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Mission statement: militarized discourses in women's advocacy organizations

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This article contributes to the literature on the role of advocacy groups in political processes by exploring militarism within women's advocacy organizations. Specifically, I bring together theories of banal nationalism and banal militarization to inform my analysis of pervasive militarized discourse in 13 women's advocacy groups in the state of Pennsylvania, USA. Discursive analysis of organizational websites and in-depth interviews with organizational leaders reveals that the use of militarized discourse is commonplace among state-level women's advocacy groups. I ultimately argue that advocacy groups' use of militarized discourse is inherently problematic as it reinforces hegemonic privilege and detracts from progressive organizing. I also account for the role that discourse plays in the creation of place/space (and vice versa) in my discussion of how Pennsylvania's unique political culture affects advocacy for women's rights. Grounded in feminist geopolitical work, I offer some potential solutions to militarism within political advocacy: namely a re-focusing of advocates' attention on the lived experiences of their constituents.

Keywords: advocacy; militarism; politics; discourse; banal nationalism

Fighting words: conflating policy-making and war making in the 'battle' for women's rights

'The numbers don't lie: anti-choice politicians in Washington, D.C. and the states attacked a woman's right to choose with a vengeance in 2011.' [National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) website, in reference to the 'War on Women' in the USA].

Introduction

With the USA preparing for a presidential election cycle in November 2012, many have turned their attention to all things political. Alongside popular topics such as the Supreme Court's recent ruling on the Affordable Care Act and the stagnant US economy is the Republican 'War on Women.' This catch-phrase stands for a series of conservative social policies focusing on women's health, especially with regard to women's reproductive rights (Terregrosa 2012). Far from the first women's rights group to comment on the 'war,' NARAL's quote above reflects a pervasive trend in US political life: the discursive conflation of policy-making and war making.

In this article, I raise questions about problematic aspects of militarized discourse in politics and argue that women's rights advocacy groups' use of militaristic discourse ultimately reinforces patriarchal and hegemonic socio-political processes. I ground these

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arguments through an exploration of militarized discourse in 13 women's advocacy groups in Pennsylvania. In my analysis, I draw on qualitative data from in-depth interviews with advocates as well as content analysis of organizations' websites. I utilize theories of 'banal' nationalism and militarization, feminist geopolitics, and feminist methods of discursive questioning to understand how the political space in which organizations work (re)produces militarized discourses.

I found that all organizations in the sample utilized some form of militarized language and argue that Pennsylvania's highly masculinized and hierarchical political culture is a contributing factor in advocates' propensity toward militarized discourse. I also argue that the use of militarized language and subsequent reproduction of hierarchy is inherently problematic for organizations working simultaneously within hegemonic political spaces and within communities of marginalized individuals. As Lorde (2003, 25) succinctly observes, 'the "master's tools can never be used to dismantle the master's house;"' I believe advocates should heed these words.

I begin with a brief introduction to militarization's prevalence in society and politics alike. I use theories of banal nationalism (Billig 1995) to highlight the ubiquity of militarized language in society, politics, and advocacy. I discuss usage of militarized terms in political discourse and the restrictions imposed upon organizations by an oppositional state. I outline my data collection and methods – a discourse analysis of in-depth interviews and organization websites – before discussing the research findings. I employ feminist geopolitical theory and method in my suggestions for reducing militarized discourse in advocacy. These suggestions include grassroots organizing, more communication with constituents, and raising the collective conscious of women's rights advocates regarding the problematic aspects of militarized language. Though militarized language is shaped by legislative spaces, I believe that advocates of women's rights can still progress toward its reduction or elimination.

Fighting words: militarization, politics, and discourse

There is no question that the military is, at its core, a large-scale organization dependent upon strict hierarchy and order to function efficiently (Levy 1998; Lutz 2002). Soldiers' decision-making and actions are constrained by the preferences and insight of their superiors who dictate course of action and issue focus. Though militarism and militarization are often viewed as processes unique to the military operation, many scholars point out how militarization is equally pervasive in daily life (Bernazzoli and Flint 2009). Similar to Billig's theory of 'banal' nationalism, militarization emerges in seemingly mundane or routine processes which reinforce privileges over disadvantaged sectors of society (1995). Usually, processes of banal militarism go unnoticed and, subsequently, uncontested. Enloe (2000, 2) succinctly points out that "... many people can become militarized in their thinking, in how they live their daily lives ... without ever wielding a rifle or donning a helmet." The ubiquity of militarism, combined with the banality it produces, creates a scenario in which people unwittingly engage in militarized behavior and discourse and fail to problematize its usage.

Nowhere in US culture is the reification of the militarized nation more obvious than within the US political arena. Though the United States' reification of the military is far from unique, (Dowler 1998; Eisenstein 2008; Enloe 1983, 2000; Oliver 2007; Woodward and Winter 2007), important linkages among the US military, nationalism, and politics shape the policy-making process. A country that frequently facilitates the transition from military to political leader, the US equated military prowess with political skill from its

conception when George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, was elected unanimously by the Electoral College as the first president of the USA. The strong and historic connection between politics and masculinized military prowess is further demonstrated in the United States' continued lack of gender diversity in national positions of power and overrepresentation of military veterans in US government. According to figures from the 2010 US Census and Association of the United States Army, military veterans comprise 22% of the 112th US Congress, while military veterans make up only 7% of the US population as a whole.

