

Infiltrating the Adult's Table: A Realistic Look at Women's Participation in National Security

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"Fighting is essentially a masculine idea; a women's weapon is her tongue." –Hermione Gingold

"I'm furious about the women's liberationists. They keep getting up on soapboxes and proclaiming that women are brighter than men. That's true, but it should be kept very quiet or it ruins the whole racket."
-Anita Loos

Introduction

The numerous gender-related problems in the field of security are deeply intertwined. A woman's access to individual security and freedom is directly related to her ability, limited ability, or inability to participate in decision-making roles at the national security roundtable. Her ability to have a voice at this roundtable is directly related to her ability to confront or conform to the male-dominated linguistics and expectations all too prevalent in the defense community.

Many feminist international relations scholars argue that women are incredibly deserving of a voice in the national security dialogue. These are the same scholars that continually write about feminism in relation to human security, peace, and conflict resolution. While they are undoubtedly revolutionary in their ideas about bringing feminism to the national security roundtable through the voices of female participants, they are also dangerously optimistic. In realistic fashion, I will argue in this paper that the human security and peaceful solutions to conflict that the aforementioned scholars so vehemently argue for can only be achieved through the allowing of such concerns deemed "feminine" to be heard at the highest levels of national security. Short of an overthrow of our patriarchal system (now that is being optimistic), women must proceed to penetrate the glass ceiling of defense by playing with the boys on their field. This assertion may suggest that women temporarily strip themselves of their feminist position, but only because men, particularly male defense officials, are unwilling to negotiate with feminists. We might even be considered the "domestic terrorists." In the end, after

permeating the national security field, feminists will regain their voices, and they will have allowed for other scholars and officials, both male and female, to discuss peaceful solutions- without peace having a negative feminist connotation.

For far too long, women have confined themselves to the home, to the field of human and local insecurity, and to the children's table. While, like child-rearing, measures taken to fight human insecurity are of utmost importance, these measures are completely ineffective if the national security system is male-dominated and war-focused. Feminists need to quit perpetuating a system in which men do the damage (both literal and otherwise) and women clean up the mess. Women's issues, including that of human security, are a part of the lowest rung of the security hierarchy. In order for the voices to truly be heard, women must divert their attention to the top of the hierarchy. We must infiltrate the adult's table.

Literature Review

While there has been a mass of scholarly literature on the presence of women in developmental and peacekeeping roles, as well as writings on gender, war, and individual security, few authors thus far have sought to investigate the presence, or lack thereof, of women at the national security roundtable. The predominant authors on this topic not only highlight the lack of female participation, but also offer possible causes of this problem including the view of women as domesticated figures, the disownment of all ideas and concerns deemed "feminine," and the "linguistics of testosterone." Despite the progress being made by a handful of dedicated scholars, an overarching problem lies in the lack of attention given to the issue of women in national security. While the

devastating effects of individual insecurity are to be stressed, they are but mere consequences of the barring of women from the “adult’s table.”

In his article about feminist security theory, “Gender, International Relations, and the Development of Feminist Security Theory,” Eric Blanchard contributes to feminist international relations literature by noting the plight of women in the security field, with particular focus on their absence from national security dialogue. Though he also discusses the neglect of individual security, and particularly that of women, he seeks to critically assess the state and incorporate women into the war room. His observations are that the subjugation of women to domesticated figures, coupled with their frequent lack of military experience, allows the creation of the idea that the national security roundtable is “no place for women.”

Blanchard’s discouraging but realistic annotations may be in part due to the masculine environment analyzed in Carol Cohn and Sara Ruddick’s “A Feminist Ethical Perspective on Weapons of Mass Destruction.” In this chapter about antiwar feminism, Cohn and Ruddick emphasize the affect of national security on human security while highlighting the continued exclusion of women and feminine ideology in the creation and execution of security policy. In addition, they point out that “just wars” are not necessarily “justified” as war is rarely a last resort and there is a failing distinction between combatants and noncombatants. As a result, national security policies can lead to increased human insecurity for civilians, who are often times women. This insecurity can come in the form of lack of appreciation of women’s work, physical assaults on women, and everything in between- all of which is undoubtedly and intrinsically linked to national security policy, a highly male-dominated field. Cohn and Ruddick further

analyze this problem by making the important notation that this intensely masculine environment of national security decision-making not only excludes female participation, but also makes irrelevant any security concerns deemed “feminine,” including human impact and morality- two top concerns for antiwar feminists.

