# Military Subsidization of Human Capital and Gender Stratification in the U.S. Economy

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## INTRODUCTION

The gender wage gap continues to pose a barrier to economic equality in countries across the globe, despite substantial reductions in this gap during the past half-century. This statistic indicates women's subordinate economic status, relative to men, in an economy that is stratified in terms of gender, as well as race, class, age, nationality, and other categories. Women's subordination in the economy takes many forms, more than just typically receiving lower wages than men. For example, a substantial portion of the gender wage gap is a result of the fact that women tend to work in lower-paying jobs than men do. In the United States, women who work in the same industry and occupation as men still tend to get paid less than men, but women who are consigned to lower strata of the economy, such as nursing, teaching, and other relatively low-paying care work, struggle even more to earn as much as men (Blau & Kahn 2016).

Many women in the U.S. have found that obtaining a higher education degree can be an effective way to help level the economic playing field. A recent study by Carnevale et al. (2018) found that women tend to earn about the same as men *who have one less degree than those women.* For example, women with master's degrees tend to earn about the same as men with bachelor's degrees. This emphasizes the critical importance of education in reducing stratification in the economy, which may be an important reason for why women are now earning substantially more degrees at all levels of higher education than men are in the U.S. In addition to education, work experience is another vital component to human capital development, but obtaining experience and skills applicable to relatively high-paying fields is also key to closing the gender gap. Increasing one's human capital cannot guarantee economic success, but it can have a significantly positive effect on

one's pay and status in the economy, even for those who face discrimination. Social capital can also afford one access to increased human capital, if not access directly to economic resources, benefits, and jobs as well.

If economic stratification and the distribution of economic resources depend in part on the distribution of human and social capital, then access to these different forms of capital is also likely to be stratified to some extent. At the same time that higher education has become an increasingly common path to getting ahead (or at least to not falling behind), the cost of obtaining a higher education continues to increase in the U.S., feeding a potentially looming student debt crisis. Unlike in many other economically advanced countries, in the U.S. access to higher education depends not just on one's academic ability, performance, and ambition, but also increasingly on one's financial circumstances and ability to pay. Furthermore, the social and political contexts also play important roles in whether or not one *wants* to pursue particular avenues of human capital development, such as higher education, but also whether or not one is *able* to access these avenues. Educational systems, rigid gender norms, and other potentially discriminatory social institutions can lead to different human capital investment strategies for people of different genders (Brinton 1988; Darity et al. 2015). A young woman just finishing high school may desire to attend college because she believes that this is the best way to maximize her future economic standing, whereas a young man may be relatively confident in succeeding without a higher education. I argue, however, that the particular context of gender norms and government spending patterns in the United States are structured in a way that tends to reduce women's *ability* to access not only education, but also other valuable forms of human and social capital.

When people finish high school, they are often faced with the choice of whether they should attend college or immediately pursue a career instead. Oftentimes these options are quite limited: an inability to afford college may rule this out as an option. The quantity and quality of jobs available to an individual may depend on her prior job experience, and if college is foregone, the prospect of moving up the economic ladder will also depend heavily on the quality of experience that can be obtained from the jobs available. If her family can't afford college and/or she lives in a depressed economic area with few jobs available, she may be left with few desirable options. In such a situation, many have found an economic outlet through military service, which may function as the closest thing to a federal job guarantee, where one can also learn valuable technical job skills. Military service is also the only viable path to free higher education for many in the U.S. (Kleykamp 2006; Wang et al. 2012)

The economic benefits of military service have come as a boon to many in the U.S., but many individuals' ability and likelihood to take advantage of this government-subsidized human and social capital depends on a number of circumstances, including expectations of attending college and the economic conditions in one's region. Individual traits such as religion and disability may also play a role, but the focus of this paper's analysis is on the role of gender because the military is and has been a remarkably male-dominated institution, though intersections of race and class with gender are also important parts of this analysis. "Gender roles are nowhere more prominent than in war," (Goldstein 2001) and despite recent policy changes to allow women into all occupations in the U.S. military, exclusionary mechanisms such as gender harassment and gender norms impose barriers to women's service that are typically more severe than those faced by men. Women are certainly not powerless against these barriers, and many women have provided

outstanding service to the military, but women are typically much less likely than men to do so because on average women face greater obstacles to serving in the military than men do. This essay will explain some of the specific economic reasons why women face these greater obstacles to military service and how this gender discrimination in the military influences the broader gender stratification of the U.S. economy. Because women occupy a subordinate status in the military, and they are systematically deterred or even excluded from the military, to the extent that the military plays a substantial role in the U.S. economy - particularly in one's ability to reach higher strata of the economy by accumulating human and social capital - this may reinforce women's subordinate status in the economy at large.

## MILITARY SPENDING AND GENDERED ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP

The United States has unusually high levels of military spending, especially compared to most other advanced industrial economies. The actual level of defense spending can vary substantially depending on how it is defined statistically, but according to the Congressional Budget Office, the U.S. federal government spent $584 billion (49.3 percent) of its 2016 discretionary budget on defense. Tables 1 and 2 show that when the U.S. is compared with other OECD nations, the only countries that show comparably militaristic spending patterns are Israel and South Korea, two much smaller countries who have relatively hostile relations with close neighbors.

