouses/partners provide feminized emotional and physical labour (i.e. caretaking) to reservists and the rest of the household sustains the geopolitical normalization of the division of the 'public' and 'wholly masculine sphere of war and diplomacy' from the 'private' 'domestic sphere of families' (Hooper, 2001: 92; see also Basham and Catignani, 2018; Giddens, 1985; Levy, 2013). Concurrently, reservists' iterative and embodied performances at home of their undertaking 'necessary' military service for the 'greater good' normalizes military service, war and the heteropatriarchal home as a facilitator of militarism. Just as the gendered categorization of people under heteropatriarchy sustains militarism, so does performing the role of caretaker under heteropatriarchy sustain militarism (Kaplan, 1994: 129).

Nonetheless, although reserve service is represented as sacrificial and necessary in defence of the state, it is far more self-serving. While military training can be trying, it can test soldiers' 'manhood' (whether they are men or otherwise) as a site in which soldiers experience and learn to master hunger, hot, cold and/or wet weather, and exhaustion (Woodward, 1998: 287). 'The notion of "combat" plays a central role in the construction of concepts of "manhood"', and accordingly the military 'plays a special role in the ideological structure of [hetero]patriarchy' (Enloe, 1983: 12–13). War preparations, especially combat training, can engender pleasures by allowing soldiers to develop masculinized and militarized traits normalized and prized in wider society, such as bravery and physical and mental fortitude (Woodward, 1998).

Situating our data in the military and heteropatriarchal normal, we argue that the benefits and pleasures derived from reserve service mean it is actually better conceptualized as a form of 'serious leisure', a concept applied to voluntary activities in which participants must persevere and commit, have self-developmental opportunities, are part of a unique ethos and culture, and form strong identifications with, and pride in, their chosen pursuit (Parker, 2000).⁶ Utilizing this concept, we show how reservists carve out personal space and spare time to satisfy self-interests, usually at the expense of their families. We show that reserve service's allure consists in facilitating forms of self-fulfilment that reservists are not able to satisfy in family or work roles. We argue that the reason why reservists join and stay in the Army is a matter of self-fulfillment rather than selfless commitment motivations. Put simply, militarism is facilitated by reservists' willing engagement in military activities that they find fulfilling and fun. Reservists are thus able to achieve personal enjoyment through reserve service because, while such service is actually serious leisure, the military and heteropatriarchal normal enables a performativity through which reservists come to embody the norm that military service is selfless and necessary to protect others (Butler, 1990).

Our focus on everyday performances is significant because, as McSorley (2014: 119) notes of Lutz's (2009) conceptualization of the 'military normal', people seldom explicitly express views on the 'necessity of war readiness and the legitimacy of the state having vast military force' in any systematic or reasoned way; instead, it is 'often through the mundane embodied practices and idioms that a broad and subtle form of militarism assumes an implicitness and becomes something not explicitly thought but simply felt to be habitually right' (McSorley, 2014: 119). Likewise, the salience of heteropatriarchy, despite feminist and LGBTIQI activism, means people also rarely explicitly express beliefs regarding the necessity and legitimacy of perpetuating orthodox gender roles and relations. Instead, it is through routine embodied practices and idioms that militarism and heteropatriarchy become implicitly accepted and sensed as customarily 'right'. The repetitive performances of reservists, as masculinist and militarized embodied subjects leaving the house not only to 'train' but also to socialize, go on adventures, etc., often go unquestioned (Butler, 1990).

This does not mean that militarism and heteropatriarchy are never questioned. Our findings show that although militarized and masculinized performativity – the stylized repetition of acts and imitations of the military and heteropatriarchal normal (Butler, 1990) – means that the notion that reservists engage in acts of selfless commitment when away from family/household responsibilities often 'goes without saying', such embodied performances do not always go unchallenged. Routinized engagement in reserve activities is not always accepted as necessary. As Butler (1996) argues, reiterated embodied performances can come to appear too errant, and, when they do, they are questioned. Reservists sometimes have to 'sell' military activities as selfless commitment. Yet they often can do so because of the orthodoxies of service, sacrifice and selfless commitment that constitute the military and heteropatriarchal normal. When reservists explicitly articulate this orthodoxy to deflect the questioning of their spouses/partners, they draw on an 'action of speech' that Butler explains 'echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*' (i.e. leaving the home) (Butler, 1996:

206, emphasis in original). As Butler explains, it ‘is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice. What this means is that a performative “works” to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions [in this study’s case, the conventions of militarism and heteropatriarchy] by which it is mobilized’ (Butler, 1996: 206, emphasis in original). Thus, we show how reservists’ ability to leave the home to pursue serious leisure within the reserves and shirk household/family obligations relies on embodied performances of the gendered soldiering self or, when occasionally questioned by reservists’ spouses/partners, on explicit narratives that normalize hetero-masculinity and war preparedness within reservist households and geopolitically (Enloe, 2000; Peterson, 2018).