As another author noting that state decision-making, the military and the field of international relations all remain exceedingly male-dominated, J. Ann Tickner compares feminist theory to that of traditional international relations theory and discusses the new trends in security and the implications thereof on security theory in her article “Feminist Responses to International Security Studies.” In calling for the expansion of feminist security theory, Tickner supports a more in-depth analysis of critical security studies, namely the societal concerns in war, as opposed to conventional rationalist theory, which focuses on security solely at the state level. Furthermore, Tickner raises the concern of whether or not states, with their deficiency of female leaders, are succeeding in their roles as providers of security, or if wartime negotiation among states creates an excuse for the neglect of women’s security.

Taking a slightly different perspective on the absence of women from the “adult’s” table, Carol Cohn focuses primarily on the language and linguistic connotations in the overtly masculine field of nuclear armament and defense in her article “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals.” In this unique article about the “linguistics of testosterone”, if you will, Cohn describes and labels the language of weaponry and defense as “technostrategic,” or bland and desensitizing so as to make the listener ignorant or unaware of the harsh realities of nuclear conflict. She goes on to identify the blatantly sexual connotations behind much of the phraseology of her

counterparts, including the discussion of “missile envy” and the “loss of virginity” of nuclear states, as was the example with India. Additionally, she states that there has been a domestication of many nuclear terms, as exemplified in the naming of missile systems as “PAL,” “BAMBI,” and other friendly terms. Nevertheless, it is Cohn’s discourse on the continuing presence of sexual innuendos in the defense community that warrants considerable attention. In the end, she suggests that it is this language that further promotes the insensitivity of the nuclear community to so-called “feminine” concerns and the poor representation of women in the nuclear field.

In a later writing by Carol Cohn, “Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War,” the discourse of masculinized linguistics in national security and defense is continued. Cohn further explores not only the powerful language of national security, but also the powerful effect of this language on the creation of an inhospitable working environment for women. She notes the association between human concerns and the weak- both of which regarded as highly feminine. In advancing her argument about the linguistics of war, Cohn suggests that epithets not only degrade women, but also homosexuals and any other persons deemed unmanly, contribute to the problem of moral or human concerns being blocked from the national security roundtable. In the labeling of an enemy as a “pussy” or “fag,” with the purpose of using these epithets to emasculate the adversary, it is clear that “feminine” concerns are not welcome amidst the highly “rational” and technical language of men at the “adult’s table”- if, for nothing else, for the fear of being perceived as the weaker party. Cohn’s writings, however, beg the question of what is determined “weak” and what is determined “rational.” If all things associated with women are conceived of as being “weak” and “irrational,” then perhaps it

should be the aim of feminists to disassociate concerns of human or moral stature in the hope that they may become available for discussion in the field of national security.

It is exactly this position that Janet Radcliffe Richards advocates for in her chapter entitled, “Why the Pursuit of Peace is No Part of Feminism.” In calling for a separation of the two areas, Richards notes that as a result of the current patriarchal system, any concern associated with feminism will be automatically discredited, despite its merit. She further notes that an important and often overlooked aspect of feminism, extremely pertinent to the relation between feminism and national security, is the inclusion of men. Richards states that while the participation of women in national security is paramount, “what is done for women” is just as important as “what is done by women.”

