

The Military and Motherhood: Identity and Role Expectation within Two Greedy Institutions

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Abstract : The military is a predominantly male-dominated organisation that has entrenched hierarchical and patriarchal norms. Since 1975, women have been allowed to continue active service in the Australian Defence Force during pregnancy and after the birth of a child; prior to this time, pregnancy was grounds for automatic termination. The military and family, as institutions, make great demands on individuals with respect to their commitment, loyalty, time and energy. This research explores what it means to serve in the Australian Army as a woman through a gender lens, overlaid during a specific time period of their service; that is, during pregnancy, birth, and being a mother. It investigates the external demands faced by servicewomen who are mothers, whether it be from society, the Army, their teammates, their partners, or their children; and how they internally make sense of that with respect to their own identity and role as a mother, servicewoman, partner and as an individual. It also seeks to uncover how Australian Army servicewomen who are also mothers attempt to manage the dilemma of serving two greedy institutions when both expect and demand so much and whether this is, in fact, an impossible dilemma.

Keywords : women's health, gender studies, military culture, identity

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