The Army Reserve is a force of last resort for use during national emergencies, so non-deployment is the norm for most reservists. This entails that selfless commitment must be translated into everyday acts whereby reservists prioritize war preparedness over other commitments. Accordingly, we focus on the routine commitments reservists fulfil outside of mobilization/deployment because these form the bulk of their service.⁷ Such experiences – and the impact that routine service has on reservists’ spouses/partners – have not been researched. Everyday practices have remained mainly in the domain of the ‘taken-for-granted . . . and trivial – in short, the unnoticed’ in international relations (Hviid, 2009: 2; see also Crane-Seeber, 2011). Yet, as Enloe (2011: 447–448) notes, paying attention to ‘everyday dynamics’ in people’s lives enables us to discover how heteropatriarchal social systems in military households endure and to uncover how militarism ‘tends to insinuate itself into ordinary daily routines’. By grounding our analysis in empirical research, we demonstrate *how* the military and heteropatriarchal normal are co-constituted to reinforce the taken-for-grantedness of masculinized subjects prioritizing military service over familial commitments and, often, prioritizing abstract notions of national security over the well-being of their families. We show *how*, despite reserve service being more accurately conceptualized as serious leisure, the reproduction of the myth of reserve service as self-sacrifice is facilitated through everyday gendered social relations that in turn reproduce the orthodoxy that state security requires militarism.

By researching lived experiences, we contribute to critical and feminist security scholarship (Davies and Niemann, 2002; Eschle, 2018; Guillaume, 2011) that underscores the ‘geopolitical significance of the everyday’ and demonstrates how domestic life and geopolitics are entangled (Brickell, 2012: 576). We show how gendered power relations that are produced, exercised and legitimated in apparently ‘private’ sites are intertwined with power produced, exercised and legitimated in the national and geopolitical ‘public’ domains (Enloe, 2011: 447–448; see also Basham, 2013). We follow others in challenging predominant notions of militarism as an ‘ideology disconnected from the embodied self and the everyday’, instead showing how militarism and war shape and are shaped by embodied everyday performances (Dyvik and Greenwood, 2016: 4–5).

We begin our analysis by outlining our methods. We then present research findings that demonstrate how reservists perform and embody the orthodoxy of selfless service to normalize engaging in routinized war preparations. Next, we consider how reservists’ participation in various military and social activities enables them to fulfil their self-fulfillment desires during reserve service. Thus, we argue that reserve service can best be conceptualized as a form of ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins, 1982) that primarily enables reservists to fulfil their desires and contribute to, but also trivialize, war preparedness by prioritizing those desires. We then examine what happens when spouses/partners occasionally question reservists’ absences, showing that household negotiations still frequently fail to contest the military and heteropatriarchal normal. We conclude that more attention should be paid to how militarism is generated and sustained through everyday embodied performances and explicit narratives of selfless commitment and service, and that shedding light on the state’s reliance on these problematizes state militarism and its symbiotic relationship with heteropatriarchy.

Methods

Understanding why reservists serve and what role their families play in enabling them to do so entails a qualitative exploration of their experiences. Data collection comprised semi-structured interviews with reservists and, whenever possible, reservists' spouses/partners. We also conducted interviews with senior regulars involved in either a reserve unit or reserve policy matters.

Interviews conducted between 2015 and 2016 explored questions pertaining to how reservists balance competing demands on their time and what role their spouses/partners play in supporting them. With participants' informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and anonymized by giving participants pseudonyms. The interviews cited below were selected as heuristically representative of the interviewees' experiences.

We adopted a purposive sampling method to interview participants with characteristics known or expected to be significant to the research (Ritchie et al., 2003). Given that prior research shows that family support is a key determinant of retention in both civilian and military employment (Bourg and Segal, 1999; Gade, 1999; Segal and Harris, 1993), our aim was to explore reservists' perceptions of the extent to which they rely on their spouses/partners to serve and the dynamics of such reliance. The reservists who self-selected for interview were chosen on the basis that they were in a committed relationship and were either in full- or part-time employment or self-employed.⁸

Sixty reservists (aged from early-20s to mid-50s), from different ranks, were recruited from three regiments. Following interviews, we asked reservists to pass on recruitment leaflets to their spouses/partners as a means of recruiting them to undergo a separate interview. By interviewing the reservists' spouses/partners, we aimed to examine and compare the reservists' accounts with those of their reservist spouses/partners in terms of how they respectively experienced and perceived the impact that reserve service had on themselves, their spouse/partners and on their families in general. Interviews with both aimed to 'expose the negotiated and contested nature of household relationships' (Valentine, 1999: 67).