This need for women, and voices advocating peaceful solutions, in the war room is further exemplified by women and militarism scholar Cynthia Enloe in the chapter entitled “Masculinity as a Foreign Policy Issue” in her book, *The Curious Feminist*. Like Cohn, Enloe blames the disassociation of women with the field of foreign policy and defense on the hyper-masculinized nature of national security and the perceived importance to appear “tough” to other states. It is this feminization of all things “weak” that prevents women from entering and contributing to the national security dialogue, both at the grass-roots, and perhaps more importantly, decision-making levels. In discussing the example of the U.S. war on drugs in Colombia and the preoccupation of U.S. officials of not being “soft” on this issue, Enloe states that while women are active in the pursuit of peace, “. . . their valuable ideas are being drowned out by the sounds of helicopter engines and M16 rifles (128).”

The aforementioned literature encompasses the main writings on this topic to date, yet one needs to look beyond this literature, to other related works, to analyze not only what is being said, but what is *not* being said. In their article entitled “Women Waging Peace,” Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa argue for a more inclusive security by the engagement of women in the peacekeeping process. Calling upon their connections and expertise, Hunt and Posa stress that women are vital to the implementation of security, particularly at the individual level. What the two women fail to address, however, is the relationship between individual and national security. While it may be true that women are driven by peace, that women have played active roles in peacekeeping movements and grass-roots organizations, and that they hold untapped knowledge of their respective regions, the efforts of conflict resolution and peacekeeping will be doomed without the presence of women in decision-making roles during conflict. Instead of allowing male-dominated regimes to plan and carry out war while feminist scholars encourage the participation of women in the cleaning up of the disaster that results from this conflict, perhaps women ought to be involved in the diplomacy process in order to prevent the militarized, masculinized mess that calls for peacekeeping.

As another scholar on women and security, Val Moghadam accentuates many of the same points as Hunt and Posa in her article, “Globalization, Militarism, and Women’s Collective Action.” She also promotes the involvement of women in collective action and activism and specifically questions issues of human insecurity, including whether or not the definition of security is the same for both women and states. She notes that quite clearly it is not and that this crucial nature of security, human security, is often overlooked or neglected by administrations. Though making a perfectly valid argument

in the study of women, individual security, and peace- this is not a paper on individual security and peace, and Moghadam, like Hunt and Posa, has overlooked a critical aspect of the security hierarchy: women's involvement in national security. While she calls on administrations to address gender concerns in conflict, she fails to recognize the overarching problem lying in the officials to be "addressing" these concerns: they are all men.

Although a select few authors have broken new ground on the problem of the absence of women from the "adult's table," including the causes of this problem and the implications thereof, there remains many unanswered questions, unsolved problems, and unexplored territory. While the existing literature on this topic highlights and investigates the problem, it also sheds light on the voids in current feminist international relations writings. Simply put, the lack of literature on this specific topic has severely hindered the public's and administrations' awareness of the problem in addition to preventing progress from being made. As feminist scholars continue to write in idealistic tone about women in peacekeeping and activism, they neglect attempts to surpass the glass ceiling of national security. Only by urging the involvement of women in all aspects of security, most importantly national security, can women begin to be taken seriously, break down gender and linguistic barriers, and provide insight to the male officials at the "adult's table."

A Linguistic Issue

For a reader of this paper to be under the impression that the real problem in the current administration of national security is solely the lack of women at the adult's table

is a mistake. The problem instead lies in the linguistics of security, and, more specifically, the distinction between “masculine” or “manly” concerns and those deemed “feminine” or “womanly.” As Carol Cohn has demonstrated with her extensive literature on national security and nuclear dialogue, there is an ever-present fear of states, officials, and citizens alike of appearing weak to the enemy. While this fear is undoubtedly intertwined with societal gender roles and a stereotypical view of women, it does not recognize the few women that have permeated the glass ceiling of national security, those that have secured their place at the adult’s table (Cohn 1987, 2000). Although these women, for the most part, have succeeded in proving themselves to “the boys,” what have they really done to change the security atmosphere? Have they secured a place for women among the upper ranks of nuclear and security policy, or have they merely conformed to the predominant masculinist standards?