This militaristic spending pattern may reflect a gender bias among the legislators who determine U.S. spending policies. Women made up just 20 percent of the U.S. Congress in 2018, but rather than describing this as a male-dominated body, it may be more accurate to describe it as a masculine-dominated body or a hypermasculine body. Whether male or female, the vast majority of congressmembers tend to conform

ideologically to the norms of military spending and aggression, which are hypermasculine by definition (Maruska 2009).[1] Since World War II, the general government spending pattern can be described as military Keynesianism, a particular economic configuration

**TABLE 1**

**Military expenditure by country as percentage of government spending**
for select OECD countries

| Country | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | Avg. 2007–2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Israel | 14.6% | 14.0% | 14.1% | 14.82% |
| South Korea | 12.7% | 12.6% | 12.5% | 12.67% |
| **USA** | **9.9%** | **9.4%** | **9.3%** | **10.76%** |
| UK | 4.8% | 4.7% | 4.7% | 5.15% |
| Greece | 4.6% | 5.0% | 5.1% | 5.11% |
| Australia | 4.8% | 5.2% | 5.2% | 4.97% |
| France | 3.9% | 4.0% | 4.0% | 4.09% |
| Portugal | 3.5% | 3.7% | 4.0% | 3.93% |
| Norway | 3.3% | 3.1% | 3.2% | 3.38% |
| Italy | 2.9% | 2.8% | 3.1% | 3.24% |
| Spain | 2.8% | 2.9% | 2.9% | 2.99% |
| Germany | 2.7% | 2.7% | 2.7% | 2.82% |
| Netherlands | 2.5% | 2.6% | 2.7% | 2.78% |
| Canada | 2.6% | 2.4% | 2.4% | 2.78% |
| Japan | 2.6% | 2.5% | 2.6% | 2.58% |
| Finland | 2.3% | 2.3% | 2.4% | 2.47% |
| Denmark | 2.1% | 2.0% | 2.2% | 2.34% |
| Sweden | 2.2% | 2.2% | 2.1% | 2.29% |
| Switzerland | 2.0% | 2.1% | 2.2% | 2.22% |
| Mexico | 2.4% | 2.5% | 2.3% | 2.12% |

**TABLE 2**

**Military expenditure by country as percentage of gross domestic product**
for select OECD countries

| Country | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | Avg. 2007–2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Israel | 5.9% | 5.6% | 5.8% | 6.08% |
| **USA** | **3.5%** | **3.3%** | **3.3%** | **4.01%** |
| Greece | 2.3% | 2.5% | 2.6% | 2.63% |
| South Korea | 2.6% | 2.6% | 2.7% | 2.61% |
| France | 2.2% | 2.3% | 2.3% | 2.29% |
| UK | 2.0% | 1.9% | 1.9% | 2.19% |
| Portugal | 1.8% | 1.8% | 1.8% | 1.91% |
| Australia | 1.8% | 2.0% | 2.0% | 1.82% |
| Italy | 1.5% | 1.4% | 1.5% | 1.61% |
| Norway | 1.5% | 1.5% | 1.6% | 1.48% |
| Finland | 1.3% | 1.3% | 1.4% | 1.34% |
| Spain | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.31% |
| Denmark | 1.2% | 1.1% | 1.2% | 1.29% |
| Netherlands | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.27% |
| Germany | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.2% | 1.27% |
| Sweden | 1.1% | 1.1% | 1.0% | 1.15% |
| Canada | 1.0% | 1.0% | 1.0% | 1.15% |
| Japan | 1.0% | 1.0% | 1.0% | 0.99% |
| Switzerland | 0.7% | 0.7% | 0.7% | 0.71% |
| Mexico | 0.7% | 0.7% | 0.6% | 0.57% |

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database. *Data for all countries 1949-2016.*

that relies on government spending to stabilize the economy and subsidize the private defense industry without creating any radical economic shifts that could arise from drastic

[1] There is some evidence that U.S. women in political leadership positions tend to be more militaristic than the general population of women. This could be because, in order to be granted leadership positions in government institutions, women must either already hold these institutions' hypermasculine postures or readily adopt them (Goldstein 2001).

increases in social welfare spending (From Cold War to Cold Peace 1949). Military and economic concerns overlap substantially in this system where military interests, especially private defense contractors, exert significant influence on economic policy, encouraging militaristic spending patterns that will provide an economic stimulus for their industry.

In the military Keynesianism model, defense needs, and hence defense spending, are not so much determined by actual security threats but rather by the needs of a state capitalist system dominated not just by men, but by a hypermasculine ideology. This ideology does require at least a perception of the existence of a real military threat, combined with an aggressive posture towards this adversary, which requires a hypermasculine approach based on militaristic strength, aggression, and domination. Without making any gender biases explicit in their foreign and economic policies, male and female policymakers emphasize a militaristic pattern of spending based on their hypermasculinized version of national security that favors relatively militaristic solutions. Military spending tends to provide greater economic subsidies to men than to women, even though the gender-biased effects of these spending patterns are not necessarily the result of a conscious or deliberate intent on the part of policymakers to produce a gender-biased outcome. However, the gender-biased effect of these spending patterns remains. Much of the rest of this paper is devoted to understanding how and why the subsidies provided by military spending are gender-biased.

