Gender neutrality vs. Gender equality
A qualitative case study of gendered norms within the Swedish Armed Forces
Abstract

Armed forces has historically been, and is still today, an essential actor in peacekeeping. Armed forces provides peacekeeping missions with the aim to provide stability and security in war-torn areas. Despite the mission’s aim, sexual transgressions by soldiers have been reported. Victims of these transgressions have been both soldiers and locals from the areas where the soldiers were supposed to provide stability and security. As a consequence of these revelations, a debate arose concerning the suitability of using armed forces for peacekeeping missions. The debate has been dominated by feminist scholars, who questioned for whom security is provided, if it is provided by the armed forces. Feminist scholars have highlighted the traditional understanding of the armed forces as carriers of destructive masculinity norms. With a point of departure in this debate, this study seeks to examine and understand gendered norms within the Swedish Armed Forces with the aim to understand if the views of Swedish peacekeepers gender relations and equality is compatible with keeping peace.

This study is conducted as a single case study, based on semi-structured interviews. The central findings of this research concern the Swedish Armed Forces’ views and strategy on gender equality and how the male and female soldiers perceive and have experienced gender relations and equality. Lastly this research identifies some challenges for the work with gender equality within the Swedish Armed Forces. The study concludes that the Swedish Armed Forces work towards gender equality through gender neutrality. Even if there has been major work put into the area of equality, there is still evidence of gender-based discrimination and views upon gender relations and equality which does not correlate with the organisations vision of an equal organisation.
Keywords
Gender, Masculinity, Femininity, Military, Swedish Armed Forces, Power, Equality, Feminism.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction and research problem

The military has historically been, and still today is, an essential actor in peacekeeping. The military provides armed forces in war-torn areas with a peacekeeping mission, with the aim to provide security and stability in volatile and violent environments. As a consequence of reports of gender-based and sexual violence of male military personnel during peacekeeping operations, both within the armed forces and towards the civilians (TT 2016; Halkjaer 2015; OIOS 2015), a debate emerged dominated by feminist scholars which questioned if gendered norms and structures in the military are conducive to keeping peace? The chosen topic for this study takes its orientation in this debate, and it seeks to understand if the prevailing gendered norms existing within the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) are conducive to perform peacekeeping missions.

The debate on the armed forces' suitability as providers of peacekeeping missions has been dominated by feminist scholars highlighting the historical notion of the military implicitly understood as masculine due to the practices’ gender coding (Hearn 2013:150). Due to the history of male dominance within the military, the military has by feminist scholars, been claimed as a masculine institution, characterised by violence, dominance and exclusion (Connell 1996; Kimmel, Hearn, Connell 2005; Mazurana, Rave-Roberts, Parpart 2005). With a point of departure in the understanding of the military as a carrier of, what is understood as problematic, masculinity norms and structures. Feminist scholars argues norms of masculinity as one possible cause of sexual transgressions by military personnel during peacekeeping missions.

Dyan Mazurana (2002) argues that in order for peacekeeping operations to succeed long-term, peacekeeping operations have to “[…] gain the skills to make responsible interventions into the social, economic and political dynamics that fuel conflicts and frustrate peace making and peacekeeping operations” (pg 42). As the patriarchal societal structure is prevailing in both war and post-war periods, a gender conscious military personnel could be argued as an essential condition when striving towards
long-term successful peacekeeping mission. In other words, examining gender consciousness through understanding gendered norms within the military, could be one way of examining if and how armed forces involved in peacekeeping are capable of promoting long-term peacekeeping. Even if the importance of gender consciousness is acknowledged within UN peacekeeping, documents and policies doesn’t seem to reflect the reality. Reports on transgressions by the military are repetitive and studies therefore, need to examine norms of gender and the internal culture constructed upon norms of gender in order to understand and change this phenomena. This study could also be looked into by the SAF to understand what they, in terms of gendered norms, has succeeded with and what could still be worked on.

1.2 Objective
The aim with this research is to examine gendered norms within the SAF in order to contribute to the larger feminist debate concerning the suitability of the armed forces to participate in peacekeeping operations. Interviews have been be conducted with nine members of the SAF employed at the air defence in Halmstad, named ‘Lv6’, of whom the majority had participated in at least one international peacekeeping mission.

1.3 Research Questions
• What is the conceptual understanding and definition of gender equality within the Swedish Armed Forces?
• What is the reality of gender equality within the Swedish Armed Forces?
• What are the challenges of the work upon equality within the Swedish Armed Forces?

1.4 Relevance
Since armed forces are intrusted as peacekeepers to ‘bring peace’ or maintain a conflict-free environment, armed forces should not produce conflicts in the affected areas, however, as previously outlined, this is not the case. Revelations of gender-based and sexual violence are recurring which indicates that the armed forces have not succeeded with only contributing with peace. As argued by Mazurana (2002), an understanding of prevailing societal (and in this case, gendered) structures is essential to achieve long-
term peace. The military is still today dominated by men and so are generally sexual transgressions, this study therefore focuses on gendered norms which could be argued to reveal soldiers prejudices of and view upon men and women, equality and their gender consciousness. The Swedish Armed Forces are chosen as the case for this study, the SAF are chosen with the basis in the perception of Sweden as an international role model for gender equality. Does this ‘Swedish equality’ reach all the way also into masculine organisations such as the SAF? Earlier research has shown that the SAF have for years received critique against their work on equality, pointed out from the male dominance within their institution and sexual harassment towards female soldiers (Pettersson & Persson, 2005). However, one can clearly see how their work have had positive results on, among others, the number of women joining (Försvarsmakten c). Research on female soldiers within the SAF has also shown that women perceive inclusion and even if problems still remain, their work on equality seem to have had great results (Pettersson & Persson, 2005:49). Due to the SAF’s major work on equality, the chances that Swedish peacekeepers are more gender conscious is now higher. How is the culture of gendered norms amongst the soldiers within the SAF? And how far have they come towards gender consciousness? What work on equality has had positive outcome and what has not?

1.5 Analytical Frameworks

1.5.1 Theoretical framework
This study has its basis in feminist theory where gender and power are central concepts, thus also for this study. Gender is a concept, design to understand and explain the differences between the two binary genders: women and men. The conceptual understanding of gender can although differ and the main two different understanding are: Gender as biologically constructed and; Gender as socially constructed (Connell 2009). This study has its conceptual understanding of gender as socially constructed which does not imply a denial of biological differences but rather perceiving gender roles as mainly socially constructed rather than determined by biological factors. The second concept in this study is power. Power is widely discussed by scholars and the understanding of the concept differs to a great extent. In this study’s theoretical framework, power is defined by both Steven Lukes’ (2005) and Foucault (1977). This study’s conceptual understanding of power is mainly in accordance with Foucault who,
argues the concept of power as non-centralized and not possible to possess, this as power is created and exercised in the practice by all individuals (Foucault 1977). In the theoretical framework the figure 1.0: The construction of gender-roles and order, is presented which seeks to illustrate a theorisation of gender and power in relation to each other.

1.5.2 Methodological framework
This research is a critical study, conducted with an abductive approach through semi-structured interviews. The matter of conducting a critical study implies, among others, the researcher’s interest for power relations among men and women and that the researcher acknowledges and reflects upon ones own role in interpretation received knowledge (Merriam 2009). The choice of an abductive approach as well as choosing to conduct the research through semi-structured interviews were both made based on this study’s aim to understand norms and notions. Danermark (2002) argues that an abductive approach enables the researcher to create a deeper understanding for unviable matters, such as norms and notions. The ability to get a deeper understanding is enabled through the abductive approach as it implies one to re-contextualise received data. Semi-structured interviews was chosen in accordance with Creswell (2014), whom argues semi-structured interviews as enabling the researcher to set the agenda during the interview, although keeping the ability to pick up on subject which occur during the interview. Creswell argues this as a suitable method when research is conducted upon subjects which the researcher has limited knowledge of.

1.6 Structure of thesis
This thesis is organised as following: Chapter 2, Analytical frameworks, contains this study’s theoretical and methodological framework. The theoretical framework is presented in three sections: conceptual framework, theorisation of concepts and operationalisation of theory. The methodological framework contains this study’s methodological frame, research method and research design. Following this, a section of critical reflections upon the researcher’s role is provided along with a part on validation of data. Lastly, ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations are provided.
Chapter 3, *Findings*, contains the research’s findings and is organised according to three sub-headings: 1. The concept of gender equality within the SAF. 2. The reality of gender relations and equality within the SAF. 3. Challenges of the SAF’s work upon gender equality.

Chapter 4: *Analysis*, contains an analysis of the previously presented findings analysed through the study’s theoretical lens.

Chapter 5: *Conclusion*, provides the reader with a concluding section of this study’s major findings of the analysis and seeks to answer the study’s research questions.
Chapter 2: Analytical Frameworks

The following chapter provides a review of the existing literature with the aim to put this research into its context. Following the literature review, the study’s theoretical framework is presented. After the presentation of the central concepts - Gender and Power – these latter are theorised. After this, an operationalization of the theoretical framework is provided. The last section provides the reader with this study’s methodological framework, including research design and a description of selection and execution of the interviews for this research.