The answers to the aforementioned questions seem obvious. A quick respondent might note that because we are still in war with Iraq, and because we still have no international goal or policy of nuclear nonproliferation, let alone disarmament, that female leaders in national security have in fact done nothing more than toughen up to play nuclear games in the war room. The actual answer, however, is much more complex. Women simply act as a median to enact a revolution of sorts against patriarchy. Current female leaders in national security are in actuality too few in number to be analyzed as potential revolutionaries for security change. The adult’s table needs more women- not because women bring peace, but because women, in their numbers, are capable of overturning a patriarchal system that disallows for the voicing of *male* officials of peaceful solutions.

In her writings, Janet Radcliff Richards has argued that “peace is not a feminist issue.” To include it as one serves to not only de-emphasize the importance of peace in our patriarchal systems but also serves to alienate men from the concept of peace. As a whole, the consideration of various issues as “feminist” only delineates their significance and likelihood of being addressed. For the purposes of this paper, however, focus will be placed on the feminization of peace. It is clear that peace needs to be addressed as an issue of humanity, and not a concern solely of feminists- only then can peaceful solutions to war and national security receive proper consideration in times of conflict and insecurity. The elimination of this view of peace must first begin with the breakdown of the segregation of male and female concerns. While there are some war-related issues, notably those dealing with human security and civilians in conflict that demand a certain amount of gender awareness- it is when that so-called “gender awareness” reaches the door of the war room that stereotypes and separates spheres are created. Gender sensitivity, while necessary in situations in which women are victims, is nothing but detrimental when applied to their involvement within the higher rung of national security. Female leaders in national security are anything but victims- they are educated, they are powerful, and they can be ruthless- and therefore, they should not be treated as such. The involvement of women at the adult’s table is, in my opinion, the only way to give peaceful solutions the attention they deserve- be it through the supposed innate pacifist nature of women or through the ability of women’s presence to allow more voices, including those of pacifist men, to be heard. Regardless of potential goals with respect to peace, it is clear that so long as it is feminist voices calling for it, it will not be addressed with seriousness. While the women of Greenham Common, or the women involved in

many peace-seeking feminist organizations around the world, may have the best of intentions, their efforts are only retracting in our ability to reach a more peaceful world (Richards 1990).

The next question that arises is how to advocate for peace without making it a gendered issue. The answer is ridiculously simple: Work with men! The inclusion of men in peace advocacy and activism is not merely recommended, but is necessary. The only way to incorporate women (and “feminine” ideas) into the field of national security is to display to men and male officials that the inclusion of women will not in any way harm their manliness. It may be stated as being common knowledge that even some of the most educated and open-minded men squirm at the mere mention of feminism. While this is highly unfortunate, it is unlikely that anything short of a major overhaul of patriarchy will change their attitudes. Likewise, the only way for men, specifically male defense officials, to consider peace as a security option is to gender neutralize it. Scholars may debate for the better part of their careers about whether or not women are more naturally prone to peaceful solutions- they may or may not be- but so long as women are assumed to be so, there must be a clear and distinct divide between the world of feminism and the concept of peace (Richards 2000).

Women and Security in Academia

The connection between concepts of peace, human security, and development, among others, and women may not only be the result of feminist activists and civil society, but also a result of the writings of female international relations and security scholars. While the writings by female scholars on the lack of human security in times of

war, as well as ways to develop and maintain it, are innumerable, attention to the inclusion of women in decision-making positions affecting conflict and interstate relations is notably lacking- just like the presence of women themselves. Authors that have directly addressed this issue, along with the issue of the over-masculinized nature of national security and war, are few enough to count on one hand- with the leader being without a doubt Carol Cohn. While Cohn's writings have most definitely created a dent in the way in which women and the security field as a whole is viewed- she is but one voice in a sea of scholars dedicating their careers to the involvement of women in low-level, grassroots peacemaking and maintenance. The inclusion of women at this level is crucial in its own form, and I by no means intend to discount it, but the achievement of individual security is entirely dependent on the achievement of national security. Why should women continue to subject themselves to the dominant voices of men- in the field, in the war room, and in academia?