For one example, the jobs created by military spending tend to be in more male-dominated areas of the economy. High military spending directly creates millions of jobs in the armed forces, but the Department of Defense (DoD) is also by far the largest federal employer of civilians in the U.S., with 746,975 total civilian employees in 2013 (DoD

2013), and military spending also creates thousands of jobs with defense contractors in the private sector. In 2016, 355,500 jobs were directly supported by the national security & defense segment of the Aerospace & Defense (A&D) industry (AIA 2016). However, women made up only 33.9 percent of civilian DoD employees in 2013 (DoD 2013) and just 21.9 percent of employees in the high-paying[2] A&D industry in 2016 (Sands 2016). Many factors contribute to the low representation of civilian women in the DoD and among private defense contractors, but the gender-biased nature of the military is likely a contributing factor. Although women make up a much higher percentage of the civilian DoD workforce than the noncivilian DoD workforce, the DoD employs a much lower percentage of civilian women than most other nondefense agencies: women made up 43.5 percent of all employees in the U.S. Executive Branch of government in 2013 (OPM 2018).

With such a large portion of national spending devoted to the military, this of course means less money is left over for other government functions such as education, jobs programs[3], and other forms of welfare spending. While Neoliberal economic policies have reduced government assistance and restricted many functions of the welfare state in recent decades, partly in an attempt to pose labor market participation as the main precondition for economic support in the U.S., Gifford (2006) points out that the U.S. military actually serves many of the functions that the welfare state serves in other similar advanced economies, such as providing free housing, free health care, and household maintenance

[2] In 2016, the average salary of an employee in the A&D industry was 44 percent higher than the U.S. national average. (AIA 2016)

[3] Military spending is relatively capital-intensive and creates significantly fewer jobs than equivalent amounts of government spending for clean energy, health care, or education (Pollin & Garrett-Peltier 2011). Furthermore, the health care and education industries employ much higher percentages of women than the defense industry.

allowances to military families. In contrast to other means tested welfare programs such as Medicaid and TANF, which are framed as assistance to those most in need, the "camouflaged safety net" provided by military benefits is guaranteed as a social right of those who serve in the military, along with their families (Gifford 2006).

The privileged benefits of military service are justified partly as entitlements for those engaged in providing national security, but they are also used as enticements for potential recruits, given that the U.S. military relies on an all-volunteer force (AVF). The government is willing to exchange the provision of a substantial amount of economic security for those who are willing and able to contribute to the nation through the provision of their military service as a civic duty, but military service represents a very (masculine) gendered form of civic duty. The civic duties required to support the nation (and thereby guarantee one access to economic protection of the government) can take many alternative, less masculine forms, though, such as environmental conservation or child care. The spending patterns of the U.S. government therefore reflect a gendered political decision that military service takes priority over other forms of service, and consequently the economic security of the government is only guaranteed to those who are willing and able to provide their service to a particularly masculine government institution. In this masculine model of civic duty, one's ability to conform to the norms of masculinity set by the military can determine whether or not one gets access to the human and social capital as well as job security provided by government subsidies.

This configuration of government spending patterns essentially amounts to a gendered model of economic citizenship based on a militaristic government and the military service of individuals, where the military is often seen as representative of U.S.

national identity. I use the phrase *economic* citizenship because during the AVF era (conscription ended in the U.S. in 1973), military service is less often motivated from obligations of male citizens to defend national security and more from obligations to establish economic sufficiency.[4] For instance, conscription is still used in two other heavily militarized countries, Israel and South Korea. This has significant effects on the economy and gender roles in these countries (Moon 1998; Sasson-Levy 2011, 2016), but because there is no conscription in the U.S., the U.S. model of service is much more dependent on economic motivations, and therefore the economic role of military service is fundamentally different in the U.S. than in Israel and South Korea. Moskos (1977) has described how the shift to an AVF meant reframing military service as an economic opportunity, rather than a citizen's duty. Prior to the end of the draft, the duty of military service had been framed as a responsibility of those who wished to be fully enfranchised citizens in a free and secure society (Snyder 2003). In the AVF era, military service is the most prominent source of *economic* freedom and security available outside of the labor market in the U.S. As Neoliberal policies continue to erode so many of the non-militaristic components of the U.S. welfare state, economic freedom and security may only be obtained by either finding a career in the private sector of the labor market or through military service to the government. This results in what could be termed the "citizen-soldier-breadwinner" model, or the soldier-breadwinner model of citizenship, a very gendered model of citizenship (Leimgruber 2010). In this model, traditionally feminine contributions to the

[4] At the same time however, military service can still be used by U.S. immigrants as a path to becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen. "While most naturalization applicants need five years as a permanent resident, military personnel can obtain U.S. citizenship much more quickly. Even the USCIS filing fee is waived." (Expedited Citizenship Through Military Service 2015)

economy, such as care work, are not deemed sufficient to receive access to the full rights of economic citizenship (Rose 2000; Lister 2001).