2.1 Literature review

A premise among feminist scholars today is that most, (if not all) societies are patriarchal and that the systemised hierarchy (in) between genders affects all aspects of the societal life (Gemzöe, 2002:80). Several feminist scholars have conducted research on norms of gender and its influence on matters. Research concerning the impact of norms of gender on varied organisations has been conducted, mainly focusing on women’s inclusion and adaption to prevailing norms and culture. Through research on women’s position within masculine context’s, scholars began to do research on men and their socially constructed gender role, this led to a new research field, termed as critical masculinity research (Connell 1995:60). Research on masculinity is not reserved to feminist scholars, though; the research has also been conducted within male emancipatory movements mostly highlighting the biological difference between men and women (Connell 2009:77). Feminist scholars however brought theories of masculinities, or the ”male role” as earlier termed, to the surface years ago. This originated from the criticism against (male)”gendered” -historiography, arguing that one cannot waive history as ”male-gendered” as there are disparities amongst men (Connell R. W., 1995:60). This debate lead to scholars discussing norms and notions within and between men (Heward, 1988) leading to the term masculinity, and the hegemonic masculinity, which is a changeable notion of what an “ultimate” masculinity is (Connell 1995:18). The hegemonic masculinity is, according to Connell, what legitimises the patriarchal structures. Further definition and explanation will be provided in the conceptual framework below.
One of the typical sectors assumed to create and reproduce the ‘hegemonic’ masculinity through training and practice leading to violence and female sub orientation are the military units (Duncanson, 2009; Hearn, 2013). Therefore, when gendered analysis of conflict and development became more frequent, armed forces were taken as prime examples of masculine organisations. Criticism towards the existing structures within the military was also presented referring to the historical image of men and women being expected to contribute to society in different ways. As the carriers of life, women’s primary duty was reproduction, while men were considered the protectors (of her and the nation) (Eduards, 2009:42-43). As a consequence, scholars problematized the armed forces both as a phenomenon but also as actors in peace, security and development problematizing, among others, if peace, security and development is provided by a unit dominated by men and their norms and notions, who is then peace, security and development provided for (Cockburn & Zarkov, 2002) (Baaz, 2009). Criticism arouse concerning women’s (non-existing) power and their (vulnerable) position in war. Catalysts for this debate were inter alia the disclosure of sexual harassment and violence both within armed forces, but also of locals during peacekeeping operations (Eduards, 2009; Turshen, 2005; Enloe, 1990).

Connell also gives her opinion in the above presented debate, linking her theory of masculinity with the armed forces and their position in peacekeeping contexts. Connell (2002) argues that one is not able to discuss a (hegemonic) masculinity as it is a structural outcome of a societal practice though she was not opposed to the idea of the armed forces as typical sectors assumed to create and reproduce a (hegemonic) masculinity characterised by, among others, violence and dominance, and neither did she reduce the potential problems of including armed forces in peacekeeping operations as brought up by scholars such as Cockburn, Zarkov and Baaz. During the last years, studies concerning armed forces and gender have generally been done within the notion of women’s (non) inclusion and adaption to this culture (Pettersson & Persson, 2005; Eduards, 2012; Haaland, 2012 et al.). A debate and research concerning armed forces suitability/ability to provide peace and security is still current (Fetherston, 1995; Whitworth, 2004; Hearn, 2013).
In a Swedish context, studies on gender equality within SAF have been done, though mostly as if gender by definition equals women. Studies have been done on, for instance, sexual harassment, women’s inclusion and women’s adaption to the “male culture” (Pettersson & Persson, 2005a and b). An explanation could be considered to be provided by Hearn whom argues that there has been a silence on men and masculinity which has led to the perception of men as ”gender-less”, resulting in that discussions on sex and gender tends to focus on girls and women (Hearn, 2013:147). There are two prominent researchers, Annica Kronsell and Erika Svedberg who in their research (2002) focus on the SAF in relation to gender practice, masculinity and femininity. They have both done research mainly focusing on how the discourse on national defence creates, portrays and affects norms of gender. Svedberg and Kronsell’s (2002) research relies on the historical idea of the feminine as reproductive, and the masculine as the protector. From this, they discuss the perceived phenomenon of a collective, national identity. During the last years, the work upon equality in Sweden have had major progress, therefore it is likely that the situation of gender equality within the SAF has changed since Kronsell and Svedberg’s research was done.

In accordance with earlier presented research, forth coming research also has its point of departure in a recognition of gendered norms as well as for the understanding of that the military traditionally has created, reproduced and therefore maintained norms of masculinity. What distinguishes this research from, for example, Svedberg and Kronsell is the matter of this study’s interest in international gendered transgressions, thus of gendered norms within the SAF in an international context.

2.2 Conceptual framework

2.2.1 Gender

Gender is a core concept within feminist theory, thus also for this research. The concept of ‘gender’ seeks to understand what determines the difference between the binary genders: men and women (Connell 2009), in order to furthermore define the concept of gender, it is central to first distinguish the difference between the concept of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. The concept ‘sex’ refers to the biological sex and primary indicates genitals and levels of testosterone/oestrogen. The concept of ‘gender’ refers to the ‘gender role’. The term of gender was introduced and adopted by feminist scholars in the 1980’s and
replaced what feminist scholars earlier had termed ‘the male role’ and ‘the female role’. The theorisation and understanding of meaning of the concept ‘gender’ differs and two central matters can distinguish the different understandings:

1. Gender as biologically constructed.
2. Gender as socially constructed.

Gender as biologically constructed implies that there are biological differences between men and women which results in for example different interests, behaviours and approaches towards matters. Understanding gender as biologically constructed implies that perceived differences between men and women are not primarily affected by outer/external factors thus by biological factors, however, if understanding gender as socially constructed, one implies that perceived differences between men and women primarily are determined by societal factors such as prejudices of gender-based differences during upbringing. Gender as socially constructed implies that gender and its role is constructed through and towards societal factors and is created, reproduced and maintained by individuals. A central matter to distinguish is that gender as socially constructed do not reject the biological differences between men and women, but argues gender as primarily constructed through societal practice (Connell 2009). Gender as socially constructed is often characterised by Simone de Beauvoir’s quote: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 2002:325)

2.2.2. Power
Power as a concept is contentious and the understanding of power can differ to a great extent. Steven Lukes’ defined power along three dimensions, namely one-dimensional power, two-dimensional power and third-dimensional power. These are presented in chronological order below.

Lukes’ explains one-dimensional power as requiring an observable conflict thus the exercise and outcome of one-dimensional power is always observable. Further on, Lukes’ quotes Robert Dahl in order to define the concept of one-dimensional power: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Lukes 2005:16)
Lukes’ defines the second dimension of power in relation to, and as a critique to the first dimension of power, arguing that the second dimension of power includes the ability to set the agenda as another way to exercise power. Lukes’ defines the concept of two-dimensional power as: "[…] a person or a group – consciously or unconsciously – creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts [...]". (Lukes 2005:20). Thus, Lukes’ second dimension also implies power as possible to exercise through mobilisation of opposition (Lukes 2005).

The third dimension of power indicates a further broadening and critique against earlier presented dimensions, indicating that exercise of power and its outcome is not always observable. Thus power could be exercised through creating/reproducing norms and thereby structures. As exercise of power results in individuals accepting structures and stop realising their needs, the conflict could be latent (Lukes 2005:26). Third-dimensional power acknowledges power exercised as one-dimensional power terms it, but the relevance lies within why B want to do what B wants (Lukes 2005:16).

“A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants” (Lukes 2005:27).

In 1977, Michael Foucault presented a conceptual understanding of power on the contrary to the common understanding of the “sovereignty power”, which implies power as centralized, possessed and oppressive (Nilsson 2008:83). Power being oppressive implies “power over”, also explained by Steven Lukes’ as the first dimension of power; “A gets B to do something that he would not otherwise do” (Lukes 2005:16). Foucault argued two main matters to be the foundational power; The truth cannot be studied unbiased or objectively, secondly, knowledge cannot be distinguished from power (Nilsson 2008:81). Moreover Foucault (1977) describes power as potentially found everywhere and exercised discrete, or even invisible and argues power primary exercised through discourse, by all individuals. Discourse as to how individuals talk, describe and categorise other individuals.
Foucault argued that exercise of power primarily is done with a known aim, however, a person exercising power cannot control the outcome, Foucault refers to this as a “factor of uncertainty”. A consequence of this factor within the exercise of power is actions can result in unexpected matters and therefore change power-relations.

2.2.3 Theorisation of concepts
Forthcoming part seeks to theorise earlier presented concepts in relation to each other with the aim to create a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework used in this study will then be discussed and presented extensively during the next heading termed operationalization of the theoretical framework.

