

‘We are here’: Military women voicing their gendered stories

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Brock

Research overview

Research aims:

- understand how military women's voices and narratives intersect with their service and military culture
- engage with critical and creative methodologies to disrupt mainstream understandings of military culture

Voice work enables:

- opportunity for participants to understand the connection between the voice, the self and the body, improving confidence, somatic awareness and a greater understanding and control of the breath (Steen, 2013)



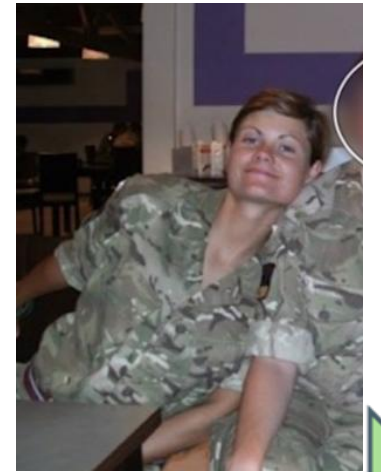
A woman with glasses and curly hair, wearing a white t-shirt with a floral pattern on the right shoulder and blue patterned trousers, is sitting in a red chair and speaking. She is in an office environment with a white desk, potted plants, and a doorway in the background.

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Creative methodologies and narrative

- creative methodologies are useful to ‘offer a process through which new realms of critical possibility can be opened up’ in order to ‘produce a new space for thinking differently’ about military organizations (Cree, 2023, p. xv)
- explore the ‘line between critically exposing narrative power...and enhancing narrative empathy through dialogue’ (Caddick, 2024, p. 21)
- feminist narrative methodology can assist with creatively examining ‘not only...the stories being told, but also...the contexts within which women make sense of and narrate their lives’ (Woodiwiss, Smith, & Lockwood, 2017, p. 5)
- as so much of military service and veteran transitions are defined by male narratives (Eichler, 2016), it is important to learn from women’s counter-narratives of military life (Taber, 2025; West & Antrobus, 2021) .

Findings



Performativity

Authenticity

Performativity

*'having been told in basic training I was **too giggly**, I was **only 18**... I was told, “**No, don't do that, be more serious** to have people respect you”..., so then you take a more serious tone. [Later in my career] they're like, “you should be about the team more and just have a coffee with people, have a laugh.” They never quite said have a laugh but it was along that kind of vibe, “be seen about the floor, **you're too busy working at your desk**”, and you kind of can't win'*

- How women's military voices 'should' and 'shouldn't' sound
- Differentiation of respect to women versus men
- Surveillance and regulation of voice endures through career

Performativity

*'I love moving the body of people around [in a drill movement] but **you have to do this certain voice**'*

*'There's a **colonisation of voice** where, not just in a woman drill commander having to do that ... maybe there's a colonisation of our voices as well whereby **we say less** or different things.'*

- Military voice is something learned, practised, and adopted while authority is enacted through a specific vocal register, it is not naturally occurring.
- The 'certain voice' signals institutionally sanctioned performance of voice shaped by external norms and expectations.
- Performance extends beyond drill into everyday speech.

Authenticity

'it's been nice to have small moments...when it's just me [reciting the poem]...but actually, I feel like when we've been doing stuff like as a five, I haven't felt like there's been a... sort of battle... I feel like in the male setting, there'd be a battle to be the dominant voice and we'd be louder and we'd be louder again, in order that we could dominate the space. But I've not noticed anything like that.

And even in the discussions, everyone's been aware of...taking into account what other people have said, not really repeating things if it doesn't need to be repeated and yeah, I wonder if that's slightly... gendered as well.'

- Liberation through absence of dominance within the workshops
- Enjoyment of collaboration and the power of sharing vulnerability
- Permissive space for solo voice within an atypical veteran group

Authenticity

*'I feel like it's just a one big week of reflection, of just **being able to look at my military experience in just a different way, I'm in a different space, I'm doing it with other military women, ex-military veterans, so it's inevitable that you're going to look at it in a different way and you're going to bounce off people's ideas and how they understand something, and I think that's where the power of this comes from, perhaps not necessarily from the workshop itself but from us being together and conducting the workshop.'***

- Focus is relocated from the voicework to collective lived experience.
- No performance is required; meaning has emerged relationally and redefinition occurred on own terms.
- Authenticity appears as honest re-evaluation.

Conclusions/Way Forward

- Contribution to critical, feminist literature about the military body and new ways of understanding and reflecting on women's narratives and embodied experiences (i.e., Cree & West, 2023; Taber, 2025)
- Women veteran voices as community-building advocates for social change and gender equity (i.e., Antrobus et al., 2025)
 - Valid voice on foreign affairs and defence policy (not limited to commenting on women veterans' health and wellbeing agenda)
- BISA paper on methodology
 - Panel: Creative methods in critical military studies
- Next steps: Voice-as-method
 - Pilot study bringing together expressive writing, voicework, and participatory film-making

Podcast link (Women Veterans Voice Work)



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