## BENEFITS OF MILITARY SERVICE

Before discussing in more detail precisely how gender barriers limit access for women to the rights of economic citizenship, I will describe what benefits military service actually provides, as well as what benefits it is perceived to provide. The main economic benefits that military recruiters focus on are: jobs; pay and benefits, including a full pension after 20 years of service; full medical coverage for enlistees and their families[5]; skills and advanced technical training; educational opportunities, both during and after service; and the ability to buy a home with no money down (Clayton 2012; Military Benefits at a Glance 2018). Another top reason for joining the military, is the valuable social capital that comes from membership in "one of the world's oldest clubs," which "can help you gain acceptance, join clubs, find employment, and gain other benefits." (Clayton 2012)

Benefits of service, including both those that are real and those that are merely perceived, will influence whether or not one is likely to transgress gender barriers in order to acquire these benefits and whether or not one is likely to enforce gender barriers to prevent others from acquiring these benefits. Because the ability to enlist new recruits is essential for staffing an all-volunteer force, there is substantial research on what the most common reasons for enlisting in the military are, including recruits' stated reasons for joining as well as other factors that influence the propensity to enlist, such as demographics. While duty and service to one's country are still very common reasons given for joining the military, access to employment, education, and other economic supports are also cited by

[5] Hefling (2008) reported that women tend to get lower quality care at VA outpatient clinics, however.

many as their primary reasons for joining (Segal et al. 1998; Bachman et al. 2000; Eighmey 2006; Kleykamp 2006; Dichter & True 2014; Yeung et al. 2017; Helmus et al. 2018).

In a 2011 survey, Patten & Parker (2011) found that 82 percent of post-9/11 female veterans said they joined the military to receive educational benefits, and 67 percent also joined to learn skills for civilian jobs. Young enlistees, both male and female, clearly perceive the benefits of the human and social capital they can gain through military service, but many also see the military an important provider of jobs in a weak labor market. Interestingly, the only significant gender difference that Patten & Parker found in reasons for joining the military was that women were significantly more likely (42 percent vs. 25 percent of men) to join because jobs were hard to find, indicating another important economic function served by the military, particularly for women.

Other studies have shown that reasons for joining the military are largely dependent on each individuals' socioeconomic status, and, not surprisingly, that those with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to cite economic benefits as a reason for joining, since they are less likely to be able to go to college and/or to pursue a stable career without these benefits. In the decision between college, jobs, or the military, individuals with college aspirations are the most likely to go to college, of course. However, those with college aspirations *and* low socioeconomic status are more likely to join the military, which for them is a means to obtaining tuition assistance (Kleykamp 2006). For some of those who can't afford college, military service comes as a welcome alternative to the ever-expanding student debt burdens taken on by so many others who perceived college education as the road to economic success. Wang et al. (2012) explain that those who are more likely to seek tuition assistance from the military are those with "status inconsistency," meaning

they have high cognitive ability, but may have a marginal family income or a mediocre school record, which reduces their ability to attend college. The military is clearly seen by many in the lower strata of the economy as a potential means of surmounting the structural barriers that reinforce economic stratification. Military recruiters understand this quite well and respond accordingly: recruiting campaigns not only focus on the value of tuition assistance and skills training that the military provides, but they tend to target these campaigns at relatively poor schools with concentrated minority populations (Ayers 2006, Elder 2017).

With promises of jobs, money, education, and training serving as motivation for joining the military, does military service actually deliver on these promises? Are veterans actually better off as a result of their service? Attempts at answering these questions have so far produced somewhat mixed results, but a Pew Research survey of 1,853 military veterans indicates that veterans at least claim to have received economically valuable experience in the military, increasing their human and social capital, which should theoretically pay off in the civilian labor market. "The vast majority say their time in the military has helped them mature (93 percent), taught them how to work with others (90 percent) and helped to build self-confidence (90 percent)." (Taylor et al. 2011) "Some 79 percent of women veterans say their military experience has helped them get ahead in life and nearly three-quarters (74 percent) feel the military was useful in terms of preparing them for a job or career (as do 73 percent and 71 percent of men, respectively)." (Patten & Parker 2011)

Military employees tend to earn more than their peers working outside of the military, many of whom are relatively young and have little work experience (Phillips et al.

1992), but research has struggled to establish a universal answer to the question of whether or not veterans actually have higher earnings than their nonveteran peers in the U.S., i.e. particularly *after* military service. This is largely because the answer depends on many factors, including the particular era of service (and the benefits available during that era); the race, gender, and class of veterans; the fact that those who choose military service are not representative of the rest of the working population; as well as other factors (Phillips et al. 1992; Mehay & Hirsch 1996; Angrist 1998; Prokos & Padavic 2000; Cooney et al. 2003; Teachman & Tedrow 2007; Vick & Fontanella 2017). Research on the particular effects for female veterans is relatively sparse due to the relatively low numbers of female veterans, but most existing literature finds a negative impact of military service on female earnings (Mehay & Hirsch 1996; Prokos & Padavic 2000; Cooney et al. 2003; Kleykamp 2009). A more recent study by Vick & Fontanella (2017) did find that female veterans tend to see an increase to earnings (in contrast to the male veterans in their study), due primarily to a reduction in occupational segregation among female veterans. Female veterans were more likely to work in relatively high-paying fields, such as computer science and protective services, and in higher-paying occupations, such as health practitioners. Though the effect of service had only a very modest effect on *average* earnings for the group of female veterans, Vick & Fontanella's found a more substantial effect on the *distribution* of earnings: veterans' earnings may exhibit relatively lower ceilings but higher floors, and the most positive effect on earnings was for lower-wage workers. With no real earnings advantage among high-wage workers, it appears that the military may function primarily not as a way to truly get ahead, but as a way to avoid falling behind or being left behind in the economy.