The phenomenon of gender is today taken for granted and the prevailing patriarchal societal structure is build upon the notion of the binary, traditional two –gender dichotomy and its power relations where masculinity and men is the superiority, creating femininity and women as subordinated (Connell 2009:101). The practice of gender constructs not only its notions within, but also what is not “within”. The foundational consequence of the power relations between genders is the construction of masculinity as the norm, and therefore, making femininity the subordinated “other” (Connell 2009:101). These power relations are also applicable to other norms and notions such as heterosexuality as the norm, and therefore homosexuality is considered deviant resulting in subordination and a portraying this as the “other”. Another example of the consequences of power relations of attributes is the white superiority, creating persons of colour as “the other” (Connell 2009).

‘Gender’ implies the binary genders: men and women, and its gender roles termed as ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. These gender roles are constructed through assigned of different characteristics. Holistically, one can therefore assign something as ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’, thus referring to characteristics assigned to this gender role. Masculinity is traditionally assigned characteristics such as courage, aggression and risk-taking (Donaldson 1993:644), and as the power relations between the binary gender is build upon the binary gender roles being dichotomies, the construction of femininity can roughly be understood as characteristics which is not assigned as ‘masculine’ (Connell 1994). However, even though one can point out characteristics assigned to specific
genders, gender cannot be understood as constant carriers of static attributes. This as gender, in accordance with social theory, is a societal structure as gender constantly is (re-) constructed through recurring and widespread practice and relations (Connell 2009:24).

Studies on masculinities led to the introduction of a new field of research termed as; critical masculinity studies. The field of critical masculinity studies has been dominated by a number of scholars such as Connell (1995) who have problematized the understanding of the masculine gender as unified, rather introducing a complex and varying understanding of the masculine gender. Traditionally, research on power relations between the binary genders is built upon the notion of that all men benefit from the patriarchal structure. Connell took her point of departure from this notion and her research upon masculinities sought to problematize men and masculinities as one unified phenomena. In other words, Connell’s research implied that men, per se, do not benefit equally, referring to that there are several aspects and matters within the concept of men and ‘masculinity’, affecting men’s privileges (Connell 2009:21). Another important matter of highlighting masculinity studies apart from gender studies was the fact that by implementing gender into policies and when discussing gender perspectives, the focus tended to lay on women whilst scholars stressed the importance of understanding of men and masculinities were affected and affected matters. As mentioned in the literature review, Jeff Hearn explained this by the fact that the norm tend to be perceived as ‘nothing’, i.e. as if men are genderless, as if white people did not have a skin colour and as if heterosexual persons did not have a sexual orientation (Hearn, 2013:147).

Above presented theorisation of men and the masculine gender led to the introduction of a concept termed as ‘hegemonic masculinity’, which is presented below. Power structures amongst men are based on the existence and construction of a hegemonic masculinity, which in itself is based on subordination, participation and marginalization (Connell 1995:114). Hegemony originates from Antonio Gramci’s analysis of power-relations amongst class. Hegemony refers to the cultural dynamics, which enables a group to claim and maintain a certain position within the societal life (Morton 2007). Hegemonic masculinity is understood as the conformation of the masculine gender that,
in the prevailing context, is the acknowledged answer to the patriarchy’s legitimation. Hegemonic masculinity as the conformation of the legitimisation of the patriarchy implies that the closer one is to the ‘hegemonic masculinity’, the more privileged one will be. Hegemonic masculinity is not individual, but rather collective, and is not bound to be real thus can be characterised by, for example, fictitious stereotypes (Connell 1995:115-116). However, what is important to highlight is the fact that hegemonic masculinity is not a static character ‘type’, hegemonic masculinity is based on prevailing masculinity norms, which are constantly changeable in relation to its societal circumstances (Connell 1995:114). The fact that the hegemonic masculinity is based on norms of masculinity implies that a change of masculinity norms could change the notion of the desirable and privileged hegemonic masculinity.

‘Power’ and ‘sex’ are two concepts which exists independent of each other, however, power can be exercised with it’s basis in ‘sex’, through, among others, discourse. The consequences of power exercised over sex is illustrated in the figure 1.0 below.

Figure 1.0: The construction of gender- roles and order.

Figure 1.0 seeks to illustrate how gender- roles and order is constructed, reproduced and maintained. Figure 1.0 embodies how power exercised over sex can consequence in the construction of the concept ‘gender’. Power exercised over sex could be manifested through among others discourse and silence. One can through discourse assign characteristics to persons based on their sex, resulting in a dichotomising the two binary genders, male/female through the construction of gender ‘roles’ furthermore the gender- ‘order’. Thus, it is, among others, through discourse that the construction of the binary gender roles, masculinity/femininity, are accomplished and furthermore the order within and between, termed as the ‘gender-order’. The gender- roles and order is also
constantly (re)constructed, reproduced and maintained through discourse by all individuals. The gender order is perceived as not possible to reproduce and maintain without the exercise of power. Hence, sex can exist apart from power but when power exists in a context, the power over sex results in gender which consequences is the prevailing gender order. Foucault (1977) argues that power is present everywhere, implying that wherever gender is acknowledged, power can be exercised and a possible outcome from the exercise of power in relation to gender is the prevailing gender order.

The understanding of power as Foucault introduced it: power as dynamic, constantly changing and reproduced, furthermore implies power and its relations as (inter) changeable. Previously presented theory on gender as non-static and constantly (inter) changeable in relation to its context, associates with Foucault’s conceptual understanding of power. Applying Foucault’s understanding of power on gender-based power relations within societies, men are not able to possess power, thus their practice of power is found within the internalization which consequences are reproduction and maintenance of gender roles and therefore the gender order. Moreover, the practice of discourse is historically dominated and therefore defined and presented by men thus enables the maintenance of power.

Implying that the gender based power-relations associates with Foucault’s understanding of power, gender based power relations are also understood as (inter) changeable. A consequence of power-relations as (inter) changeable is the relevance of studying and understanding how femininity and masculinity is constructed and reproduced today as one moreover then can analyse however power can be exercised differently with the aim to reduce and eradicate the un-equal gender based –power.

2.2.4 Operationalization of theoretical framework
Presented concepts of Gender and Power, and the theorisation of these, will be used as an analytical framework and tools, in combination with the researchers situated knowledge, to interpret, understand and analyse collected data, formulate findings and results. As this research seeks to understand gendered norms within the SAF the operationalization of the theoretical framework will be used in order to detect findings in of, among others, a discourse on men/masculinity and female/femininity.
As shown in the figure 1.0, the construction of gender-roles and order, one can detect exercise of power, gendered norms and notions through discourse. An analysis of the received answers during the interviews will be conducted, with the aim to detect gendered norms and notions among the interviewees’ through how they perceive gender differences and how their notion of gender equality associates with their male and female soldiers ‘gendered’ experiences.

The interviews will be analysed focusing on how the individuals perceive gender, and their discourse on men/masculinity and women/femininity. In accordance with Foucault (1977) this study recognises discourse as an essential way to exercise of power due to its perceived ability to reproduce and maintain gender roles and it’s order, therefore, the interviewees’ discourse on men and women is perceived as possibly prevailing of norms of gender. The findings of this research will be presented according to themes and moreover analysed through this studies theoretical framework. These themes are: The concept of gender equality within the SAF; The reality of gender equality within the SAF and Challenges of the SAF’s work upon equality.

2.3 Methodological Framework

This is a critical study conducted as a qualitative case study through semi-structured interviews focusing on gendered norms. In the following chapter, the methodological approach of the study will be presented. The methodological approach will be organised as following: firstly presenting the studies methodological framework, research method and research design. Lastly, a validation of data and limitations and delimitations will be provided. All methodological choices made are commonly chosen in virtue of their capacity to provide a holistic understanding of (gendered) norms and notions.

2.3.1 Methodological frame

The research for this study is conducted with a qualitative, abductive approach. The choice of methodological approach was done in accordance with Danermark’s (2002) understanding of the ability to receive a deeper understanding of this research matter.
Danermark (2002) argues that an abductive approach enables the researcher to create a further understanding of unviable matters such as structures. The ability to receive a deeper understanding of structures is relevant in this research as the aim of the thesis is to understand, highlight and analyse gendered norms and structures. Danermark (2022) argues this further understanding to be difficult to achieve without further application of theories and concepts, i.e. a re-contextualization (pg. 88).

2.3.2 Research method
This research is conducted as a critical study, which in accordance with Merriam (2009) refers to the main aim of examining power relations between men and women, focusing on structural notions rather than individual ones (pg 35). When examining gendered notions and norms one can also include a linguistic approach in order to analyse the discourse on gender within the SAF (ibid 2009:36).

With the aim to understand how gender is perceived and the view on the work upon equality, through analysing both practical matters and its discourse, this research is conducted through semi-structured interviews. In other words, the choice of conducting semi-structured interviews was entirely based on the ability to get a deeper understanding the topic of the research. The choice of interviews was made in line with Creswell (2014) who argues that interviews are a fruitful method when the aim is to study object/s that are not observable such as perceptions and understandings. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are chosen due to the ability for the researcher to direct the interviews into perceived relevant topics, yet being able to pick up on subjects that the conversation come across during their interview (Aspers 2011:143).