Through their continued writings on the aforementioned topics, female scholars are further inhibiting the ability of women to be taken seriously in the national security. First, these scholars are bridging the ideas of peace, non-conflict, and humanity with women's issues and feminism. While these ideas are typically seen in a positive light by women, as was mentioned above, in a heavily patriarchal society and government administration, a connection of this sort only serves to discredit arguments of peace. Second, through the inaction of the vast majority of female international relations scholars, the international community is given the idea that not only should women not be afforded a seat at the adult's table, but that they are too preoccupied with the children's table to even notice their open seat, or opportunity. With complete respect to

problems of individual insecurity, wartime gender-based violence, and lack of development, more female scholars need to write about national security and demonstrate to their male counterparts that in addition to their compassionate concern for human security, they have also earned their much-deserved seat at the adult's table of national security. A balance of sorts is needed. Yes, they may be women and feminists, but they can still play with the boys.

A Call For Action

Despite the simplicity of blaming the problem of a hyper-masculinized national security dialogue on men, a predominately male administration, and patriarchy as a whole- the problem is equally (if not more so) a result of error and inaction by women. We must stop blaming men and patriarchy for the lack of opportunity we so often discuss. In actuality, the opportunities to change stereotypes, policies, and the international political environment exist- we simply do not take advantage of them. Thus far, I have singled out feminists and female security scholars for their hindrance to a more peaceful national security dialogue- but what about students of international relations? Female citizens? The foremost thing that students of international relations can do to combat this problem is not follow in the footsteps of their academic predecessors. The place to start is to disprove the traditions notions of women's studies held by their male peers and professors by writing about national security, defense policy, nuclear war, and other topics traditionally, if unofficially, reserved for men. As was mentioned before, striking a balance is key- the continued writing on development and individual security is strongly encouraged, but it should not constitute all of an emerging female scholar's

work. In stressing the need for women and female voices at the national level of foreign policy decision-making, female scholars, feminists, and students of international relations can all help women gain status at the adult's table in addition to allowing for more "feminine" ideas to be heard and considered.

Although patriarchy is the most notable contributor to our highly masculinized national security roundtable, and should receive a substantial amount of the blame, from a woman's perspective the only way to correct the situation is to take the matter into our own hands. We need to take action not by asserting our power in feminist movements and organizations, because they are among the lowest of concerns in the international hierarchical structure, and not by pouring all of our intellectual capabilities into the world's social and local conflict-related problems. We have been honored by many for our "maternal" instincts, while at the same time discredited by others for our "emotional" tendencies. What we may or may not bring to the adult's table via biology should not be the focus of our involvement. We should not cry for peace and an end to wartime violence, particularly that against women. We should not because that is not the framework within which we are working. In order to have any influence whatsoever, to participate fully, and to encourage a wealth of idea sharing, regardless of radicalism, we have to meet the men on their playing field, however muddy and unpleasant it may be. We have to (temporarily) forgo our obsession with peace in order to not seem emotional and unstable. We have to (temporarily) divert our research and writings to the greater whole of security, placing particular emphasis on national security. Perhaps we should not have to prove ourselves in this manner. But perhaps this mindset will leave us in a continued state of warfare and overall insecurity. It is time to not only address the fact,

but prove that we can play with the boys, and bring fresh, new, gender-neutral ideas, such as peace, to the table.

Conclusion

In sum, to realistically address the problem of a hyper-masculinized national security roundtable, women must infiltrate the adult's table. It is only through numbers that women can have a substantial effect on national security policy while simultaneously opening the door for new ideas and more peaceful solutions to conflict. Unfortunate as it may be, the only way for the officials in our patriarchal system to concerns issues of peace, morality, humanity, and the like, is to disassociate them with feminism, femininity, and weakness. Women must neutrally become involved, not because we are natural nurturers or because we have some indescribable maternal instinct- because these excuses are worthless and invaluable to the machismo administration, but rather because our numbers and our eventual majority will allow for a more open discussion and look at the various threats to our international, national, and individual security.

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