In addition to potential earnings benefits, increased employment opportunities could be an important benefit of military service. The military itself employs more people than any other employer in the U.S., and if civilian DoD employees [6] are included, the DoD is the largest single employer in the world, with well over 3 million employees (DoD 2015). The military can function as an economic safety net of guaranteed employment for anyone who qualifies both medically and academically, and the military also has programs to help veterans find employment after they serve in the military. The Partnership for Youth Success Program partners with private corporations and public sector agencies to guarantee interviews and possible employment for U.S. Army veterans (PaYS Program Overview 2018), and the Troops to Teachers program provides a path to becoming a public school educator, without having to obtain a college degree (Elder 2017). Although women may be less likely to serve in the military and access these employment benefits, as discussed in further detail in the following section, women who do become veterans have higher rates of employment than female nonveterans (Lofquist 2017).

Earnings and employment also depend heavily on educational attainment, another major benefit that many receive for their military service. The Post-9/11 GI Bill covers complete tuition and fee costs at any public college or university in a veteran's state of residence, or up to $17,500 towards a private or foreign institution, and existing student loans can be relieved by up to $65,000 (Clayton 2012; Walton et al. 2016). Further, existing research tends to agree that military service increases the likelihood of obtaining higher education (Angrist 1993; Teachman & Call 1996; Barley 1998; Wang et al. 2012).

[6] A disproportionate number of civilian employees in the DoD are U.S. military veterans, and military veterans are much more likely than nonveterans to work for the DoD and the public sector as a whole. (DoD 2013; Vick & Fontanella 2017).

Focusing on the effects of military service on women's education, Lofquist (2017) finds that although female veterans aged 18-34 were less likely than nonveterans of the same age group to have a bachelor's degree or higher, female veterans in age groups 35-44 and 45-64 were more likely than nonveterans in these groups to have a bachelor's degree or higher. In all three of these age groups, female veterans were more likely to have enrolled in college than female nonveterans[7]. In 2011-12, 22.3 percent of undergraduate military students and 27.6 percent of graduate military students were female (Walton et al. 2016). While most of the veterans in higher education were in fact male, these numbers indicate that female veterans were more likely than male veterans to be in higher education, since only 8.4 percent of all veterans, 15.5 percent of active duty forces, and 19.0 percent of reserve forces were female in 2015 (DoD 2015; Lofquist 2017).

Human capital is also developed directly through military training and experience developing skills that may transfer directly to work in the civilian labor market (Mangum & Ball 1989; Barley 1998). The United States' largest employer is also its largest vocational training institution, where many gain the experience that leads to some of the highest paying (and often male-dominated) careers, such as engineers, computer technicians, and aircraft pilots. Others argue that additional benefits accrue in the form of social and cultural capital developed from the process of socialization and integration into a large bureaucratic organization, which shares many features in common with other civilian agencies in the public sector and large firms in the private sector (Browning et al. 1973; Sampson & Laub 1996; Kleykamp 2010). Social capital may be a key component to

[7] The youngest group of veterans was probably less likely to have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher due in part to the fact that veterans tend to enroll in college at an older age than nonveterans (Walton et al. 2016).

traversing economic strata for women and minorities if the military functions as a way to get one's foot in the door of higher paying industries and occupations that are often dominated by white men.

Browning et al. (1973) originally developed the hypothesis that the combination of human and social capital developed in the course of military service creates a "bridging environment" for people from disadvantaged backgrounds who wouldn't otherwise have access to a similar level of human and social capital. Other researchers have added support to this hypothesis as it applies to economically disadvantaged men (Xie 1992; Sampson & Laub 1996; Teachman & Call 1996), but there is much less evidence at this point whether or not the military serves as a bridging environment for women (Kleykamp 2013). This could be because the effect of military service for women may vary quite a bit depending on their class and race, as indicated by Mehay & Hirsch (1996) and Vick & Fontanella (2017). Women who are relatively privileged due to their race and class will likely reap smaller economic benefits from military service than lower class women of color, for example. If an individual already has relatively privileged access to human and social capital outside of the military, she will likely pay an economic cost by giving up that capital to join the military, but if the military represents a woman's best or only available source of human and social capital, military service would likely be a rational economic choice for her (Cooney et al. 2003). This leaves open the important questions of whether the military is the most effective bridging environment for both men and women who are disadvantaged in the economy and whether the government can and should offer alternative paths to economic citizenship rights. Even if it can be shown empirically that female veterans do realize substantial economic benefits from military service, can the military serve as an

effective bridging environment for women while it also maintains a hypermasculine work environment that systematically deters the participation of women?