Semi-structured interviews are also relevant to conduct in this research as the researcher does not have a comprehensive insight of norms and notions within the SAF, and can therefore not know before the interviews what questions that will be most fruitful for the study and therefore emphasise.
2.3.3 Research design

Case selection
Conducting this research as a single case study is based on the earlier presented basis of the SAF comprehensive work on equality, and that it therefore is relevant to understand if norms of gender have changed as a result of this work. The relevance of the SAF as a case study also lies within the international notion of Sweden as “an equal country”, sometimes perceived as a ‘role-model’ for gender equality. Due to this perception and the fact that the SAF works internationally, it could be argued to be relevant to examine the SAF and their soldiers view upon and actions taken for, gender equality.

Selection of interviewees
The interviews are conducted with members of the SAF at their air defence in Halmstad (Luftvärvet 6) termed as ‘Lv6’. Lv6 was chosen due to suitability and accessibility of the interviewees’ mainly based on two matters: all members of the SAF working at Lv6 are prepared to participate in a international peacekeeping mission and therefore suitable for this research aim. Secondly, Lv6 was chosen due to contacts within the organisation, which was considered a great advantage when setting up the interviews.

The field research consists of 9 interviews with members of the SAF. The selection of interviewees is, in line with Creswell (2014), done through purposeful selection. In this case, this conspires with involvement within the SAF and gender (identified by them selves). These are requirements defined as they, from chosen theoretical framework, are perceived to affect the interviewees’ perception of current research subject. In this study, it resulted in the following selection of individuals: three leaders within SAF, whereof one person responsible for their work upon equality; three female soldiers and three male soldiers (both without further defined degree). The selection of interviewees’ was conducted with the aim to get a holistic understanding of norms and understanding of gender and work upon equality from different perspectives. The vision with the selection was also to, in the analysis, being able to triangulate the received information, i.e. analysing what individuals think is being done, what is being done and how individuals on different levels perceive it.
Design of interview guides

Three different interview guides were made for this field research; one for individuals holding a lead role, one for the person responsible for the work upon equality and one for the soldiers (without further defined degree). The interview guides differ in terms of which perspective the questions are designed from. The interview guide designed for the leaders focuses on how they perceive the work on equality, and how they reflect upon their role as a leader, in other words, what they communicate to their soldiers. The interview guide designed for the person responsible for the work upon equality focuses upon their documents and policies, what areas are prioritised, how they think the work is and should be implemented, possible improvements etcetera. The interview guide designed for the interviews with the soldiers are based on their perception upon women within the SAF, work on equality and masculinity norms. The interview guides for the soldiers are disposed after four themes; Identity, Workplace, Equality and Equal Treatment.

Themes in the interview guides will assure that answers wished for will be given, themes are chosen as they are perceived to answer the studies research questions presented on pg. 6 in this thesis.

2.3.4 Conducting interviews and validity of data

The principle of voluntary participation

The vision of contacting interviewees’ was to present the research and its aim, thereafter asking for their participation reassuring the fact that their participation was completely voluntarily. Concerning reassuring that the participants for the interviews would participate voluntarily was perceived as successful. Apart from this, it is central to reflect upon the matter of that one cannot know how the interviewees’ received the request of their participation, neither can I as an external person understand possible power structures between them which could affect their choice of participating. This is relevant to mention as this could affect whether the interviewee participated completely voluntarily or not. The interviewees, and especially the soldiers, lack of voluntariness could be perceived as a potential issue as the study seeks to understand norms and notions, which could be highly personal and sensitive.
The interview environment
The interviewees’ were are given the choice of where the interview was conducted. In most cases, we sat in their office apart from their colleges and the environment was calm and private. The environmental privacy was in this research perceived as essential due to that the interviews touched upon subjects of leadership, identity, norms and notions, which could be undesirable to be exposed and therefore answers given in non-privacy could be perceived as less valid.

Two interviews (a female soldier and a female leader) were conducted in non-private environments where others, namely their colleges could hear what was said. These interviews were apart from this, perceived as successful as they, from my understanding, spoke openly about their thoughts.

2.3.5 The researcher’s role
This research built on a critical study, which implies not only that the researcher has a critical approach to the study, but also the fact that the researcher pervading critically reflects upon their own role in relation to the research (Merriam 2009:219).

Creswell (2014) highlights the importance of reflecting upon the researcher’s role, he argues; “[…] inquirers such as gender, history, culture and socioeconomic status […]” (pg. 187) affects the researchers understanding and analysis, but also the access to information etc. The feminist understanding of objectivity within science and research implies the similar facts and opposes the understanding of objectivity as essential (or even possible) in research (Harding, 1986). In line with the understanding of the researchers role in research and with a feminist view upon objectivity, this study acknowledges itself as a hermeneutic process. This implies that the researcher has a pre-understanding of the context and what one thinks will be the outcome (Danermark, 2002:159). In this research, a pre-understanding of the field is based on theoretical and ideological conviction.

The “god trick” is central within feminist methodology and was developed by Sandra Harding (1991) as a critique towards the positivisms attempt to conduct completely objective research. The “god trick” seeks to highlight that one cannot ignore ones’ situated knowledge, as all research is conducted and interpret through this. Thus, the
concept of “the god trick” seeks to conceptualise the inability of objectivity within research. In accordance with Harding and Bryman (2016) who presents the main steps of an qualitative research, where interpretation of received data is included, the following section provides the reader with the researchers ontological and epistemological understanding. The researcher of this study has its understanding of epistemology and ontology as not possible to dichotomise, this research, in line with Barad (1998), rather acknowledges gender as a subject of the production of knowledge. The understanding of gender as a central matter in the production of knowledge, implies that gender, therefore, is a relevant theoretical concept and/or framework of research, as well as a subject to be researched upon. Gender as both a theoretical approach, and a subject of research implies that the construction, understanding and being of gender is both an epistemological and an ontological point of departure. Barad (2007) therefore introduces the idea of instead framing this feminist understanding of gender as a “epistem-onto-logy” or “onto-epistem-ology” (pg. 158). However, a central matter to highlight concerning ontological understanding is the understanding of gender as socially constructed, rather than biological (further developed as concept and theorised on pg. 12).

*Validity of data*

The validation of these data is strengthened by the fact that they are first-hand data, collected in person as a result of semi-structured interviews. The validation could also be argued due to the fact that the data are collected from several persons, all in different positions and therefore a triangulation of received information was possible to conduct.

*Ethical considerations*

In this research, ethical considerations are important as interviews are conducted with the aim to understand how people perceive norms and values in their context, which consists of people with whom they, at the time, live with and/or work for and/or with. This means that it is crucial to, in line with Creswell, be open about this research’s purpose and that the research will be accessible for everyone (Creswell, 2014:98). Anonymisation of the interviews has been conducted in order to provide maximum convenience for the interviewees. The anonymisation was done through numbering them and only coding them with F/M in order to highlight their gender. Coding the
interviewees’ with numbers and gender was done with the aim to reduce the perception of individual experiences and rather highlighting structural matters.

2.3.6 Limitation and Delimitations
This study is to some extent limited by the access to information. The lack of information is due to that the information is expected to be provided by individuals, who are involved in an institution that are known for being secretive. The limitation of data was foremost perceived as limited by the perception of the soldiers’ strive to be loyal against the SAF and therefore might reduce and avoid discussing certain experiences during the interviews. Another limitation might also be the number of conducted interviews as a larger number of interviews could have been perceived to contribute to a higher reliability for this study. However, as it is difficult to get interviews with members of the SAF I was bound by my contacts connections and therefore what he would offer me. It is also in this research essential to highlight the fact that this study is only based on the air defence, Lv6, in Halmstad, which does not enable one to generalize this study’s findings for the SAF nationally. Another possible limitation is the matter of translation, as the interviews were conducted in Swedish, quotes brought up in the findings chapter are translated from Swedish to English by the author of the research.

The most essential delimitation made for this study is due to ethical considerations, both for the researcher and for the interviewees, thus excluding sexual harassment and violence in the research for the case study. This has been done, as I do not believe that I am in the position to ask about sexual harassment and violence in this context with the interviewees. This as considering both the value of the possible (non)-answers received, but also concerning power relations between me as a young, female, researcher and the male, (soon to be) –soldiers. Above presented delimitation is relevant to mention as sexual harassment and violence has been central in earlier research on masculinity within armed forces (Eduards, 2009:49; Pettersson & Persson, 2005:35).

Chapter 3: Findings
The following chapter seeks to present findings of the qualitative case study conducted through interviews with soldiers within the Swedish Armed Forces employed at Lv6,
Halmstad. The findings are presented and organised according to this study’s matters of research. These matters are: The concept of gender equality within the SAF, the reality of gender equality within the SAF and challenges of the SAF’s work upon equality.

3.1 The concept of gender equality within the SAF

The following section seeks to present findings illustrating how the concept of gender equality is defined and understood within the SAF. A quote from the prevailing policy document of gender equality is provided below with the aim to illustrate how the SAF nationally identifies gender equality.

