

# Misframing Men: The Politics Of Contemporary Masculinities

*Veterans' Narratives of "Being a Man" in the Military's Community of Practice*

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## Abstract

Aaron Belkin (2012) argues that military men must navigate "binary oppositions" (p. 3) of masculine and anti-masculine or feminine behaviors, mostly of a physical nature, to be considered good soldiers/good men. Embracing these polar behaviors of strong and weak, expressing the masculine aggressiveness expected of them hand-in-hand with the non-masculine submissiveness of obedience to superiors, creates "double binds," (p. 4) he argued. This study expands on and challenges Belkin's theory by identifying how soldiers' navigation of conflicting gendered discourses may extend beyond the body and the barracks. The study identified physical/psychological toughness and leadership and duty/respect as core masculine military discourses consistent with the literature. It also uncovered soldiers'/veterans' conflicting expectations around the expression of emotions, particularly in how they must navigate a military community of practice that breeds deep bonds and affection among men yet conditions them to defer or compartmentalize expression of emotions about their comrades. This conflict between the subjugation of the individual and the deferral of emotions may create more contradictory discourses when combat soldiers re-enter mass culture and its expectations of self-made masculinity. The study's findings raise interesting questions about how participants experience and articulate "being a man" both in the military and civilian worlds and may contribute to better understanding the difficulties some veterans face, including

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