Eight of the nine recruited spouses/partners were women; eight were in heterosexual relationships; one was a reservist in a same-sex relationship with another reservist who spoke to us about her experiences as both a reservist and a partner, something we examine further below. Five of the women were in full-time employment, two in part-time employment, and one was a full-time homemaker. The male spouse/partner was a regular Army officer. His wife, now a reservist, had resigned her regular Army commission when she became pregnant in order to take on primary care for her children while her husband continued to serve in the Army and functioned as the household's primary breadwinner, their respective role choices thus reflecting the heteropatriarchal division of household labour (Khazaaal, 2018). The ages of the interviewed spouses/partners ranged from the mid-20s to the mid-50s. Six of the nine spouses/partners had two or more children; the remaining three intended to have children. While our spouse/partner sample was relatively small, their richness and overlapping character allowed us to identify common and recurrent themes across interviews.

Interview questions were guided by research questions and relevant literature, but revised as insights emerged from our interviews. Data transcription, coding and analysis were concurrent with fieldwork (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). Data became meaningful because it began to 'ring true' not only to us but also to research participants from across the sample and because the data became saturated – that is, we reached a point at which no new insights were being obtained from expanding our sample (Charmaz, 2006; Ritchie et al., 2003). In interviewing 60 reservists and 9 spouses/partners, we discovered that for most reservists their service is a form of serious leisure, enabling them to fulfil personal, and often selfish, desires, often at the expense of their

spouses/partners. Their ability to do so is routinely legitimated by the military and heteropatriarchal normal, as we shall demonstrate below.

Everyday performances of the military and heteropatriarchal normal

Prior research shows that ‘military participation as service to Queen, country, and the nation is . . . noteworthy for its absence’ (Woodward, 2007: 373). Similarly, none of those interviewed identified such service as their motivation for joining or remaining in the reserves, and yet the idea that reservists make vital contributions to the nation’s defences (the military normal) has long normalized the absence of men and masculinized subjects from the home (the heteropatriarchal normal). As our interviews reveal, notions of service and selfless commitment, which constitute the military normal, are habitually performed by reservists whenever they leave the household to attend Army Reserve events, justifying absences from family obligations. As Adam disclosed:

The conversation sometimes with my wife is . . . ‘My extended family is coming down, are you around?’ ‘No, I’m not. I’m away having an Army weekend’, thankfully . . . I mean, unfortunately!

What is interesting about Adam’s account, and others similar to it, is the way in which an ‘Army weekend’ trumps a family one. Many reservists admitted that, when challenged, justifications for attending training events conveniently provided get-out clauses for shirking family obligations. The effortlessness of such shirking is enabled because reservists embody and perform the military and heteropatriarchal normal (Butler, 1990). The military and heteropatriarchal normal legitimizes reservists’ absences from family/household responsibilities (war preparedness is normal; masculinized subjects leaving the home is normal, so they must leave), and in turn reservists’ embodied performances of militarized and masculinized subjectivity reinforce the normality of war preparedness.

There were instances in which reserve commitments were dropped or postponed owing to other more pressing family (or work commitments). As reservist Ray stated: ‘There are priorities in life and if you are needed at home . . . I wouldn’t go training.’ Still, the greater the importance a reservist ascribed to their military role – that is, the more ‘serious’ or beneficial they considered it to be – the greater the likelihood that they would avoid interruptions to it. For example, when commenting on how he ‘balanced’ his reserve and family commitments, Dom divulged that:

When I’m in ‘green’, I tend to stay in ‘green’. . . I find it difficult to . . . think about my other life interrupting ‘green’, because . . . I’ve taken the Queen’s shilling today. . . Whereas if the phone rings and the adjutant’s got an issue . . . I’ll answer it straight away.

Here, Dom’s embodied performance of a soldier ‘in green’ is buttressed by and buttresses the interplay of the military normal (the implied seriousness of ‘staying green’) and the heteropatriarchal normal (ignoring what is assumed to be a less important call from a spouse), which allows him to prioritize his ‘public’ reserve service over other ‘private’ commitments, even when not in uniform.

The Army Reserve is dominated by men in heterosexual relationships, but reservists’ spouses/partners are not exclusively women, not all reservists are men, nor are all reservists in heteronormative relationships. What we found, though, was that regardless of the reservist’s gender or sexual orientation, having chosen to serve in a masculinized institution, they could pursue their serious leisure because of the heteropatriarchal normal and the entitlements it affords to its masculinized members. One woman reservist recounted how she handled her spouse’s periodic protestations

about her absence from the home by retorting that her reserve service had begun before their relationship and thus would take precedence:

He said, 'You're going to be away from me for a period of time. Why would you want to do that?' From the start, I said, 'This is something I've been doing a lot longer than I've known you. So, I'm sorry, you will have to accommodate it' (Jess).