“The Swedish Armed Forces vision regarding gender equality is that: The SAF’s employees’ shall work in an equal organization where women and men can develop and contribute with their full potential to the SAF’s operational capability”

-(Försvarsmakten 2015)

Reviewed documents written in prior to the SAF’s work upon equality are commonly written with the vision and approach of providing women and men with the same possibilities to utilise and develop their individual competence. Providing female and male soldiers with ‘the same possibilities’ indicates a gender neutral approach towards equality. The discourse in the document (Försvarsmakten 2015) also testifies to the focus upon a binary genders i.e. without further inclusion of non-binary genders, this is detected through the ‘non-use’ of ‘gender identity’ or highlighting ‘gender defined by one self’ exclusively using the terms ‘men’/’women’.

The following section seeks to examine the interviewees’ understanding and discourse upon the concept of the ‘soldier’. The concept of the soldier is presented as it is perceived to testify towards if the foundational understanding of a soldier is ‘gendered’. In order to detect this, the interviewees’ were asked about what they perceived as essential characteristics of a soldier within the SAF.

All interviewees’ commonly highlighted the importance of a physical status that enables the soldier to conduct the work as the most important characteristics physically. The
perception of key characteristics of persons involved within the SAF, apart from the physical ones, seemed to be dominated by flexibility and the ability to cooperate. Stressing the importance of persons during their first educational period ability to take and obey orders, to have faith in the leaders, making an essential characteristic for the leaders to take responsibility for their possessed positional power over others. Flexibility was also highlighted with the common motivation for all characterises of that they were essential and crucial in case of war.

Soldier M6 highlighted stability as central, both physical and mental. By mental stability he meant that the soldier shares the SAF’s core values, “We can educate on everything, but when there is a person who doesn’t share our core values, then we can’t do anything”. – M6. Core values were by the same person presented as the perception of equality between men and women, the acceptance of different ethnicities, sexual orientation and religion. Previously presented characteristics detected as essential for soldiers to possess are perceived as ‘gender neutral’ as they generally are not perceived as assigned to either ‘femininity’ or ‘masculinity’ (Connell 2008).

The following part presents characteristics perceived as ‘gendered’. ‘Gendered characteristics’ are perceived as such due to the that the interviewees presented them as ‘more important’ for either female or male soldiers. When asking for ‘gendered’ characteristics for soldiers, the attitude towards labelling soldiers as female or male were generally negative, but during the interviews, gendered characteristics were brought up, however carefully, being aware of not emphasising differences between female and male soldiers. The fear of emphasising gender was perceived due to their answers stating that women do not have to be different as long as they can accomplish tasks given and commonly rather highlighting the individual. M6 said: “If you are a man or a women, it doesn’t matter, it disappears in the clutter. It is the rank/degree and the competence that is relevant” F1 also testified to this saying, “[...] as long as you accomplish tasks given it doesn’t matter if you’re a man or a woman, [...] if your given the task to drive this car then you drive this car good and then it doesn’t matter if you’re a woman or a man”. – F1 Another male soldier said: “then again, as we say, you don’t have a gender within the armed forces”. – M5.
Women within the SAF were by M6 perceived as more focused and goal-oriented than men, this he meant resulted in, among others, that women often had a higher, or better, physical status when entering the organisation. Others also mentioned the fact that women could perceive their first accomplishments as more important, as they felt a need to rebut the notion of women as physically weaker. Several of the interviewed female soldiers testified to the feeling of having to refute prejudices when joining the SAF (F1, F7 and F9).

The section above provides the reader with information of the concept of ‘gender equality’ concluding that the concept of gender equality associates with what could be termed as gender neutrality. The vision of gender equality within the SAF seems to imply a ‘gender-blind’ approach towards equality, rather focusing on treating and providing the same opportunities for all individuals than considering gendered differences. The interviewed soldiers were asked to describe essential characteristics of a soldier, with the aim to detect, if any, ‘gendered characteristics’. Answers received testified to a perception of the ultimate soldier as gender neutral.

3.2 The reality of gender relations and equality within the SAF

The following chapter seeks to present members of the SAF’s experiences perceived to illustrate how the reality of gendered norms, notions and equality is manifested on their daily work. These findings are presented according to two sub-headings, these are: Male soldiers views upon and experiences of the concept of gender equality and female soldiers experiences of gendered norms and equality within the SAF.

3.2.1 Male soldiers views upon gender and gendered experiences within the SAF

Following section provides findings of the male soldiers’ perception of the ‘gender neutral soldier’. Male soldiers were commonly positive towards the matter of female soldiers, although when discussing differences between gender the attitude was commonly negative and doubtful, rather highlighting the phenomena of the ‘gender-less’ soldier.

During an interview with a male recruit, the subject of the view upon women within the SAF was brought up. He described how women within the SAF might change during
their duty, creating a more “masculine” approach. He reflected upon this as a possible result of the fact that the attraction between men and women within the SAF was not as central as in their civilian life. He of them said:

“All kind of sexual attraction disappear when you put the green clothes on, haha its like that! I would not see a girl in the uniform and think like ‘shit, she’s hot, I’d like to go out with her’ your more like; ‘what rank dose she have?’ There’s an saying like ‘you become weapon brothers…and weapon sisters’ “. – M5

Another male soldier also brought up the role and importance of the uniform. He said:

“As a soldier you don’t have a gender, like, you have a task to accomplish. And we have a uniform, it de-genders. It actually does! And you don’t have any prejudices make up because you think you should have that or whatever that is about” -M4

Asking about if relations with female and male soldiers differed for M5, he stated that:

“No matter what your first name is, it doesn’t matter, you’re just one in the group. [...]”. Despite this, the same soldier, M5, as an reflection upon what he thought of including female soldiers within the SAF, he said:

“Its great, its really great. It contributes A LOT to have a woman in the group, I mean, it becomes, both men and women have different views upon things, like, that’s how it is, generally, I think it’s good, I mean, the masculine attitude reduces, so it doesn’t escalate and go too far’’. –M5. When asking another soldier, M6, if the group dynamics changed in gender-mixed groups, he said: “Yes! I think so. I think the guys rises a notch with the jokes, and the girls lower themselves a notch, I think that they do other jokes in mixed and non-mixed groups. [...] I think it (including women) creates a more...smooth group dynamic [...]” –M6. One of the male soldiers also testified to this saying: “[...] and it’s like, you think differently (when women are present), or like, there’s another perspective on things when she’s around”. – M4

During two interviews with soldiers, the question of how it their relation to the only female soldier in their group was, they both, independently of each other, indicated that it was not an issue as she “was more of a man than 50% of the other guys in the groups” –M3 and “no like, she, she is almost more, what should I say, she is almost
more manly than us.” –M4. He continued by identifying what ‘made her masculine’:
“You know, she likes to work out and stuff and she’s like bigger than most of us” –M4.
Previously presented findings testifies to the matter of a gender neutral vision of the
soldier, although despite this, when discussing practicalities, their discourse revealed a
view upon female soldiers as ‘the other’. Examples of women as ‘the other’ were
statements such as: women trained harder (than men) and women contributed with
another perspective (than men). Practically, women were assigned a special changing
room, boots and uniforms. This was detected as the changing rooms; boots and
uniforms for men were not termed/spoken about as something “else”, while the ones
customised for female soldiers were termed thereafter.

The section above provides the reader with male soldiers views upon gender relations
and equality within the SAF, this section concludes how the male soldiers perceive
women differently within and outside of the SAF. The male soldiers pointed out how
female soldiers were only judged by their accomplishments and rank rather than their
gender. However, the male soldiers despite this described how female soldiers were
different as they were perceived to contribute with something else (than male soldiers)
to the group dynamics, the male soldiers also highlighted how some female soldiers
were perceived to adapt to the masculine norm within the SAF.

3.2.2 Female soldiers experiences of gendered norms and equality within the SAF
The above presented section provided the reader with examples of how male soldiers
perceived gendered norms, notion and equality, with the aim to triangulate presented
findings, the following section will present findings of female soldiers experiences of
gendered norms, notions and equality within the SAF.

A common understanding among female soldiers was the “awareness” of their gender.
A female soldier said: “You are aware of your gender. Like, you are aware of that you
are different. Even if the percentage of women today are a lot higher than before” –F9
The awareness seemed to orient from experiences that were described by several of the
interviewees’. F7, a newly recruited female solider said: “There was one accident
where a few guys had gone into the shower (while a girl was taking a shower) and took
her towel and clothing, so she had to walk naked in the hallway”. –F7 another matter
described, although mostly as a observation rather then an issue was the male norm
detected in the language, she said: “Then it’s a lot like, come on guys! But than you’ll
just have to include yourself among the ‘guys’. Like, you have to be aware of the male
dominated history. But it would be even worse and silly if they would be like ‘come on
boys!....and girls: ‘ that would almost be worse, it better to just adapt’”-F7.