Whether or not an individual *is likely to* benefit from military service may depend more on their class and race than gender, but I argue that whether or not an individual *is able to* take advantage of any of these potential benefits depends more on his or her gender, because of the gender barriers discussed below. Although some racial hierarchy does exist in the DoD and the military, black men and women perceive the military as less racially biased than the civilian labor market (Segal & Segal 2004), but the hypermasculine military is much more gender-biased than the civilian labor market. This is largely reflected in the demographic makeup of the U.S. military's active duty forces. In 2015, racial and ethnic minorities made up 40 percent of active duty forces, and women made up only about 15 percent of active duty forces. Only the gender numbers show a stark contrast to those in the U.S. population aged 18 to 44, which is 44 percent racial and ethnic minorities but 50 percent female (Parker et al. 2017). Interestingly though, African American women make up a disproportionately high share (27.4 percent in 2013) of all women in the active duty forces, and white women make up a disproportionately low share (48.5 percent in 2013) of these women (DoD 2013). Does this indicate that military service is a more effective bridging environment for women of color or that women of color face fewer barriers in the military than white women do? Not necessarily. The potential benefits of military service and their appeal must be weighed against alternative economic options in the civilian labor market, which are likely to be better for white women than for women of color. Women of color tend to face more barriers in the military than white women[8], but for them the

[8] 67.5 percent of active duty female officers were white in 2013 (DoD 2013)

military service may still represent a relatively positive alternative to the barriers they face in the civilian labor market, because of the relative lack of *racial* discrimination in the military.

## EXCLUDING WOMEN FROM THE MILITARY

The benefits of economic citizenship that are provided in exchange for military service are both valuable and scarce, particularly in the U.S. The existence of valuable resources, both real or perceived to be real, incentivizes individuals to compete for them and to guard against competition for them. Under such circumstances, discrimination may be an economically rational strategy for limiting competition. A rational strategy is not necessarily a conscious or deliberate strategy, though. Such a strategy can be executed through a system of practices, which may appear mundane but are actually meaningful, that are meant to confirm the identities of those who belong and those who do not (Maruska 2010). In the specific case of a historically male-dominated institution like the military, women's token status makes them the likely targets of a variety of gender discriminatory practices meant to indicate that they do not belong in the military. In addition, using implicitly hypermasculine standards for access to and success in the military can reduce both women's ability and likelihood to compete for the economic benefits of military service. Men who do not conform to the standards of militaristic hypermasculinity, especially gay men, are also excluded from competition for these benefits in a similar manner.

Motivation to enforce gender barriers in the military may vary depending on one's class, and women are also capable of perpetuating these barriers. Economically disadvantaged men who stand to benefit from the human and social capital benefits of

military service more than other men may have the most incentive to enforce gender barriers in the military, especially if they perceive that middle- and upper-class women are outcompeting them for positions within the military and/or using military service to gain an advantage in the civilian labor market. "[E]nlisted men may not enjoy the privileges of their sex as much as men at the higher command levels, particularly in relation to women officers…" (Miller 1997) In this case, gender discrimination may perceived as a way to reduce the class stratification of the extremely hierarchical military system and in the broader economy. However, the effects of gender discrimination and harassment are typically broad enough that they encompass all females in the organization, regardless of class or race, due to the universally gendered nature of the military as an institution.

Now that women are allowed into any occupation in the military, and gender discrimination is increasingly unwelcome in the military, boundaries of gender exclusion must be continually shifted, redrawn, and redefined using a variety of techniques intended to assert men's continued dominance in the military. These techniques can include sexual assault and sexual harassment but also goes well beyond, to what Miller (1997) calls gender harassment, which is "not sexual, but is used to enforce traditional gender roles, or in response to the violation of those roles." Women's power or attempts to gain power in the military are undermined by resisting the authority of female superiors, constantly scrutinizing women, name-calling, indirect threats, sabotage, gossip, socially and professionally isolating/ostracizing women, stereotyping, etc. Whatever the specific behavior, the effect is to curtail women's ambitions by adding more difficulties to their work experience (Iskra 2010).

The military is also particularly prone to sexual assault and sexual harassment, partly because it is so male-dominated, but also because those in the military tend to be relatively young, often live in close quarters, work in isolated places, and the military is also a very hierarchical institution. These are all workplace characteristics that the EEOC has identified as increasing the likelihood of sexual harassment (Segal 1999; Feldblum & Lipnic 2016). Also, when women report instances of sexual assault and harassment to their superiors, the cases have often been handled poorly, compounding the trauma of the experience and increasing the likelihood that it will happen again[9]. Women who report may be ostracized, victim-blamed, or seen as simply a complainer, not tough enough to make it in the military. Harassment is often normalized to the point where many women believe there is no point in challenging it (Benedict 2009). Experiencing sexual assault or harassment would not only increase an individual's likelihood of leaving the military, this experience could have negative consequences for one's economic trajectory, whether the individual stays or leaves the military as a result. For example, a woman experiencing sexual harassment during military service may be less likely after her service to work in a relatively high-paying male-dominated field because of the higher prevalence of sexual harassment in male-dominated fields (Parramore 2018).