The implicitly 'serious' nature of reserve service here produces and reproduces traditional gendered roles in relations between reservists and their spouses/partners as respectively masculinized (greater public duties) and feminized (greater household duties), regardless of the sexual and gendered identities of either one. Reserve service can inflict practical and emotional burdens on reservists' spouses/partners since, when reservists are away from home, 'child rearing, cooking, cleaning, and household maintenance responsibilities necessarily increase' for whoever is left behind (Basham and Catignani, 2018; Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008: 608). This was the case especially for those with childcare responsibilities. For example, Tara stated: 'when Scott goes away on his two-week camp . . . I've got to make sure that all . . . three children are sorted out'. Such 'sorting out' often requires significant efforts for spouses/partners, but heteropatriarchal norms of entitlement and military norms of necessity mean that, more often than not, these are made by spouses/partners so reservists can be self-fulfilled.

Reserve service as serious leisure: Pain, pleasure and respite

The Army Reserve is a 'volunteer force in every sense of the word' (Walker, 1990: 6). Unlike reservists elsewhere, British reservists are not obliged to serve for any specific time period (Army, 2015: 2) and, under the terms of the 1996 Reserve Forces Act, can quit the military at any moment unless already compulsorily mobilized. Even in cases of compulsory mobilization, reservists still have the discretion to serve or not (Army, 2016a). Reservists have a minimum, though not enforceable, commitment to serve annually either 19 or 27 'Man Training Days' (MTDs), depending on the unit. As reservist Mike remarked: 'In the regulars, you can tell them, "You are going to do this. Just shut up and get it done," whereas, here, we just don't come back.'

This contingent form of military service is why, as mentioned above, reservists' motivations to join and serve could be seen as transactional (Edmunds et al., 2016): they are paid for conducting service-related duties and obtain an annual bounty subject to fulfilling the minimum MTDs per year and passing annual tests. However, while incentives matter, joining and staying in the Reserves entails commitment and passions to serve that cannot be fully explained by financial and skills incentives. For most reservists, such incentives were helpful, but not essential. As Darren observed: 'the reserves don't pay the mortgages. This is the spare time bit.' Thus, while the Army has increased financial incentives to bolster recruitment and retention, these fail to fully encapsulate why reservists serve. As interviewees revealed, the wider self-fulfilment they attain through service is more significant.⁹

The concept of serious leisure enables us to make sense of the value of self-fulfilment to reservists. Five characteristics demarcate serious leisure from other pursuits. These are that: (1) it entails training to have some kind of career or specialism; (2) those pursuing it believe in the need to persevere and be committed; (3) it will have durable benefits that cannot be gained elsewhere; (4) it will inculcate a unique ethos through a subculture of special beliefs, norms and performance standards; and (5) participants will identify strongly with it (Parker, 2000: 151).

Our data shows that serious leisure's key characteristics are easily met by the Army Reserve. Though some reservists perform roles that mirror their 'day jobs', as commanding officer (CO)

Todd, declared, 'we have surgeons lining up to join the reserves to get [specialist] experience they'll never get in the [National Health Service]', such as battle trauma experience. As such experience necessitates violence and injury, this suggests prioritization for self-fulfilment via militaristic practices.

The need to persevere and commit was salient when reservists compared reserve service to other commitments, like employment. Some revealed that their job came second or equal to reserve service. Many explained this was the case because they drew greater satisfaction and purpose from the reserves. Peter stated that 'in many ways, what I do here . . . has greater significance to me, and . . . it probably is the thing that I get more enjoyment and satisfaction out of doing'. Damien explained that reserve service appeals to many because 'that's their excitement. That's the bit that fills that gap, void in their life.'

Others admitted that family commitments took second place to the reserves. Even in the case of Lisa, who was in a same-sex relationship with another cisgender female reservist, the valuing of public military service and the devaluing of private household responsibilities were evident. Lisa had repeatedly rebuffed her partner's desire to have children out of concern that it would interfere with her own reserve career. Although previous research indicates more balanced household divisions of labour among women in same-sex relationships (Brewster, 2017), Lisa privileged the masculinized role of reserve service over household responsibilities, reflecting heteropatriarchal household relations. As mentioned above, caretaking is a method of relating to others that entails 'feminine forms of spending time by deferring one's needs to those of others' (Kaplan, 1994: 127). Lisa was adamant that her partner would have to bear the child, take up child-caring responsibilities and give up her reserve career, thus taking on more of a feminine mother-housewife role, while Lisa preserved her masculinized military role. Such a gendered conception of the household division of labour between Lisa and her partner was, in fact, already operating at the time of our interview when Lisa admitted that her partner, rather than she herself, was responsible for household tasks such as 'hanging out the wash'.