A female soldier who held a leading position within the SAF, drew from her own
experiences and stated the importance for women to have the courage to take their place
and stand firm. She also mentioned the importance for women to have “thick skin”, this
as the jargon sometimes could appear raw/rough. She said; “[…] there is so much in
our society today about getting offended for this, offended for that, but, it could actually
also be that people are joking! One doesn’t always have to take everything as offensive
and as harassment. When something crosses the line, one could start by thinking: what
he said, did he mean anything by that? No, maybe he didn’t. I’ll just ignore it. –thick
skin! But, if it crosses the line, then you have to make a damn stand, super clear! Then
it’s almost better to over react, not so that is becomes one of those formal complaint, we
have to be able to talk to each other”. –F2. She furthermore described other ‘gendered’
experiences and said: “[…] I’ve heard from the female recruits that the guys nag more
(against the female leaders). Some guys, not all. But some, they nag against the leader.
When it’s a girl who’s the leader, they (female recruits) perceive the guys to nag and
question the leaders more” -F2, female leader within the SAF.

What also seemed to be pervading was the feeling and notion of women being judged as
a group, often in relation to the perception of that women could not conduct the same
things as male soldiers, this seemed to orient from that the SAF earlier had put lower
demands on women for educations and positions. F2 called this a type of quotas, and
she said:

“[…] and this is unfavourable for girls who get sent because then the
colleagues just think, yeah she just got to go because of that she is a girl, and
then she is “stamped”. It can, all guys don’t do it, but I could also feel that, I
know girls who got educations, and they weren’t the best. They were OK. But
they weren’t the best, and we should have the best person at the best place. So I
could also feel like, yeah but she just got it because she was a girl. Some girls
Almost all female soldiers testified to this saying that they felt a pressure to rebut the prejudices of women being, among others, weaker and not as qualified for the job. “I mean, everybody has prejudices, but if there is a girl who can do it, then she can refute the prejudices and then maybe the guys are like shit girls can! But would there on the other hand be a girl be a girl who could not do it, then she would strengthen, and then maybe the next girl in the same context will have a harder time, because she will have to proof her self even more” –F9 Another female soldier also testified to this, she said: “There is nothing worse, in a female leaders eyes, I think, then a female soldier who does not have the physical status, who gets prioritised in virtue of her gender. Because then you can get the feeling that women are not as competent as men [...]” –F8

Female soldiers drew from their own experiences from their time within the SAF and one said: “It’s hard to take the step, because boys take so much space. And like I said before, if its like 30 guys, its hard, like you have to take a damn stand to be visible and such. It’s like, you come up with great ideas but then they’ll be like, no, no, and he’ll take the decision instead. And then you’re like but damn it, I want to as well. You don’t really get to show what you can do” F7. Another female soldier said: "When I joined (the SAF) I hade the approach like now I have to be tough. It is not possible to come here to fool and piffle and like, you know, I am very girly in my spare time. Like, a lot of shopping, doing make up, partying and travelling, but when I am here at work, then I try to reduce it in some way” –F1. Later during her interview she said: “Well, I can say that you have got eyes more upon you as a girl when working in the Swedish Defence Force because there are so many who think like no way shit she is a girl she cant do this and she ‘let’s she her fail’ so you do have eyes upon you in another way” –F1.

F7, a female soldier who had only been employed for a few months and therefore unlike the majority of this studies interviewees’ had most of her experience from the GMU (Basic Military Education). Also testified to the feeling of needing to refute prejudices although exemplifying how she had perceived this, she described how male soldiers within her first education could perceive it to be “a bit funny” seeing female soldiers
marching, answering formal to their leaders and especially during line up and attention. “[…] and this is by the male soldiers perceived to be terribly ridiculous when the female soldiers do. It’s not the same authority (as male soldiers) […]”. –F7.

The section above concerns female soldiers gendered experiences within the SAF, this section concludes that female soldiers do perceive an ‘awareness’ of their gender, which testifies to the understanding of the male/masculine norm within the SAF. The female soldiers gendered experiences also indicated that discrimination or questionable incidents based on gender still occurs within the organization.

3.3 Challenges of the SAF’s work upon gender equality

The following section of this chapter seeks to present challenges of the work upon equality within the SAF. Detected challenges will be presented according to two themes: Attitude towards work upon equality and Practical issues of the work upon equality. One main matter could symbolize the practical challenges of the work upon equality within the Lv6: The work upon equality is organized with a top down-approach resulting in a lack of implementation and therefore changed approach towards it.

3.3.1 Attitudes towards the work on equality within the SAF
The prevailing approach and attitude towards the SAF’s work upon gender equality is essential to take into consideration when examining and evaluating the SAF’s work upon equality. This is central to take into consideration as the approach and attitude towards gender equality could testify towards if the SAF’s work upon equality really affect the general soldiers approach towards the gender relations and equality. The approach and attitude is also relevant to examine, as it is what sets the agenda of norms and notion for the individuals working in these contexts which obviously affects individuals ability to “[…] develop and contribute with their full potential to the SAF’s operational capability” (Försvarsmakten 2015) which, as stated in the chapter above, is the SAF’s strive with their work upon equality.

There seems to be a positive approach towards the matter of the SAF’s working pervading with questions of gender relations and equality, although the matter seems,
according to some interviewees’ have gone too far, which in their turn has affected their approach towards the matters importance. F2, a female soldier in a leader position, described the approach towards Resolution 1325. Resolution 1325 is foundational within the SAF’s policy documents; the resolution directs the SAF’s work, view and vision upon matters of equality and is described as following:

“The Swedish Defence Forces alignment:
The Swedish Defence Force’s equality-integration and implementation of the resolution 1325 contributes to reach the governments political objectives and is a requested approach and method both national and international” -Försvarsmakten 2015

One interviewee, a female soldier holding a leading position within the SAF, and whom got the guidelines for her work concerning gender equality from the head quarter of the SAF, testified to the problematic aspects of the pervading top down-approach said:

“Sometimes it’s hard to know how they are thinking, who writes these documents (on equality), it’s like they’re sitting up in...an office, and think a lot. But that is not how it works out here, and then sometimes I go against what the policy documents says, now I sound like I am really cocky but... because I know better!” –F2.

She continued describing what perceived nagging of the resolution 1325 and the lack of implementation had resulted in and described the situation of the approach towards the resolution 1325 as following: “It has almost become a joke, “yes and then we have to include 1325 in the order as well” and then you laugh”. She also highlighted the approach towards another essential matter within the SAF’s work upon equality, namely NOAK. A network for women within the SAF, these meetings had according to F2, a female leader, earlier been termed as ‘witch meetings’ where ‘women got together to complain about nothing’ and even if she thought this was better now, the current attitude among the soldiers was explained as negative, she said that it was common for the male soldiers to nag about the meetings, she said: “We have to get rid of the view upon NOAK as something annoying, ‘oh are they going to an NOAK-meeting again....oh no.. ’ [...]”. –F2. Above detected issues of the top-down approach of the work upon equality is illustrated in the figure 3.0 below with the aim to clarify where the perceived issues arouse.
Figure 2.0: The factor of uncertainty

Figure 2.0 presented above provides not only challenges of the SAF’s work upon equality but rather also an example of how power exercised is affected by what Foucault terms as the ‘factor of uncertainty’. The expected outcome could be A, but result in B, un-expected outcome. One could with a point of departure in this understanding argue that the challenges of the work upon equality illustrate an example of exercise of power and its outcome.

The negative attitude towards the work upon equality is also supported and brought up by some of the interviewed female soldiers (F1 and F7), saying that even if they are now only a few, there are still men at powerful positions who don’t think women should be soldiers, which affects the general attitude towards questions concerning women within the SAF. Even if the approach among the female soldiers towards actions taken for equality differed mostly based on how they perceived their own situation, there seemed to be a common understanding of the need of the work upon equality, while two male soldiers stated that they perceived the organisation Lv6 as equal. They said: “[…] it’s a nagging, I think it (equality) is obvious […], according to me before I started here (in the military) was that here there are real people who are nice and one should not make difference of men and women”. –M4. The same soldier also said “[…]
is a lot of nagging about equality, like its supposed to be built in in policies and stuff. I don’t think it is needed”. A male recruit, who had just conducted his GMU (basic military education) said “[…] there are not many professions that are as equal as the SAF, from what I’ve experienced. But what I’ve seen is extreme; I haven’t seen it anywhere else. That it is so equal.” –M5

The female leader, quoted above, continued by also criticising how the work upon equality supposed to be implemented, she described how it felt like it often resulted in that they said: “‘and then we have to take (resolution) 1325 as well’, and then instead of it being integrated in the organization, you’re like ‘yeah but lets put a girl there and its all good’ ‘check’”. –F2 She continued by stating: “Equality easily becomes a ‘girls issue’, it has to be a made an organizational issue” –F2.

A female soldier who had been working within the SAF for less than one year and therefore had most of her experiences from the GMU (Basic Military Education) brought up the issue of the information (namely policy documents) not reaching the people “on the ground”. “[…] and somewhere on the way down it (information concerning the policy documents) disappears because there’s someone who doesn’t perceive this as important. And it’s hard not to think its some guy. Your like; it has to be a boy who stops it. It cant be a girl!?”. –F7.