When assessing the earnings effects of women's military service, it must also be kept in mind that women are more than twice as likely to develop PTSD as a result of military service (10% of women vs. 4% of men), even though women are much less likely than men

[9] In one recent case at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, a student tried to sue the academy after she was sexually assaulted, arguing that the academy promoted and tolerated an overtly misogynistic culture. Courts ruled that she could not sue the academy because the courts are not allowed to second-guess military decision making. This is part of a larger trend of gender discrimination in the U.S. military academies that exists alongside the gender discrimination within the military itself (Robinson Kurpius & Lucart 2000; Matthews et al. 2009; Bergstein 2017)

to experience combat while serving. This is due primarily to women's much higher likelihood than men of experiencing sexual assault in the military, and sexual assault is more likely to cause PTSD than many other events, including combat (Benedict 2009; VA 2018). The increased likelihood of having a traumatic experience and having to live with its aftereffects also functions as a greater deterrent for women to join the military (Yeung et al. 2017), but women may also have greater difficulty taking full advantage of the economic benefits of their service if they are more likely to suffer from PTSD (McCrone et al. 2003). Having to live and work with PTSD could be conceptualized economically as a reduction in human and social capital, potentially cancelling out the increases to capital provided by military service.

Women are not helpless victims of these different forms of harassment and assault that pose additional barriers to them because of their gender. Many women are perfectly capable of overcoming these barriers and succeed brilliantly in the U.S. military, but because women typically experience these obstacles with greater frequency and severity than men do, women tend to serve shorter periods in the military, and often end their service prematurely[10], and report less satisfaction with their time in service (Dichter & True 2014). Segal et al. (1998) also found that women have a lower propensity to serve in the military than men do, and more women desire to serve in the military than actually do serve. These results could due in part to the explicit practices of assault and harassment in the military deterring some women who would otherwise want to join the military, but whether or not an individual actually wants or even considers joining the military also depends on gender norms to a large extent. Unlike the explicit practices of gender

[10] Dichter & True (2014) found that 32 of the 35 female veterans they interviewed for their study had prematurely separated from the military.

harassment, which can reduce women's ability to compete for military resources, constructed norms of masculinity and femininity mold men's and women's preferences in such a way that women are much less likely to choose to compete for military resources in the first place.

Gender norms are a way to influence but not determine individual preferences by socially constructing implicit rules of behavior based on one's gender. These norms can function as a sophisticated tool of coercion by imposing a penalty for nonconformity, which is enforced by a decentralized form of social authority, and makes these potentially discriminatory practices particularly difficult to root out (Folbre 1994). Even where explicit discrimination is prohibited by law, norms can give certain groups a strategic advantage over scarce resources by imposing structures of collective constraint on other groups (Folbre 1994). The power that gender norms of masculinity and femininity exert on individual preferences and behavior was evident in an important caveat made by Defense Secretary Ash Carter when he announced that all military occupations and positions would be opened to women in 2016: "Equal opportunity likely will not mean equal participation by men and women in all specialties, and there will be no quotas." (Pellerin 2015) Rules against discrimination are not sufficient to guarantee equal participation of women and men when gender norms pose different combinations of the costs and benefits of military service to women and men.

Gender norms must be accounted for in the process of deciding whether an individual joins the military. In nearly every society, male gender norms tend to incentivize military service as a way for young men to "prove their manhood," while female gender norms discourage women from military service, which is typically framed by society as

contradicting the traditional duties of wife and mother. Concepts of masculinity have long been used as a means of socializing young men to the requirements of military service. Cultural ideals associated with masculinity, such as stoicism, lack of emotion, violence, and aggression, emanate more from a militaristic culture than from male biological propensities (Goldstein 2001). Militaristic norms of masculinity that controvert biology can be harmful to both women and men, as soldiers are trained to do harm to others. But men and women who fully adopt these norms can also experience much harm themselves, both physical and psychological, which often comes from such unnatural behavior. To overcome the aversion that many men have towards these harmful experiences, those looking to maintain a continuous flow of male warriors have long used the tactic of posing war as an important rite of manhood, which can bring valuable benefits, both concrete and symbolic, to those who are deemed "real men" by their participation in war. The belief that masculinity brings real material and psychological benefits incentivizes individuals to adhere to and to reinforce binary gender norms.