Notwithstanding the fact that no particular household role or task is inherently masculine or feminine – that is, gender roles are socially constructed – and that 'parenting by two women refutes the differentiation of roles based on sex' (Downing and Goldberg, 2011: 102), demonstrating the performative nature of gender (Butler, 1990), 'patriarchal values' reinforce the belief that women should 'devote themselves first and foremost to mothering' (Enloe, 2017: 18). In this example, what is enlightening is how reserve service enables militarism and heteropatriarchy to work together to unproblematically reinforce and perpetuate such socially constructed heteropatriarchal divisions of labour even within the case of this same-sex military household.

Reserve service is also an activity where those who perform it are immersed in a (military) subculture of special beliefs, norms and performance standards (Hockey, 2006). Close-knit relationships that developed within this shared culture were prized by interviewees, who used terms such as 'brotherhood', 'family' and 'fraternity' to describe relationships within their unit,¹⁰ and serious leisure often engenders its own 'shadow families' (Gillespie et al., 2002: 292). Such ties were strong reasons for some for staying in the reserves. Helen told us: 'I'm not sure you get that in civilian life, but I think the camaraderie between unit members when you go away is amazing.' Mark admitted that being with comrades during exercises was preferable to being with family: 'Do you want to go away and train with your friends for the weekend . . . or do you want to spend time with the family at home? Now, I would say nine times out of ten the Army wins.'

Such camaraderie can be explained by the experiences and emotions reservists share during training in challenging environments, and by the repetition of physical exercises on drill nights and during manoeuvres at larger training events. McNeill terms this process 'muscular bonding', that is, 'the euphoric feeling that prolonged and rhythmic muscular movement arouses' (McNeill, 1997:

2–3), which over time creates longstanding bonds between those who have experienced the same ‘assemblage of pleasure and pain’ (Dyvik, 2016: 136). As Darren explained:

If you were out on manoeuvres and at night in a slit trench and it was pouring down with rain, you would think what am I doing here for a pittance of money? Then you look to your left and right and just have people smiling at you saying, ‘Cup of tea?’ So, you’re in it together.¹¹

Dyvik’s (2016) review of recent international relations scholarship (inter alia McSorley, 2013, 2014; Sylvester, 2011, 2012; Wilcox, 2015; see also: Welland, 2017) reveals growing interest in the ‘embodied legacies of war and of enduring preparations for war-making upon the structuring and reproduction of social life’ (McSorley, 2014: 112). Much scholarship on wartime experience has concentrated on ‘war as a site of suffering and pain’, but, as others argue, war and war preparations can engender a gamut of embodied and emotional reactions that constitute an ‘assemblage of pleasure and pain’ and respite (Dyvik, 2016: 136; Higate, 1998; Welland, 2018).

Though the intensity of emotions and physical experience is greater in combat than in training, the fact that military training tries to closely mimic war conditions – albeit within a controlled setting – means it can generate similar emotional and physical experiences. Thus, just as the ‘exhilaration, excitement and ecstasy of combat remains an enticing elixir for . . . (predominantly) young men who join and fight in militaries’ (Welland, 2018: 442), we found that similar emotions (re)produced in training provide an ‘enticing elixir’ for masculinized subjects who join and play soldier in the reserves. When asked what kept him in the reserves, Luke explained:

It’s getting out in the field ‘in contact’ with the rounds going down. No one likes being out in the rain, cold and wet in the middle of the night, *but when you’re closing with the enemy, albeit pretend on an exercise or on a course, it is really good fun.* That’s what keeps me coming back (emphasis added).

Besides experiencing self-fulfilment and fun, Etzion et al. (1998: 578) show that reserve service allows reservists ‘while on duty [to be] geographically distant not only from . . . [their] job but also from home and family’. That is, they can take a break and get away from both. As Aaron explained: ‘I perhaps don’t give my wife – and the family – the priority that I should give her at times, but she knows that sometimes it’s this that keeps me sane, because it’s just nice to get away from everything.’

Indeed, although reserve service disrupts daily routines, many reservists, and those interviewed in previous research, expressed that a positive attribute of reserve service is the opportunity to dodge ‘back-home work obligations and to “recharge their batteries”’ (Etzion et al., 1998: 579). When speaking of her husband’s reserve obligations, Natalie showed how aware of this need spouses/partners often are, declaring, ‘Timing-wise it isn’t ideal for us from a family viewpoint, but that is his escape route.’ Indeed, annual training camps are often fulfilled by interviewees taking annual leave, time usually dedicated to family holidays. Despite the orthodoxy of military service being a matter of self-sacrifice, reservists’ selfish motivations were openly acknowledged by some interviewees. As senior officer Rory said: ‘I think reserve service . . . [is] a very self-indulgent exercise . . . it’s very selfish. You do your own thing and you expect people to follow behind you.’