The conflation of military and political life is further strengthened by use of militarized language in political discourse. Political discussions are rife with examples of militarized discourse, for example: 'the fight against terrorism;' waging a 'campaign' in Afghanistan; and the military's 'mission in the Middle East.' Advocates, policy-makers, and media also refer to the 'fight against breast cancer;' the recent 'campaign for healthcare;' and an organization's 'mission' to end domestic violence. Though a women's rights organization and a military unit may seem to have completely different spheres of influence, the use of similar terms to describe the activity in both spaces reduces any supposed separation between them. As such, advocates' militarized discourse signals their adherence to and reproduction of a militarized/political hegemonic value system.

Feminist and cultural geographers have long highlighted the power of discourse in the construction, reproduction, and transformation of socio-political systems as it shapes both language and practice (Cock 1997; Henry and Berg 2006; Laclau 1994; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mueller 2008). To understand the construction and perpetuation of the state and military, one must consider discourse in terms of a performative, rather than simply descriptive, process. As discourse 'produces the effects that it names,' it delineates and reinforces socio-political boundaries between groups of individuals (Butler 1993, 2). Given that political and military bodies are largely male-dominated and inherently hierarchical, their established discursive patterns will necessarily reflect positions of hegemonic male privilege in society and politics (see Enloe 2000). These discursive patterns simultaneously reinforce masculinized socio-political hegemony and demarcate individuals' connections to political and/or militarized institutions.

As space and place play significant roles in the construction of gendered identities, political and military spaces, along with their related discourses, similarly shape and distinguish individual identities within state boundaries (Jackson 1991; Momsen and Kinnaird 1993). Discourse delineates place and identity, and it can be used as a boundary marker to distinguish insider and outsider status (Buizer and Turnhout 2011; Hakli 1998; Norwood and Monk 1987). Those working within political spaces are encouraged to adopt similar modes of decorum and discourse as a way of creating a unified political identity and sense of belonging.

In political spaces, militarized discourse also becomes a synonym, or metaphor, for political commitment and action (Eisenstein 2008). The Republican 'war on women' is a prime example of militarized discourse signalling the strength of individuals' commitment to an issue or cause. Rather than saying that conservative legislators have backed a series of anti-choice policies, progressive advocates have heightened debate and rallied support by framing these actions metaphorically as a 'full out attack' on women's rights. Framing these political activities as a 'war on women' suggests something much more insidious and systematic than a group of similar policy proposals.

Thus, advocates working on behalf of 'Othered' individuals who have been historically excluded from politics and political cultures (e.g. women and racial minorities) occupy a particularly interesting position in the US policy process. As they

forge connections between lawmakers and constituents, advocates walk the line between political insider and outsider. In so doing, advocates continually negotiate an exclusive and clearly delineated political space. When progressives (individuals actively supporting social justice and equality) and lawmakers engage within the state's boundaries, many advocates conform to dominant political rhetoric and behavior in an effort to legitimize or rectify their 'outsider' status (Best and Strüver 2000; Minkoff 1995; Saff 2001; Sibley 1992). Working directly with government officials is often discussed as an 'insider' strategy and creates a dichotomously exclusionary political space accessible by insiders and out of reach for most others (Spalter-Roth and Schreiber 1995). By mimicking the language and activity of political actors, advocates signify familiarity with the political process and establish a sense of belonging. However, as the concepts of the state and military are inextricably linked through their production of power, discourses stemming from both sources reconstitute socio-political hegemony (Enloe 2007). Though organizations' adoption of militarized discourse may be beneficial to their relationships with legislators, it is potentially detrimental to goals of reducing inequality and patriarchy.

Thus, the very organizations we might expect to counteract hegemonic politics ultimately enhance the military's ubiquity in US society through consistent use of militarized discourse. Enloe (2000, 4) warns of the problematic aspects of militarized assimilation vis-a-vis the state saying:

Without a self conscious avoidance of militarized forms of public action, the militarization of one sector of public life can generate an equally militarized response, apparently based on the assumption that the only effective response to official militarism is the militarization of dissent.

As Enloe (2000) says, dissenting individuals and organizations must consciously avoid militarized activism to avoid its perpetuity. However, when dissent itself is militarized, militarism and hierarchy are reinforced in both political spaces and the public's lives. The banality of organizations' militarized discourse simultaneously maintains and ignores the power structures of the state, thereby perpetuating inequality and reifying masculinized hierarchy.