F2, a female leader within the SAF, also expressed the importance of the ‘gender-less’ soldier through pointing out that documents earlier had declared easier tests (systematised affirmative actions) for female soldiers with the aim to increase the percentage of women within the SAF. She declared this as counterproductive, referring to, what she termed as a ‘common understanding or prejudice’, of that some female soldiers gain positions or educations due to their gender rather than their competence. She referred to this as ‘contra-productive’ as these easements resulted in a worsened attitude and approach towards female soldiers and their competence.

The major finding in the section above concerns issues of soldiers attitude and or approach towards the SAF’s work upon equality, the main issues seems to concern the perception of actions taken in favour for gender equality. Actions taken highlighting
3.3.2 Practical issues of the SAF’s work towards equality
During the interviews, two main issues that the interviewees’ perceived as related to the question of equality were identified. A practical issue commonly brought up by the interviewees’ was the issue of separate changing rooms. Separate changing rooms were directed from the SAF’s national management, judging from the interviewees’ this issue had been extensively discussed and there seemed to be various opinions of the matter. A female leader, F2, criticized this extensively saying: “[…] I want to be in the changing rooms with (all of) my colleges and chit-chat after practice and such. And the girls say the same thing! That they miss out on the good talks, then like, the soldiers who has separate changing rooms, then 20 guys go into one, and the only girl goes to ‘her’ changing room, then she’ll miss out on the spontaneous debriefing. And then, she will feel excluded just because we follow some legislation. I mean, the law, I understand it! But it does not work like that here!” –F2, a female leader.

Other female soldiers (F1 and F7) also criticised this and testified to the feeling of exclusion as a consequence of separate changing rooms. F7, a newly recruited female soldier said: “Like, at GMU, it is like, totally different group feeling when you change together, but you know, some changing room –talk, chilling, hanging out and such” –F7

Concerning the issue of the uniform being “designed by men, for men”, the boots have not been available in smaller sizes and even if they now are, they are still made for men. The uniform, and primarily the uniforms worn in war is far from adapted for feminine bodies, M6, a male soldier in a leading position identified this as one of the things that had to be done, he said: “reform the uniform system, today we have underwear, bra, tampons and pads. But on the other hand, boots, uniforms and combat-vests, it’s men who make them, for men. […]” –M6. The matter of bad fitted uniforms was also brought up by several of the female soldiers, among others, F7 said: “Like the uniform, it’s horrible!”.

Pregnancy was brought commonly brought up intercepting practical issues and reviling a notion of women changing notions and sacrificing more (than men). There seemed to
be an understanding of pregnancy as an obstacle for women’s career opportunities. On the contrary, several of the interviewees’ argued the SAF to be one of the workplaces where men and women share the parents insurance equally.
Chapter 4: Analysis

The following chapter seeks to present an analysis of the previously provided findings of this research. The existence of gendered norms within the military is generally a common understanding although the understanding of to what extent and how these are constructed and the outcome of these differ. This analysis seeks to provide a view upon these matters from the analytical framework existing from a theorisation of the concepts: power and gender.

4.1 Gender neutrality: a power play?

One could from the previously presented findings argue that the SAF’s view upon and strategy to reach gender equality is through gender neutrality. The view upon gender neutrality within the SAF implies that a soldier’s gender is not relevant as it is the individual competence that determines whether a person can become a soldier or not, this view results in the strategy of providing all individuals with the same conditions with the aim to provide the same opportunities to develop within the SAF for both female and male soldiers. One can understand SAF’s view and strategy for equality through policy documents for gender equality as well as the soldiers view upon essential characteristics, i.e. ‘what makes a soldier’. Examples of the gender neutral approach are, among others, when the subject of differences between male and female soldiers were touched upon, the common approach was doubtful, rather highlighting the phenomena of the ‘gender-less’ soldier. The ‘gender-less’ soldier refers to the perceived irrelevance of gender within the SAF. Findings of the importance and the functioning of the perceived gender neutrality were dominated by male soldiers. The male soldiers commonly stressed the centrality of the concept of ‘gender neutrality’ within the SAF through highlighting the fact that female soldiers were not considered different than the male soldiers. As the interviews presented in the findings show, there was a perception of an irrelevance of gender by both female and male soldiers (F1, M5).

The issue of the SAF’s view upon and strategy of gender neutrality, from a feminist theoretical point of view, is that men and women are socialised into being neither raised, treated or given the same opportunities in the society today. The matter of men and women not having the same opportunities in the society today results in that prejudices and power structures are brought, reproduced and maintained also within the
SAF. The consequence of this is what was presented under the sub-heading of female soldiers experiences of gendered norms, notions and equality. Examples of these experiences were for example when male soldiers took a female soldiers clothing, making her walk naked in the hallway, another example of this was also presented during the findings concluding a female leader describing more nagging against female leaders than male leaders. The same female leader also concluded how female soldiers have to refute prejudices and how female soldiers often are judged as a group, as presented in the findings chapter, several female soldiers testified to the feeling of having to refute prejudices based on their gender (F8, F7).

The matter of male soldiers perceiving gender neutrality as functioning within the organisation, is contradictory to the above presented female soldiers gendered experiences. The differences of perceptions based on experiences of gendered norms and notions between female and male soldiers could be argued as testifying to the hypothesis of the SAF being a masculine organisation, where female soldiers have to adapt to the prevailing norms and notions in order to ‘pass’ as gender neutral. As presented in the findings, two soldiers testified to the idea of female soldiers subjecting or adapting to the masculine norms within the SAF and one soldier stated how the female soldier in their group was “[...] more of a man than 50% of the other guys in the groups” –M3. Female soldiers also testified to this notion of female soldiers adapting to the masculine norm, as presented in the findings, F1 perceived her self to ‘reduced her feminine interests’.

Referring to both the theory of gender and masculinity (Connell 2008) but also in accordance with Foucault’s (1977) concept of power as constantly changeable due to its dependence on actions taken and discourse by individuals, argue that gender roles and it’s order within and between is (inter) changeable. Furthermore, arguing gender neutrality as a view of and strategy for gender equality, could also be seen as an expression/exercise of power, an expression of power through silence. Silence as an expression of power was introduced by Foucault (1977) stating that the oppression of gender (and sexuality) is based on silence. A silence of matters such as gender injustices and/or differences implies it’s non-existence, which creates gender as ‘nothing’ to understand, say or know. However, the gender neutral approach taken by the SAF
towards gender equality prohibits the change of gender roles and its order as the 
strategy could be seen as resulting in an ignorance of possible differences between the 
binary genders.

One could therefore, with a point of departure in this, argue that the strategy of 
gender neutrality within the SAF is one way for the SAF to maintain the prevailing 
norms, notions and structures, through silence of gender differences. The silence of 
gender differences enables a maintenance of the unequal gender-based power relations 
as they are acknowledged, thus non existing. If the SAF would acknowledge gender 
based differences and power structures, one could, from the theory of gender as socially 
constructed, argue the SAF as being able to change norms of gender as gendered norms 
are perceived as (inter)changeable. In other words, through making gender and its 
differences visible within the SAF, they could be able to reconstruct the gender roles 
and creating a more equal armed force. To summarise, the above presented analysis 
concludes that the construction of the concept of the ‘soldier’ within the SAF is 
intended to leave the impression of gender neutrality. However, without acknowledging 
differences in pre-conditions and gendered power relations of norms and notions, the 
soldiers within the SAF will not be able to overlook gendered prejudices and structures 
in which they have been socialised in before their involvement within the SAF.

Is gender neutrality a power play? According to these findings, the military norm cannot 
be assigned as masculine, although the silence of male soldiers adapting to certain 
norms or notions could be understood as supporting the traditional understanding of the 
military norm as masculine. In other words, if female soldiers perceive a need to adapt 
to prevailing norms, while male soldiers do not, one could argue this as an indicator of 
that it the adaption is restricted to female soldiers and femininity as the ‘gender neutral’ 
norm associates with the masculine norm in which men are socialized into by the 
society. Gender neutrality could thus be argued to be one way of taking responsibility 
and actions towards gender equality although without changing prevailing norms and 
rather working towards making the ‘masculine’ norm the prevailing ‘general’ norm. 
Constructing the masculine norm as ‘gender neutral’ could be done though creating the 
(masculine) environment within the SAF available for women (if adapting) and creating 
an environment where pointing out differences between sexes is contradictory to gender 
equality.
The interviews showed a negative attitude towards actions taken to favour gender equality detected among the soldiers. F2, for example described how resolution 1325 almost had become an internal joke as the heard quarter always nagged about how it had to be implemented in every document, practice and education. The same attitude also applied to other matters such as NOAK, a network for female soldiers within the SAF. The negative attitude towards actions taken acknowledging gender differences, even if taken to favour gender equality, could be argued to testify of soldiers being socialised into the idea of gender neutrality and therefore perceiving highlighting gender differences as contradictory to gender equality. To summarize, setting the notion of the masculine norm as a gender neutral norm, could be argued to create the ones questioning gender neutrality as opponents of gender equality, as gender neutrality is perceived as gender equality.