These selfish benefits do not feature in any recruitment literature we encountered, but our interviews suggest they are significant for many reservists. Paul opined that ‘if you [are] away for a weekend or for a longer period, you can completely switch off . . . and then come back to it afresh afterwards’. Alex admitted: ‘It is a way to play big boys cowboys and Indians. . . So, running around and being a complete idiot with no responsibility and nothing else to worry about and just

take my mind off it. It is a basic de-stress.’ As Welland (2018: 447) has noted, military training provides opportunities for ‘physical sensations of movement, intimacy, and strength [that] are tied to emotional sensations of wellbeing . . . and relief’. Yet the fact that reservists derive pleasure and respite from simulated violence trivializes the actual violence military training facilitates.

The Army emphasizes in its recruitment campaigns what reservists can gain in terms of skills development, adventure and sports training opportunities (Army, 2016b). Yet, as CO Todd conceded, the Army Reserve is in the ‘entertainment business: Bangs, breathlessness and beers. . . . If I don’t put on a good show, I’m not going to get any business.’ This ‘entertainment business’ consists mainly of providing reservists social events (e.g. mess-hall dinners, post-training drinks), overseas exercises and adventurous training opportunities. Though selfless commitment and service are core to the state’s narrative, interviewees revealed that such trivial ‘entertainment’ was a major motivating factor for people to join, and stay in, the reserves. As Lisa admitted:

My main retention thing is snowboarding. . . . Every year . . . I get paid for two weeks . . . to go live in a lovely apartment with my regimental team. It’s not really strict. . . . So, you can have a few beers . . . as long as you’re fit for training in the morning! [laughter]

Through the conceptualization of the experiences of our reservist interviewees as serious leisure, the advantages for individuals of the normalization of militarized and heteropatriarchal social relations become clearer. Reservists make strong contributions to state militarism whenever they prioritize the self-fulfilment they derive from engaging in reserve activities over other activities. Some interviewee accounts suggest that some reservists do this even when they and their spouses/partners are aware that their participation in military activities leads to uneven distributions of labour for their spouses/partners. As we discuss below, spouses/partners sometimes question this inequality, though we found that they are unable to disrupt the military and patriarchal norms that underpin it.

Contesting the military and patriarchal normal?

Despite reservists often selfishly deciding to spend time with their ‘Army family’ rather than their personal family, reservists still received significant support from their spouses/partners. We argued above that this has much to do with partners/spouses recognizing the importance of reserve service to their reservist’s self-fulfilment, but also with the military and heteropatriarchal normal, which reservists routinely but unconsciously perform as militarized and masculinized subjects. When spouses/partners occasionally questioned the taken-for-grantedness of the notion of reserve service as necessary and important, reservists articulated the orthodoxy of selfless and necessary service, even when such ‘service’ blatantly equated with entertainment. As spouse/partner Lesley recounted:

I know what it’s like in the Army with your do’s and your weekends away; you have your nights out, your curry nights’. And he was like, ‘No, no. I don’t socialize! That’s not socializing!’ And we [i.e. Lesley and her friends] always joke about it, because he always says he does not socialize.

Some spouses/partners mocked reserve activities as ‘jollies’, ‘hobbies’ or ‘fun’ and, when their reservists returned home, some would subject them to ‘payback’, such as making them use their bounties to pay for family holidays or gifts. This payback was common knowledge among senior commanders within the regular army, who admitted that ‘the training bounty . . . is one of the ways that a reservist can sell this to his family’ (George). Payback might also involve extra chores to

make up for absences while having fun on reserve duty. Speaking about the experiences of his best friend in the regiment, Steve told us:

As far as his family are concerned, going away with the reserves is a treat for him. He comes back and she is like . . . ‘Right, you’re in charge. You’ve had fun with your mates.’

Reservist interviewees’ experiences of payback were, however, a means for reservists to pacify their spouses/partners and continue to co-opt their support, rather than real opportunities for spouses/partners to fundamentally challenge their periodic absences from the home. Thus, payback essentially reinforces the goodwill of spouses/partners towards supporting reservists’ military activities, which militarism and heteropatriarchy normalize.