As discourses often reflect organizations' operational and policy goals, militarized discourses also signify the fact that groups may be focusing on strategies for survival rather than on strategies for equitable representation. Given that complex issues often affect the most disadvantaged members in society (Strolovitch 2006, 2007), militarized discourses that emphasize 'stream-lining' issue agendas or 'choosing policy battles' based on political expediency reinforce privileges associated with more advantaged subgroups of an organization's general constituency. Although militarized discourse is problematic for everyone associated with an advocacy group, it significantly affects those already disadvantaged in the socio-political system. As the effect(s) of militarized discourse are simultaneously produced by, and for, inhospitable legislative spaces, the interests of those already advantaged by the political system are more likely to be emphasized through advocacy.

Data collection

The data for this study come from a combination of in-depth interviews completed with the executive and policy directors of women's rights organizations advocating at the state level in Pennsylvania and a discourse analysis of these organizations' websites. I focused exclusively on women's organizations in Pennsylvania due to proximity, familiarity, and connections with Pennsylvania state politics, and time and monetary limitations. I chose to speak with the executive and policy directors of organizations because they are primarily

responsible for developing and overseeing the organization's policy agenda and are familiar with the organization's constituents. The 13 organizations included in the study all have an interest in affecting state policies on women's issues, although some provide services in addition to advocacy work.

Knowing that I would be working with a limited sample, one of the most difficult aspects of the data gathering process was defining exactly what constitutes a 'women's organization.' As feminist scholars point out, using the term 'women's interests' or 'women's organizations' is problematic as it implies universal female experiences, essential characteristics, and that 'women' have common interests to be communicated through organizations (Beckwith 2005; Burns 2005; Mohanty 2003). Though there may be overarching issues that women of various ethnicities, sexual orientations, and classes agree upon, designating an issue such as education or healthcare as a 'women's' issue is both limiting and overly simplistic. As such, my definition of 'women's organizations' was broad; in an effort to include organizations with marginalized constituencies, the term 'women's organization' applied to any group that explicitly prioritized issues of relevance to women and girls in its title or descriptive information. For example, Organization D (to protect the anonymity of organizations, I employ letters as pseudonyms throughout the article) describes their policy work in the following way:

Our mission is to raise money and public awareness to fight for and achieve women's equality, safety, self-sufficiency and reproductive freedom through women-centered funding, advocacy and education. (Description from Organization D's website)

Given the lack of a comprehensive list of women's organizations in Pennsylvania, I used a combination of lobbying registrations, snowball sampling, and referrals from personal contacts within the state legislature to comprise a list of organizations.

I employed a guided interview questionnaire that allowed respondents to answer in an open-ended format; it is important to note that I did not ask organizational leaders directly about their choice of language or issue framing. Thus, the conclusions of this study are based on notable rhetorical patterns that emerged from verbatim coding of each interview. By coding interviews in their entirety, I could more easily track patterns of militarized discourse throughout the course of a conversation with an advocate rather than focusing exclusively on portions of the interview that concerned their issue agendas only.

Discourse analysis

I also completed discourse analyses of all of the sample organizations' websites, looking specifically for any usage of militarized language. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a particularly effective way to disentangle the influence of militarized language on the attention advocacy groups pay to issues of equality, difference, and representation given its focus on "... issues of power and justice and the ways that economy, race, class, gender, religion, education, and sexual orientation construct, reproduce, or transform social systems" (Billig 1999; Fairclough 1995; Nichols 2002; Peace 2003; Rogers et al. 2005, 368). Also, CDA "... focuses on how language as a cultural tool mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge" thus making it a particularly relevant method to examine militarization in advocacy groups (Rogers et al. 2005, 367).

Groups' websites are often used to attract membership or constituency support through monetary donations or activism, making the information included on the site integral to organizational maintenance and accomplishment of advocacy goals. Ultimately,

organizations' websites convey vital information about where the group positions itself in relation to other advocacy organizations, the community, and the legislative assembly. As such, any trace of militarized discourse on groups' websites conveys information to the public about their effectiveness as an organization, how they choose to engage in advocacy and represent constituents, who their main constituents are, and the overall goals and purpose of the group's existence.

In both the interview coding and discourse analysis, I characterized the following as 'militarized' language: references to combat (attack, fight, conflict, and battle); discussions of fear or safety (protection and alerts); competition (winning/losing a campaign); weaponry or tactics; and any outright discussion of the military or military issues. Though organizations' discussions of missions or mission statements constitute less obvious examples of militarized language, their taken for granted presence warranted further exploration. This phrase is used in virtually every type of organization from non-profit advocates to corporate giants; a search for the term 'mission statement' in Google books produced over one million hits with many references for books on starting non-profit organizations and/or businesses. After some searching, the origin of the phrase 'mission statement' remains unclear but there are many connections to religious and political work involving travel and military endeavors.

Mission accomplished? Advocates' use of militarized language

In early drafts of this article, I compartmentalized organizations into binary categories based on their discursive tendencies: militarized and non-militarized. Upon further advice and subsequent revisions, I came to realize that binary categories were not only problematic, but unfitting for what I discovered in my analysis. I found that militarization is omnipresent, making it difficult to categorize an organization as completely militarized or non-militarized. By forcing organizational rhetoric into two categories, I oversimplified an inherently complex process of advocacy. Given that I found evidence of militarized language in all of the organizations in my sample (the mission statement), it was a rather arbitrary decision to discount some instances of this while exaggerating the effects of

Table 1. Organizations and militarized discourse mentions.