As discussed earlier in this study, power can be exercised through discourse and further more through silence and dichotomisation. A discourse, constructing female soldiers and ‘their’ needs as ‘the other’, could be argued to be one way of reproducing and maintaining prevailing gendered norms and notions (Connell 2009). Through positioning female soldiers as something ‘else’, one also dichotomises the binary genders through the indication that there is something (in this case male soldiers) who constitutes the norm (Gemzöe 2003). The positioning of female soldiers as the ‘other’ was detected through, among others, the notion of female soldiers contributing with something else (than men), female soldiers needed longer pauses (than men), female soldiers needed ‘special’ underwear and clothing in smaller sizes (than men) and the issues changing rooms were enabled through giving women ‘another’ changing room. Female soldiers testified to the notion of female soldiers need to refute prejudices which implicitly indicates an ‘awareness’ of their gender as the ‘other’. A female soldier said: “You are aware of your gender. Like, you are aware of that you are different [...]” –F9.

The above presented analysis of this research concludes two central matters, firstly, the fact that the SAF has developed a strategy for gender equality which associates to great extent with what could be termed as ‘gender neutrality’. Their vision of gender equality is, according to this research, a gender neutral environment where men and women are able to develop to their full potential, regardless of gender. This vision’s consequence is
a strategy for gender equality which implies treating men and women the same, and
more or less, not taking gender into consideration rather focusing on the individual
capacity. The gender neutral vision and strategy could be viewed upon as positive,
however, with a point of departure in feminist theory, it is problematic not to include
gender and it’s different pre-conditions and power relations within and between the
binary genders. One could argue the female soldiers gendered experiences (presented in
the findings) as testifying towards how the SAF’s gender neutral approach does not
succeed in terms of eliminating gendered prejudices and injustices. Secondly, it is
relevant to reflect upon why the SAF has chosen to view gender equality as gender
neutrality. This analysis concludes how one, from a perspective of Foucalt’s (1977)
theory of silence as an expression of power, could perceive the SAF’s strategy of gender
neutrality as an expression of power. In this case, power implying that the SAF
distances themselves to gendered differences, both concerning pre-conditions from the
society, but also biological differences. The silence enables the SAF to reproduce their
traditional norms and notions, although terming the prevailing norms and environment
as ‘military’ thus, gender neutral, rather than ‘masculine’. Through re-branding the
‘masculine’ norm as ‘military’ and gender neutral, one enables a continuance of
traditional norms although opening up the environment for female soldiers whom then
are expected to adapt to the prevailing (military/gender neutral) norm. The female
soldiers’ adaption to the prevailing ‘military’ norm is although, as presented in the
findings chapter, perceived by male soldiers as an adaption to a masculine norm, rather
than gender neutral.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The fact that essential characteristics presented by the interviewees’ appear as gender neutral could be argued to be a successful outcome of the SAF’s work upon re-constructing the concept of the ‘soldier’ in favour for reducing the norms of the hyper masculine ‘warrior’, traditionally perceived as existing within armed forces (Hearn 2013, Connell 2008 et al). However, re-defining what makes a good soldier and stressing the matter of the gender neutral soldier does not seem to reach gender equality. Female soldiers’ gendered experiences testify to a continuance of discriminatory or questionable incidents. Defining the vision of and strategy for gender equality as gender neutrality, implies a reluctance of both biological and socially constructed differences between the binary genders. Even if one could argue the matter of the SAF not claiming an eradication of general gendered norms as a goal, one could, from this research’s theoretical framework upon ‘gender’, argue gender neutrality as a problematic strategy as gendered norms and notions are inevitable to ‘leave outside the walls’ of SAF.

From a feminist point of view, signs of the SAF’s striving towards ‘re-termining’ their prevailing military masculine norm as gender neutral is problematic. Re-termining, or re-defining, the masculine norm as gender neutral would imply an reinforcement and maintenance of norms of masculinity as ‘invisible’, which is problematic due to two main matters. Firstly, the SAF is a influential and powerful public institution, and if they would succeed with re-defining their internal culture as gender neutral, even if still dominated by masculinity, then this could affect the general view upon, understanding and notion of men and masculinity as the norm, implicitly strengthening women and femininity as the deviant ‘other’. Secondly, through ignoring the matter of the SAF trying to reinforce the notion of masculinity as the (gender neutral) norm, one also counteracts the feminist scholars major work upon highlighting masculinity and the patriarchal structures as gender un-neutral.

What seems to be a challenge for the SAF in their work towards an equal armed force, is the problem of balancing their work between the gender neutral strategy, although without ignoring social and biological differences between the binary genders. An acknowledgement of gendered differences is in this research perceived as essential due
to the need to highlight differences in order to be able to address. The ignorance of
differences and injustices between genders also, according to feminist theory of gender
as socially constructed, closes the door towards changing injustices within the
prevailing gender order.

This study concludes that the SAF has put major work into their work upon gender
equality, and that the SAF has succeeded concerning communicating the importance of
gender equality within their organization. They have also constructed a vision and a
strategy for gender equality which also seems to have been successfully communicated
to their employees’. Above stated findings testify towards that soldiers within the SAF
are ‘gender conscious’ thus, that they are aware of among others, injustices between
gender and gender roles (masculinity/femininity). The ‘gender consciousness’ is, as
stated in this study’s introduction, essential for soldiers participating in peacekeeping
missions as the aim is to bring sustainable, long-term peace. What although could be an
obstacle for Swedish peacekeepers is, once again, the vision of gender neutrality. If
Swedish soldiers would approach other contexts with the gender neutral vision and
strategy, one could argue that they are not aware of prevailing relations and power
structures within that context. Despite this, this study also concludes that there are
challenges of the work upon equality within the SAF. Main challenges detected in the
analysis is the matter of the ignorance of gendered differences due to the SAF’s gender
neutral strategy and the lack of internalisation of gender equality among the male
soldiers. Ignoring gendered differences, one, as previously mentioned, reduces the
possibilities to work with challenges concerning gender differences which implies that
differences such as injustices will be reproduced and thus maintained. In terms of
soldiers participating in peacekeeping missions, the maintenance of gendered injustices
could be argued as an issue due to the international image of Sweden as an equal
country. In other words, if soldiers from the SAF are implicitly perceived as gender
neutral or equal due to their nationality, then the soldiers ‘gendered’ behaviour and
relations could be implicitly understood as gender equal, reproducing and maintaining
gendered injustices.

One could from this study question whether the strategy of gender neutrality is the best
way of accomplishing gender equality, this study shows that even if there are visions
and strategies well formulated and synced with the resolution 1325, and even if they are partly implemented, there are still incidents indicating that there still remains challenges upon socializing the soldiers into their gender neutral vision. One could although question however it is possible for the SAF to create a gender neutral organisation on their own. One would although from a feminist point of view, state that the vision of gender neutrality within the SAF is dependent on gender neutrality within the Swedish society generally, which is not very likely to happen in a viable future.

For future research on sexual transgressions by armed forces during peacekeeping missions, one could conduct ethnographic studies on norms of masculinity and gender relations within the armed forces, this as ethnographic studies could enable the researcher to receive a deeper understanding of internalized norms which might not be possible to detect through only interviews. Apart from this, what needs to be studied in future research is how the fact that Sweden has such a influential and powerful institution, dominated by men and masculinity norms, affects Sweden as a society, but also how it affects the view upon masculinity, femininity, gender and equality. If the SAF would succeed in re-branding their internal culture and norms as gender neutral rather than masculine, if, and if so, how would this affect Sweden’s view upon and definition of gender neutrality?
References


Spanning, Å. Fns fredsbevanade aktioner. Ur: Världspolitikens dagsfrågor 67:1. Utrikespolitiska institutet


1.7 Reference list of interviewees’

F1: A female soldier between 20-30 years old.
The interview was conducted the 19th of April in Halmstad.
F2: A female soldier holding a leading position within the SAF, between 40-50 years old.
The interview was conducted the 19th of April in Halmstad.
M3: A male soldier between 20-30 years old.
The interview was conducted the 20th of April in Halmstad.
M4: A male soldier between 20-30 years old.
The interview was conducted the 20th of April in Halmstad.
M5: A male soldier whom at the lime conducted his basic military education, between 20-30 years old.
The interview was conducted the 20th of April in Halmstad.
M6: A male soldier holding a leading position, between 40-50 years old.
The interview was conducted the 19th of April in Halmstad.
F7: A female soldier representing in the network for female soldiers, NOAK. Between 20-30 years old.
The interview was conducted the 19th of April in Halmstad.
F8: A female soldier holding a leader position, between 30-40 years old.
The interview was conducted the 20th of April in Halmstad.
F9: A female soldier holding a leader position, between 30-40 years old.
The interview was conducted the 20th of April in Halmstad.