While societal needs for defense and security heavily influence norms of masculinity, societal needs for producing and developing the next generation of citizens heavily influence norms of femininity. Dominant female gender roles, such as mother or caregiver, are typically seen as incompatible with military service (Segal 1999; Dichter & True 2014), and in 2011 only 46 percent of women in the military were married, as opposed to 58 percent of their male counterparts (Patten & Parker 2011). Female gender norms serve partly to satisfy society's need for caregiving put also serve as a relatively peaceful counterpoint to militaristic masculine norms. As a result, women in the U.S. tend to be less supportive of defense spending and the use of military force (Eichenberg 2002; Eichenberg & Stoll 2012). Even among Post-9/11 veterans, Patten & Parker (2011) found

that most women said that both of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were not worth fighting (63 percent against Iraq, 54 percent against Afghanistan), but less than half of men said that either war was not worth fighting (47 percent against Iraq, 39 percent against Afghanistan). As women in the U.S. are socialized to be generally less militaristic than men, they will be less likely than men to choose military service because this choice would mean transgressing gender norms and could substantially raise the cost of military service for women. When women have to break with gender norms to succeed in the military, they are constantly "fronting," a process that Benedict (2009) described as a very common

> "…price of being female in the military: the unnatural act they have to put on, day in and day out, not only to protect themselves from sexual assault but also to live up to the role of soldier…. This is true for almost all soldiers to some extent: many men also tire of the tough act they must maintain in front of their comrades. *But for women it is harder because the soldierly identity they have to assume is an antifemale, male-defined identity.*" [emphasis added]

Reinforcing specifically implicitly anti-militaristic norms of femininity may be even more effective at limiting women's access to the military than explicit policies of female exclusion, at least in some ways, because the existence of norms and the impact that they have are far less obvious. If girls and women are fully socialized to the dominant version of femininity that exists in the U.S., they are likely to take themselves out of the competition for military resources, reducing the need for their competitors to engage in more direct forms of gender harassment. Rather than making it clear that women are not wanted in the military, a view that is becoming less acceptable in the U.S., standards of military success can still be equated with implicitly masculine standards, while women are socialized and expected to behave in feminine ways that diverge from the implicitly masculine standards of the military. As new opportunities in the military are nominally opened to women, criteria for entry based explicitly on sex are deconstructed, but criteria for entry

are then reconstructed in a way to implicitly favor men, such as preference for physical strength and authoritativeness over intellectual capability and communication skill. When it is no longer acceptable to explicitly say that women do not belong in the military, exclusionary practices can instead use biological and socially constructed differences between men and women as ways to imply that women are inferior when it comes to military service (Cohn 2000; Uhlmann & Cohen 2005; Sasson-Levy 2007).

In the same way that conditions of merit in the military are socially constructed to coincide with socially constructed masculine norms and to diverge from socially constructed feminine norms, so too are the standards of economic citizenship socially constructed. Hypermasculine norms of physical toughness set the bar for success in the military, even though the vast majority of soldiers do not fill combat positions (Snyder 2003), and militaristic government spending patterns establish military service as the standard for economic citizenship. Without enacting policies that explicitly favor men, legislators instead implement a budget skewed towards military spending, which implicitly favors men because it is a fundamentally hypermasculine spending practice.

## CONCLUSION

This essay clarifies how U.S. government spending patterns that focus on military service as the primary pathway to guarantee the government's economic support are implicitly gender-biased. When the agency that receives nearly half of all discretionary spending from the federal government and is the largest employer in the nation is also a hypermasculine and male-dominated institution, it is inherently more difficult for women to take advantage of these jobs and resources. Women are much less likely to work in the military, but because military spending and the military itself play such unusually large

roles in the U.S. economy, the effects of women's lack of access to the military reverberate far outside the military itself. The human and social capital gained through military service can give veterans an advantage over their peers, particularly those who are relatively disadvantaged by other socioeconomic circumstances. As a result, women's relative lack of access to these valuable resources provided by military service serves to maintain gender stratification in the U.S. economy.

There are a variety of potential solutions to this problem. A liberal feminist solution could focus on treating women and men as equals in the military, eliminating harassment and discrimination against women, and encouraging women to more readily adopt the hypermasculine norms of the military. This solution could be problematic, however, if it forces women through a degendering process, which men are not subject to, in order to access military resources. Difference feminism is critical of this militaristic form of feminism that may devalue women and femininity. A difference feminist solution would not encourage more women to enter the military, an inherently hypermasculine institution. Rather, women should be allowed to pursue more traditionally feminine occupations, such as care work, but that these should be treated by the government as just as valuable as military service. This would mean more gender-neutral government spending patterns that focus less on military spending and provide other occupational paths to economic citizenship that correspond to more feminine gender roles. Government policies for paid parental leave and paid child care could be two practical first steps in this approach. But the difference feminist solution also has problems because it could reinforce binary gender norms, which always run the risk of becoming a tool used to justify inequalities between groups that are seen as fundamentally different. Cutting funding for the DoD may also intensify competition for increasingly scarce military resources, which may actually

incentivize an increase in gender discrimination against those women who still choose to serve in the military.

Posing the options of liberal feminism and difference feminism as an either/or decision is particularly problematic in this case. The model of gender-biased economic citizenship described in this essay depends on both gender-biased spending patterns (the focus of difference feminism) and gender-biased practices of excluding women from the military (the focus of liberal feminism). Solutions will then ideally address both of these features of this model. Legislators can diversify government spending patterns to support not just those occupations that defend society but a wider variety of occupations that also contribute to the viability, strength, and resilience of the U.S. economy and society, and society can also work to dismantle restrictive masculinities and femininities based on false essentialist dichotomies (Maruska 2009). Progress made along both of these lines could be quite fruitful in mitigating the ways that individuals' genders limit their economic opportunities and circumscribe their places in the U.S. economy.

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