Organization name	Online	Interview	Total
Organization A	1	1	2
Organization B	2	3	5
Organization C	6	11	17
Organization D	4	3	7
Organization E	3	14	17
Organization F	4	5	8
Organization G	2	1	3
Organization H	0	2	2
Organization I	1	0	1
Organization J	2	4	6
Organization K	2	19	21
Organization L	0	14	14
Organization M	3	0	3
Totals	30	74	106

others. The interviews especially demonstrate that though some organizations are more militarized than others, no organization is completely free from the effects of militarization discourse.

By far, the most common form of militarized language was an organization's mission statement connoting its course of action to accomplish a goal. Though 'mission statement' may not be the most problematic of militarized references, it is often the first piece of information one receives about a group and is one of the first things organizations of all types are encouraged to create. Thus, 'mission statement' serves as a primary example of banal militarization; this term with former military connotations is now so commonplace in organizational and political life that the reference is not only ubiquitous but virtually required. In other words, this low-level usage of militarized discourse is so common among advocacy groups that 'mission statement' may not be considered a particularly violent or militarized term, thereby reinforcing the notion of banal militarism in organizing communities.

Table 1 demonstrates the differences between each organization's use of militarized discourse in interviews and online, respectively. While some organizations frequently use militarized language, others hardly use it at all making it more appropriate to discuss militarization as a matter of degrees. Though many organizations limit their use of militarized discourse, the last column in Table 1 shows that four groups used a combination of 10 or more militarized terms on their website or during in-depth interviews. However, it was much more common for organizations to use militarized language in interviews rather than online, as demonstrated by the 74 total militarized references in interviews compared to 30 total militarized references online. Table 2 shows the breakdown of organizations' militarized discourse into categories of five, further demonstrating the discrepancy between online and conversational usage.

Overall, a slim plurality (46%) of organizations made between zero and five mentions of militarized discourse on their website or in the interview. Again, the prevalence of militarized discourse in interviews was much higher than online; 12 out of the 13 organizations made 5 or fewer militarized references online compared to only 9 out of 13 making so few references in interviews. No organization made more than 10 militarized references online while four groups used over 10 references during interviews.

Advocates' tendency to use militarized language when verbally describing their organizations' work demonstrates the proliferation of banal militarization in advocacy processes. In conversation, advocates may unconsciously rely upon discursive norms that equate political prowess with military might, thus describing their organization's work in militarized terms to emphasize its effectiveness or their commitment to the cause. When forced to limit descriptions to few words on a webpage, advocates are more likely to edit these militarized terms out of their repertoire. Considering the extensive levels of militarization within the US political process, it is no wonder that advocates have learned

Table 2. Militarized discourse – number of mentions.

	Online	Interview	Overall
Number of Mentions			
0–5	92% (12)	69% (9)	46% (6)
6–10	8% (1)	0% (0)	23% (3)
11 +	0% (0)	31% (4)	31% (4)
Total	100% (13)	100% (13)	100% (13)

to mimic militarized speech in discussions regarding their policy efforts. Given that militarized language is often edited out of organizations' websites, advocates may recognize some problematic aspects of violent or war-like discourse. However, when describing their policy work in less visible settings, advocates rely upon militarized discourse common to the political process. Regardless of whether advocates consciously use militarized language in conversations, its presence undoubtedly demonstrates processes of banal militarization within advocacy.

For 4 out of the 13 groups where militarized discourse was highly prevalent (10 or more examples of militarized discourse), the most frequent references were of 'fighting' in issue 'battles,' 'protecting' women or their rights, and 'winning' women's 'freedom' or particular 'campaigns' for issues. Like others, these organizations also framed their policy goals in terms of a 'mission' or 'mission statement,' reinforcing the pervasiveness of this particular phrase among advocacy groups. For example, the program director at an organization in Philadelphia (Organization C) combined discussions of 'mission statements' with further militarized discourse, saying: "... it's part of the **mission** to serve poor women through ... service and navigating the legal system but, to a greater extent, **fighting** punitive welfare measures" (boldface emphasis added). This example is particularly interesting as the program director uses hegemonic discourse to highlight the work the organization is doing to help poor women. In the same conversation, she also discussed the challenges Organization C faced as it moved through the court system 'protecting' women's reproductive rights.