Spouse/partner support was also often predicated on the understanding and practice of bartering for each other’s spare time. The reservist could expect to get time off from the family as long as they were willing to allow time for their spouse/partner to pursue their own interests in the future. Matthew highlighted this negotiated ‘understanding’ in relation to his recent demanding role: ‘She understands that I need to do it, but we negotiated that before I started . . . “It’s only two and a half years and then you can concentrate on going out and do your walks in Peru or whatever.”’ Such bartering suggests a moral equivalency of each other’s leisure pursuits, something not encapsulated by the orthodoxy that military service is selfless and of a higher moral standing. However, this orthodoxy practically still proved powerful because spouses/partners more often ceded opportunities for reservists to serve given the axiomatic nature of military service as selfless commitment and as necessary – the military normal.

Reserve commitments were also feigned as a *fait accompli* imposed by military superiors or absolutely necessary when reservists really wanted to attend an event. Reservists sometimes stressed their career-progression prospects and the financial benefits of serving, but, as spouse/partner Natalie explained: ‘Any time I get annoyed if he’s been away, he’ll remind me of the financial side of things [but] . . . I’d rather have him home.’ Such discursive performances of patriarchal breadwinner identities prioritize public goods over private ones. When such justifications failed, reservists would often resort to just leaving the household and letting their spouses/partners ‘get on with it’, thus assuming that support would be still forthcoming given the axiomatic nature of spouses/partners performing their caretaking and supporting role at home – the heteropatriarchal normal.

Spouse/partner goodwill alone cannot explain the accommodation of such selfish practices. As Perry confessed: ‘I know she would rather have me around when I’m away on a TA¹² weekend . . . but generally I don’t get too much pushback from her.’ This lack of pushback, we suggest, is because reserve service is a militarized and masculinized pursuit. Though actually serious leisure, the military and heteropatriarchal normal facilitates reservists in obtaining self-fulfilment from military training, even when they know it negatively impacts spouses/partners. The lack of pushback from spouses/partners points to the extent to which they have become militarized and, thus, to how they readily absorb the self-fulfilment desires of their reservist spouses/partners or yield ‘to the often intense pressures on them to behave as loyally supportive – or at least silent – partners in their husbands’ militarized . . . endeavors’ (Enloe, 2017: 98). Everyday social relations in military households consequently reveal the salience of the orthodoxy that military service is for others and that such service should thus be supported by the spouses/partners of those who serve.

Conclusion

The Army's shift towards greater reliance on reservists invites us to question why civilians join and remain in the reserves. A longstanding orthodoxy among political, military and academic commentators is that military service is a self-sacrificial endeavour and that the nation should equip, pay and morally support those willing to place the needs of the nation above their own (Army, 2000). This discourse of sacrifice is rarely questioned because the 'military normal' characterizes militarism – preparing for, normalizing and legitimating war – as constitutive of national security. As a result, reservists are able to normalize reserve activities as more significant than other demands on their time, particularly when negotiating with spouses/partners about periods of absence from the home. Though reservists' spouses/partners do sometimes question the necessity of absences due to reserve training, the military and heteropatriarchal normal make such questioning ineffective.

Inattention to how military labour is prioritized over other labours in the home and a lack of questioning of the orthodoxies surrounding military service have to date impoverished our understanding of how reservists contribute to warfighting capabilities and militarism. Showing instead how reserve service is a form of serious leisure that facilitates and is facilitated by the cultural prioritization of masculinized and militarized activities, we argue that reservists' key contribution to British warfighting capabilities is not their selfless protection of UK citizens but their reiterated embodied performances of the military and heteropatriarchal normal.

Through their embodied and sometimes discursive performances of the need to leave the home to fulfil military 'obligations' on behalf of others, reservists reproduce the geopolitical orthodoxy that state security requires constant preparations for war and maintaining the ability to readily wage it. At the same time, this normalization of the militarized state as the established protector of populations reproduces gendered power relations within societies, including the heteropatriarchal notion that families and the feminized 'private' sphere should support those engaged in war preparations, even when war preparedness engenders greater insecurity for women and feminized subjects (Basham, 2018). Our chief contribution has been to show how the routinized and mundane practices of reservists, selfishly, not selflessly, prioritizing their own opportunities to experience the pains, pleasures and respites of military training, foster and normalize militarism and heteropatriarchy as co-constitutive power relations.