Discussions of 'protecting' women or keeping their rights safe were strikingly common, and the policy director of Organization D went so far as to say that the group wants to "make women safe in their homes and on the streets" when discussing issues of domestic violence. In addition, consider the following examples:

Our **mission** is to raise money and public awareness **to fight for** and achieve women's equality, **safety**, self-sufficiency and **reproductive freedom** through women-centered funding, advocacy and education. (Description from Organization D's website, bold face emphasis added)

Organization E believes that neither the United Nations nor any other international organization should have authority over the United States in any area. We **also believe the United States has the right and duty to protect and secure our national borders**. (Description from Organization E's website, boldface emphasis added)¹

Rape is a crime. It is motivated by the need to control, humiliate, and harm. It is *not* motivated by sexual desire. **Rapists use sex as a weapon to dominate others**. (Description from Organization F's website, boldface emphasis added)

The references to *protecting* women's rights and safety (assuming these are physical, mental, or emotional rights/safety) and framing rape in terms of weaponry reflect Enloe's (2007) observation that the mobilization of fear is inevitably connected to the mobilization of support for the military (2007). Peppering speeches with terms such as 'homeland security' and discussions about how the government is 'keeping you safe,' the G. W. Bush administration frequently used fear mongering as a way to mobilize and maintain civilian support for the US 'war on terror.' It is incredibly problematic that women's advocacy organizations use similar language about 'keeping women safe' and how rapists use sex as a 'weapon' when advertising policy goals on their websites. Given that these websites contain public information and are intended to mobilize support through member donations or voluntarism, it is interesting that women's organizations choose not only militarized language but fear-mobilizing, militarized language to attract support.

The most obvious example of militarization within organizations dealing with issues of sexual assault and domestic violence is the acronym for Organization G which is ultimately pronounced ‘war.’ In discussions with other women’s organizations, they referred to the organization as ‘war’ rather than the full title, indicating that this abbreviation was pervasively used by groups in the network of women’s organizations. The other organization lobbying on behalf of rape victims (Organization F) used examples of issue ‘campaigns’ on their website and also discussed rape in terms of sexual weaponry. Domestic violence and sexual assault advocacy groups may reproduce social, political, and economic inequalities when they elicit militarized discourse in responses to gendered fear of violence. When advocates reinforce gendered hierarchy through militarized discourse, they also contribute to the dominance of male policy-makers’ patriarchal, protectionist, and values both inside and outside the confines of the state. Advocates’ unconscious or unrecognized use of militarized language indicates the pervasiveness of military culture in all aspects of society. Though women’s rights activists may purposely use this language, their failure to recognize problems associated with its militaristic origins reinforces militarism’s banality and cultural acceptance.

The logic of militarized discourse

Ultimately, the effects of political space on advocates’ discursive strategies need to be considered. Beyond the expectations of government actors, restricted or hostile political spaces require different organizational behaviors when compared with more welcoming or open political atmospheres. In restricted political spaces, organizations must choose their words wisely as the discursive framing of an issue may make or break its reception. To further understand how the political atmosphere motivates advocates’ adoption of militarized language, one must consider several characteristics of Pennsylvania’s legislative atmosphere. It is important to consider the state’s ideology, gender and racial composition, history of support for women’s issues, and the implications of advocacy in the state capital. As mentioned previously, legislative spaces virtually require adherence to particular codes of conduct heavily influenced by norms of masculinity and power. These legislative spaces quite literally “impart day-to-day modes of behavior influenced by the routines, procedures, and decorum associated with the government sector” (Lewis 2012, 291). Given that all levels of US government have been dominated historically by white, upper-class, males (Conway, Ahern, and Steuernagel 2005), to be within a political space is to adhere to behavioral and discursive norms based upon masculinized hierarchy.

Legislative institutions demonstrate patriarchal governmentality as they impart hegemonic codes of conduct upon citizens and advocates alike (Foucault 1979). These codes subsequently influence individuals’ own perceptions of appropriate behavior within the walls of government and legislators’ perceptions of who belongs and who may not (Huxley 2008). In fact, some argue that governmentality extends far beyond the physical walls of government, permeating people’s lives in the entire capital city (Legg 2007; Lewis 2012). Thus, advocates working within political communities appropriate militarized political discourse simply as part of a masculinized, militarized, socio-political culture (Eisenstein 2008). Again, the pressure to conform is particularly great for people seen as outsiders (e.g. women) in male-dominated political life as they must prove themselves legitimate and their concerns worthy of lawmakers’ attention.

Women’s rights organizations are disadvantaged by Pennsylvania’s political culture and legislative composition. The state has a history of hostile legislative efforts to restrict women’s rights (e.g. *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern PA v. Casey*), a strong

conservative presence in the state legislature, and few female lawmakers.² Having worked in the Pennsylvania state legislature for several years, I can attest to the fact that describing the political atmosphere as an ‘old boys’ network is an understatement. Female and minority legislators are outnumbered in the state legislature, and the resulting patriarchal policy production demonstrates these inequalities. Male legislators with whom I interacted often had very little knowledge of women’s organizations in the state, further marginalizing activists from mainstream political life. The combination of state legislators’ ignorance and prejudice against women’s interests enhances a highly masculinized, restricted political space.³

Of course, female legislators can also be hostile to women’s rights organizations the same as male legislators can be supportive; thus, attributing legislative hostilities to gender alone is a gross oversimplification. However, literature in political science suggests that, regardless of party identification, female legislators are generally more supportive of women’s issues than their male counterparts (Canon 2005; Hawkesworth 2003; Mansbridge 1999), so it is reasonable to expect that as women’s legislative representation increases, so will the support for women’s advocacy groups in Pennsylvania. However, Pennsylvania political space is competitive, male-dominated, and conservative. Thus, advocates’ use of militarized language is in keeping with the Pennsylvania statehouse’s masculinized and hierarchical political culture.

As militarized state actors marginalize minority groups, particularly women, via gendered processes of exclusion, the potential for women’s rights advocates to reduce or eliminate militarism within the state seems bleak (Davis 2008; Franzway, Court, and Connell 1989; Siim 1988; Walby 1990; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). Thus, the crucial question of ‘who speaks for whom,’ eloquently raised in feminist geopolitical work (Dixon and Marston 2011; Dowler and Sharp 2001), is mirrored in the complex interplay among advocates, legislators, and the state. When advocates unwittingly, or even consciously, employ militarized language to advance social-justice goals, can they still be considered representatives of marginalized groups? What steps could advocates take to reduce or eliminate militarism within politics? For whom are advocates speaking with militarized language: for disadvantaged individuals, for privileged policy-makers, or for both?

Grounding advocacy, reducing militarism?

Although the idea of the state as a patriarchal institution is not new, we still have much to learn about the role advocacy groups play both inside and outside its boundaries. Women’s rights advocates are viewed by politicians and the public as ambassadors for women’s rights, yet their use of militarized discourse reconstitutes and perpetuates existing socio-political hierarchies (Tickell and Peck 1996). Given these connections, considering activity outside of the formal ‘state’ may be an effective way for activists to reduce militarism in their policy work. Women’s places in politics tend to be minimized (Norris 1985; Randall 1987) relative to male colleagues; however, this does not mean that women have no role in the recreation of political orders. Rather, their agency is often hidden from the ‘traditional’ gaze of both geopoliticians and political scientists (Dowler and Sharp 2001, 168; Enloe 1983). If advocacy leaders and legislators alike were to consider the political implications of individuals’ actions further outside of governmental spaces, might this lead to the reduction of militarized language within politics?

Dowler (1998) and other feminist geopolitical scholars call for the deconstruction of public and private space to reveal a new type of political solidarity that does not premise political legitimacy upon state boundaries. A renewed focus on everyday experiences

rewrites women and other marginalized groups back into conceptualizations of conflict and politics (Dowler 1998). There has been an intense effort by feminists and feminist geographers to reengage the subjectivity of marginalized individuals by focusing on how concepts of space and power are experienced and embodied in their daily lives (Dixon and Marston 2011; Jenkins 2008; Hyndman 2001). Echoing the classic rallying cry of second-wave US feminism, ‘the personal is political,’ scholars conceptualize political activity in terms of both public and private life (Held 1989; Kofman and Peake 1991; Leftwich 1984; Millett 1972).

By focusing on the everyday, feminist geographers suggest that local political change might transform politics, conflict, and action on a global scale (Dowler 2012; Dixon and Marston 2011; Fluri 2009; Sharp 2007). They argue that everyday life serves as the foundation for political tensions, especially regarding the relationship between social inequalities, globalization, and militarized political processes (Staeheli and Kofman 2004; Wright 2010). Through their attention to the everyday, feminist geographers offer alternative conceptions of politics and globalization that exist independently from formal state actors and institutions (Hyndman 2001; Dowler and Sharp 2001). These alternative conceptions are rooted in the experiences, knowledges, subjectivities, and identities of people marginalized by traditional political cultures. As such, alternatives to militarized political hierarchies could be revealed through advocates’ similar attention to women’s daily lives. Advocates’ focus on constituents’ daily lives would reposition marginalized individuals into the center of political spaces and discourses, potentially altering militarized discourse and subsequent reproduction of hierarchy (Sharp 2003). Typically, marginalized concerns and actions would become legitimate political demands should advocates consider the activity outside of formal state institutions and boundaries. Just as a feminist geographers provide alternatives to globalization through their focus on women’s lived experiences, this focus might also provide alternatives to militarization.

In fact, many scholars provide reason to believe that advocacy groups’ focus on the lived experiences of their constituents outside of restricted political spaces could reduce militarized discourse (Benn and Gaus 1983; Bowlby, Foord, and McDowell 1986; Cooke 1989; Dowler 1998; Urry 1981). Through their explorations of the everyday, scholars reveal war’s harmful effects on the lives of individuals already oppressed by political states. Undoubtedly, female civilians and soldiers suffer atrocities on the front lines of conflict. However, women on the ‘homefront’ also suffer during times of war. As politicians redirect spending toward the war effort, they slash the budgets of social programs that have an overwhelmingly female clientele (Chew 2008; Na’im and Wagman 2004).

As such, war and its proliferation in politics reinforce socio-economic injustice for low-income women and heighten the pressure on advocacy groups to rectify their marginalized political positions. However, these effects often go unnoticed or unacknowledged in traditional political spaces. A heightened focus on the lived experiences and needs of women outside of political spaces renews attention to the damaging connections among militarism, politics, and socio-economic privilege. By renewing attention to women’s lived experiences of poverty at the hands of a militarized government, advocates may feel compelled to reduce militarism within their own organizations and activism.