We have posited that the concept of serious leisure better describes the reasons people join and stay in the reserves. We have shown how reservists are able to routinely absent themselves from household responsibilities and prioritize reserve activities through their embodiment of the military and heteropatriarchal normal, which facilitates the orthodoxy that the 'bravery, sacrifice and service' of reservists in giving up their spare time 'to protect our nation's security at home and overseas' demands spouse/partner support (Fallon, 2015). As we have also argued elsewhere (Basham, 2013; Basham and Catignani, 2018), by focusing analysis on the embodied experiences and lives of those involved in war and war preparations, we are more likely to understand 'and to know war as a comprehensive whole that has a teeming life alongside and sometimes in defiance of what statesmen, militaries, strategists and [international relations] specialists say about it' (Sylvester, 2012: 503). As we have shown, the embodied practice of the reservist periodically leaving the household to fulfil their self-fulfilment needs (camaraderie, adventure, self-development, the pain and pleasure of physical training, etc.) is both enabled by and enables the military normal. It also engenders and further bolsters gendered divisions of household labour that comprise the heteropatriarchal normal. In other words, heteropatriarchal gendered roles are reproduced and reinforced in the household because the reservist relies on the military normal, as well as spousal/partner support, to escape household commitments in the name of war preparations.

Although remuneration and other rewards matter to many reservists, the increased obligations that these rewards are being offered to offset are often just as alluring to them. Reservists revealed that military service is principally a matter of self-fulfilment; of experiencing instances of joy, pain, pleasure and togetherness that cannot be replicated within the household (or workplace). The pleasure derived from engaging in military activities during reserve service directly facilitates the state's ability to prepare for war and to render war preparations as routine and mundane. Our empirically grounded theoretical contention is thus that reserve service is a means of self-fulfilment that obscures the normalization of masculinized subjects preparing for war and feminized ones supporting those preparations.

Through highlighting how reservists prioritize their own pleasure, respite and self-fulfilment, and thus trivialize war preparations, we have exposed reserve service as serious leisure. This matters because representing military activities as being for the 'greater good' ultimately allows the British state to justify its use of, and preparations to use, military violence. Though the performative power of the military and heteropatriarchal normal is clear from our data, the state's reliance on the serious leisure of reservists to enable it to prepare for and wage war has potential to disrupt the rationale for war preparedness that the UK and other liberal states most rely on to reproduce themselves as security actors: that war preparedness is a necessary, self-sacrificial and selfless act to defend lives and freedoms (Basham, 2018). Everyday household negotiations highlight the dependency of this orthodoxy on the reiterated, embodied and discursive performativity of the self-fulfilling desires of reservists that belie the inherent contradictions of military training as selfless and necessary for maintaining state security (Butler, 1990). By rethinking orthodoxies about military service through original empirical data on what actually motivates people to engage in militaristic practices – in this case joining and serving in the Army Reserve – we have sought to trouble the military and heteropatriarchal normal by fundamentally questioning the selflessness and necessity such orthodoxies lend to war preparations in the name of state security.

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Notes

1. For details of the SDSR, subsequent defence cuts and reforms concerning the Army Reserve, see House of Commons Defence Select Committee (2017); Bury and Catignani (2019).
2. For an analysis of the Covenant's origins and evolution, see Ingham (2016).
3. For a critique of this orthodoxy, see Woodward (2007).
4. While MoD survey data suggests that to 'serve one's country' is the primary motivator for reservists to join and stay in the reserves (MoD, 2018), we accept previous studies' claims that these responses reflect what Bryman (2016) calls the 'social desirability bias' of survey research – that is, that the social and political resonance of military service being 'for the greater good' means these responses are shaped by the perceived desirability of this answer (Gibson and Abell, 2004; Woodward, 2007).
5. As of October 2019, 12.1% of UK military personnel were women, 9.1% were black, Asian and minority ethnic. Sexual-orientation statistics were not disclosed owing to the very low percentage of personnel who declared their sexual orientation (MoD, 2019: 1).
6. Although reservists face similar risks to regulars during training and deployment, serious leisure has been applied to other pursuits that are considered dangerous, such as volunteer firefighting, which routinely involves life-threatening conditions and potential injury and/or death during service; see Perkins and Benoit (1997); Yarnal and Dowler (2002).
7. Only a minute proportion – an average of 4.9% (MoD, 2014, 2015) – of reservists mobilized even during the height of the 'war on terror', when the Army deployed in significant numbers in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries.
8. In the 2016 Tri-Service Reserves Continuous Attitude Survey (RESCAS), 63% of Army reservists were either in a 'long-term/established' relationship (23%) or 'married/in a civil partnership' (40%), and 78% stated that they were employed (70%) or self-employed (8%); see MoD (2016).
9. While cognizant of our previous points on the 'social desirability bias' of survey research, in the 2018 RESCAS, reserve pay or bounty was notably the 12th of 19 most salient reasons for joining and staying in the reserves. Being challenged, personal development, excitement and adventure were, respectively, the second, third and fourth most significant reasons (MoD, 2018).
10. On the development of fraternal bonds during military service, see Higate (2012).
11. The very scene Darren describes features in the Army's 2018 'This is belonging' recruitment campaign.
12. The Army Reserve was previously known as the Territorial Army (TA) in the period from 1979 to 2014.

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