The proliferation of militarism in political processes does not *prevent* activists working within the state from taking part in antimilitarist activism. There are conscious steps every activist can take to reduce militarism in their lives and policy work. In fact, there exist several advocacy groups acting to reduce the influence of militarism in their

organizing and personal lives. In addition to their programs for racial minority women in the San Francisco Bay area, the Women of Color Resource Center (WCRC) in downtown Oakland promotes a small antimilitarism project related to the banal militarization of women's fashion. Similarly, organizations in Turkey and Israel call attention to examples of banal militarization in their daily lives while a prodemocracy activist in South Korea questions militarized practices within her own organization (Enloe 2007; Kwon 2000). Though I have shown militarism's prevalence among my sample of organizations, it is important to recognize that some groups were undoubtedly less militarized than others. Could discrepancies in militarism be due to a more grounded organizing approach that emphasizes constituents', rather than legislators', daily lives? To answer this question, I discuss briefly the structure and advocacy focus of the less-militarized advocacy groups.

There was significant variation in organizing styles among the women's groups ranging from hierarchical models which placed the majority of decision-making power in the hands of formal group leaders to constituent-centered, egalitarian models which emphasized the input of organizational constituents rather than leaders. For example, the executive director of an organization that provides maternity and pre-natal care to low-income women (Organization A) says:

We have a community advisory committee which is more neighborhood-based. We have discussions about our policy agenda at our neighborhood advisory committees ... with people who are not generally clients of the program but they are neighborhood women who are concerned about our issues.

She identified 'all child-bearing families' as the organization's main constituents but that there is a significant contingent of low-income, minority women who live in the area and comprise the organization's constituency. Similarly, the policy director of another organization (Organization B) serving low-income, urban, minorities highlighted the extent to which staffers include constituents in decision-making processes:

I would say the constituents guide us because we really hear from them and that's the advantage of having an organization that does both direct service and policy work that we hear a lot from people and so I, as the CEO, will also ask the staff that's [sic] working directly with people to talk to me, to tell me what's happening with people, to tell me what they're hearing. (CEO, Organization B)

Particularly interesting about Organization B (beyond the extent to which it involves low-income women in organizing) is the language it uses on its website to describe advocacy projects. When describing various advocacy programs, the organization highlights community-level organizing with a 'peaceful' rather than militarized focus: "**Project Peace facilitates** parenting groups and in-home case management within the community" (Organization B website) and "**The Self-Sufficiency** program helps low-income families **build paths out of poverty** and encompasses outreach, training, education and research" (Organization B website). This organization did not describe its activities in terms of a 'mission statement' and described policy goals and controversies as 'projects' and 'conversations' about policy rather than fights or battles over issues. Maintaining strong connections with constituents, rather than legislators, seems to decrease usage of militarized language as the organization is slightly removed from policy work (relative to other groups which do not combine advocacy with direct service provision) and immersed in the experiential realities of disadvantaged women. Whether intentional or not, this organization was by far the least militarized and grounded their policy foci in the experiential realities of low-income, minority women. Thus, the case of Organization B

suggests that decreasing political militarism may be best facilitated via organizations with strong connections to individuals outside of government and increased attention to constituents' daily lives.

However, the transition from hierarchical, state-focused organizing to grounded, constituent-based models may be easier said than done as abrupt changes in political tactics or policy goals often lead to advocacy groups' demise (Minkoff 1999). That said, working from a bottom-up rather than top-down models of organizing may be the key to reducing militarized/hegemonic discourse. This type of grounded organizing requires extensive resources and may be difficult for advocacy groups to maintain. It is easier for organizations to use more hierarchical modes of organization and, potentially, more militaristic language in order to maintain membership support and/or ties to legislators (Acker 1995; Ferree and Martin 1995; Gamson 1975; Goldstein 1999; Kollman 1998; Rothenberg 1992). This is especially true for organizations working in a resistant or hostile legislative environment, such as that exhibited by the Pennsylvania state legislature. When advocacy groups are faced with the choice of failing to maintain the organization *or* using militarized discourse in order to gain/maintain support, group leaders would usually choose the latter. Thus, organizations may be unlikely to completely abandon formal advocacy strategies in favor of more grassroots activism.

Advocates' inability to overhaul their organizing strategies does not prevent them from taking alternative steps toward reducing militarism's influence. Advocates' recognition of the problematic aspects of militarized discourse may encourage their development of an 'oppositional consciousness' (Sandoval 2001) where they purposefully adopt peaceful and anti-militarized language in an effort to oppose the forms of hegemonic masculinity and oppression rife within militarized power structures. Thus, less-militarized organizing is decidedly possible, albeit difficult, in a restricted political space. The use of militarized language by all types of Pennsylvania women's advocacy groups signals the fact that it is a pervasive part of the political culture within the state. However, this does not mean that advocates cannot escape militarization's effect; in order to do so, however, they must first recognize its presence and potentially detrimental repercussions.

Conclusion

Without asking group leaders directly, one cannot fully understand the reasoning behind the use of this language (whether unintentional or tactical), but it is safe to assume that many advocacy leaders fail to recognize the problematic aspects of framing egalitarian policy proposals in language that reflects a hierarchical militarized standard. Advocates need to consider the meaning behind seemingly mundane discussions of rapists' use of sex 'as a weapon' or the pronunciation of their organization as 'war' as this language ultimately reinforces violent discourse and undermines progressive organizing. As theories of banal nationalism and militarism demonstrate, the 'mundane' is far from inconsequential.

What does the use of militarized language ultimately mean for representation through advocacy groups? Until the use of militarized language is challenged, even progressively leaning citizen organizations will perpetuate hegemonic discursive strategies that rest upon hierarchical, masculine, and oppressive epistemologies. Obviously, an organization must demonstrate effectiveness to constituents, legislators, and donors in order to survive and if survival means the adoption of militarized, hegemonic discourse, many organizations may be willing to assume that risk despite the cost(s). When the price of

organizational survival involves discursive and organizing strategies that reinforce hegemony and contribute to the marginalization of disadvantaged groups, one wonders about the level of benefit these advocates provide.

Organizations' uncontested use of militarized discourse, even for purposes of survival, is problematic. The use of militarized discourse undermines organizational solidarity and the achievement of policy goals that seek to reduce multifaceted systems of oppression. Harkening back to early US second wave feminism, I believe that consciousness raising and renewed attention to constituents' daily lives may be effective strategies to reduce banal militarization among women's advocacy organizations. Ultimately, drawing attention to the connections between discursive strategies of organizing and the perpetuation of hierarchical power structures through militarized language could be the solution to the spread of militarism in political organizing. Questioning the *status quo*, satisfying a feminist curiosity, and considering the importance of 'mundane' discursive processes may be the first step toward a new, 'liberated,' form of women's advocacy.

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Notes

1. This is the only organization to explicitly prioritize national sovereignty and protection of national borders as an issue on its agenda.
2. Pennsylvania ranks 44th out of the 50 states with women comprising only 14.6% of the state legislature – 20% (10/50) of the state Senate, 13% (27/203) of the state House, 11% (2/19) of the Members of Congress, and no women holding a state-wide elected office like Governor or US Senator (Information from the Center For American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University).
3. The hostility expressed by state legislators is not an anecdotal incident; it was mentioned in many interviews with women's rights advocates working in the state. Many advocates said that it was a struggle to survive in the state and that they faced frequent backlash or opposition from conservative state legislators.

Notes on contributor

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

Declaración de misión: los discursos militarizados en las organizaciones de promoción de los derechos

Este artículo contribuye a la literatura sobre el rol de los grupos de promoción de derechos en los procesos políticos analizando el militarismo dentro de las organizaciones de promoción de los derechos de las mujeres. Específicamente, unifico teorías de nacionalismo y militarización banales para informar mi análisis del extendido discurso militarizado en 13 grupos de promoción de los derechos de las mujeres en el estado de

Pensilvania, EE.UU. El análisis discursivo de sitios web de las organizaciones y de entrevistas en profundidad con líderes de las organizaciones revela que la utilización del discurso militarizado es común entre los grupos de promoción de los derechos de las mujeres a nivel estatal. En última instancia argumento que la utilización del discurso militarizado por los grupos de promoción de derechos es inherentemente problemático ya que refuerza el privilegio hegemónico y actúa en detrimento de la organización progresista. También doy cuenta del rol que el discurso tiene en la creación del lugar/espacio (y viceversa) en mi discusión de cómo la cultura política única de Pensilvania afecta la promoción de los derechos de las mujeres. Basándome en trabajo geopolítico feminista, ofrezco algunas posibles soluciones al militarismo dentro de la promoción política de los derechos; esto es, un reenfoque de la atención de los promotores sobre las experiencias vividas de sus constituyentes.

Palabras claves: promoción de derechos; militarismo; política; discurso; nacionalismo banal

任务宣言：女性倡议组织中的军事化论述

本文透过探讨女性倡议组织中的军事主义，对倡议团体在政治过程中所扮演的角色之文献做出贡献。我特别结合平庸国族主义与平庸军事主义的理论，形构我对美国宾州十三个女性倡议团体中盛行的军事化论述之分析。针对这些组织网站的论述分析，以及对组织领导的深度访谈，显示出使用军事化的论述，对州层级的女性倡议团体而言非常普遍。我最终将主张，倡议团体使用军事化论述的本质是具有问题的，因为它强化了霸权式的特权，并且背离了激进的组织方式。我亦将在对宾州的特殊政治文化如何影响女性权利倡议的讨论中，说明论述在创造地方 / 空间中所扮演的角色 (反之亦然)。根据女性主义地缘政治理论，我将对政治倡议中的军事主义提出一些可能的解决方案，亦即倡议者再度聚焦委托人的真实生活经验。

关键词：倡议；军事主义；政治；论述；平庸国族主义