

Women In International Security

POLICYbrief

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1325 And Beyond – Essay Contest

HONORABLE MENTION

Escaping the Closet: Women, Peace and Security Was Already Queer

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Audre Lorde, a pioneer in calling attention to the intersection of antiracist, queer and feminist advocacy, argued that “the failure ... to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower.”¹ The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, advanced in the landmark Security Council Resolution 1325, defines the problem of women’s exclusion from security discourse and challenges it legally. UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions elevated women’s voices in peace and security and recognized gender as integral, not incidental, in responding effectively to conflict. Talking about *women as women* in the Security Council was a bold political act. Because of the political progress this agenda enabled, however, the rhetorical focus on women now circumscribes an agenda that is otherwise well placed to question gendered power in peace and security.

In the next decade, the WPS agenda must shift to focus on gender. This idea is not new, and many civil society organizations (CSOs) and academics have been de facto working as if WPS were the gender, peace, and security agenda.² An effective way to push gender out of the discursive, theoretical sphere and into official policy is to queer the WPS agenda. Including queer people and discourses would make the agenda more legitimate in its claims to respond to the needs of all women. It also lays a groundwork for nuanced policy responses that

unravel gendered power binaries that underpin women’s marginalization from security spaces and their vulnerabilities to gendered violence. This essay reviews work being done to queer the WPS agenda, gives policy recommendations for how to better institutionalize this work, and argues that this work can strengthen the agenda as it moves toward 2030.

I take “queer” to be the most flexible, least prescriptive term for nonnormative sexual orientations and gender identities. I use it to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) communities as well as sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) rights discourse, without being limited by labels that do not always reflect the self-identification and experiences of queer people. For example, these labels can exclude indigenous two-spirit and third-gender identities, and they often collapse the distinct but interrelated issues of gender and sexuality. Queer language also has the benefit of disentangling sexed bodies with masculine and feminine constructs, allowing us to question gendered constructs like “militarized masculinity” without making generalizations about “all men” and “no women.”

Current Efforts

The global pushback against using “gender ideology”—that it merely represents a progressive, politically correct culture³—undermines genuine conversations about gender. Still, real progress has been made even with advocates, as many avoid

third-rail words like “gender.” For example, the most recent WPS resolution, SCR 2467 (2019) recognized that sexual and gender-based violence affects not only women and that men and boys must also have access to care.⁴ It also calls for “gender analysis,” a term that often is interpreted to mean looking only at women but which has enough flexibility so that CSOs can interpret it more broadly.⁵

Academia and CSOs, however, have made more progress. Academics such as Jamie Hagan are increasingly writing about LGBTI people within the WPS agenda,⁶ and CSOs like International Alert are also including LGBTI people in their WPS programming.⁷ Outright International, an explicitly LGBTI organization, is part of the NGO Working Group.⁸ Individual countries, too, have made progress in inclusion of queer people: Colombia’s 2016 Peace Accord included LGBTI advocacy organizations in its Subcommission on Gender, a consultation that led to explicit recognition of the unique impact of the decades-long conflict on LGBTI populations in the country.⁹ Canada, Argentina and Japan also have provisions recognizing the unique needs of LGBTI communities in their most recent National Action Plans for WPS implementation.¹⁰

Queer people have been integral to the WPS agenda from the beginning, so the challenge of mainstreaming their voices and needs is not one of invention but rather of recognition. I lay out recommendations that can be implemented at the United Nations, member states, and CSOs, and all of these policy recommendations rest on the core principle of recognition as key to normative and legal change.

Policy Recommendations

- 1. At the United Nations Security Council: Talk to, and about, queer people.** Ideally, subsequent WPS resolutions should include explicit language recognizing LGBTI populations and their unique vulnerabilities in conflict. Direct language helps affirm global norm development. It informs resource allocation within peacekeeping missions for queer peacekeepers and queer members of the host countries. Grants can be directed to CSOs already working with LGBTI populations, and incentives can be created for CSOs to develop programs that align with the funding priorities of UN country teams as part of humanitarian responses. A natural entry point for this language is in provisions that already recognize the need for psychosocial and medical resources for male survivors of sexual violence. Gender-neutral language would not infringe on discursive space held for women only, but it would broaden the space to include nonbinary and third genders. Recognizing that key voices on the Security Council have domestic agendas that are antagonistic toward recognition of LGBTI people, there are other
- 2. Within member-state governments: Talk to, and about, queer people.** Individual member states are better positioned to incorporate queer people into their domestic implementation of the WPS agenda. National action plans (NAPs) such as Japan’s contain provisions identifying LGBTI populations specifically.¹² State-level WPS policy can make important inroads in questioning military cultures that discriminate against LGBTI members of security and police forces as well as perpetuate other harmful impacts of militarized masculinities for cis and straight men and women in these forces. Gender nuance also leads to better domestic policy outcomes, such as security forces that are better attuned to queer constituencies and the gender dynamics of the populations they serve. In addition to including LGBTI language in NAPs and in the operating procedures of police and military forces, attention to LGBTI populations can also push against the siloed nature of gender-sensitive responses, moving the WPS agenda away from being seen as only the purview of women’s agencies. WPS can be mainstreamed into security institutions.
- 3. Among CSOs: Talk to, and about, local queer people.** Given the political constraints facing the UN Security Council and domestic governments, CSOs have the most latitude for pushing for a queerer WPS agenda as policy implementers and norm entrepreneurs. Not only do CSOs wield power to implement queer-sensitive policy as first responders and aid providers in humanitarian situations, they also can avoid some of the problems inherent in top-down approaches to queering WPS. For example, governments such as the United States have been criticized for “pink-washing,” that is, using pro-LGBTI rights language and funding to recreate a neocolonial power hierarchy of “good” versus “bad” states that justifies intervention to “protect” queer people.¹³ LGBTI identities, especially when used as gatekeeping identities for legal protections in Western countries, have also been criticized for perpetuating neocolonial power and leveraging queer people for political aims.¹⁴ Locally led CSO work that is tailored to specific contexts and contextually salient identities is more legitimate and more effective at addressing the needs of actual queer people.¹⁵ Bottom-up approaches,

especially when supported by and informing large international institutions, will be most effective at addressing the needs of queer people, challenging gender stereotypes in conflict, and not reentrenching global power hierarchies.

Including queer people in the WPS agenda will have tangible benefits for queer people. However, their inclusion is critical for the success of the WPS agenda as a whole. The WPS agenda is only legitimate if it responds to the needs of all women. Policy blindness to racial, ethnic and socioeconomic difference means that policies will help only those women who face the fewest barriers; sexual orientation and gender identity must be included. These issues are not exclusively queer, but attention to queer populations is an entry point for a conversation about women's multifaceted needs. An agenda that can foster those discussions will be stronger and more legitimate.

The WPS agenda questions patriarchal assumptions that have justified women's marginalization from decision-making roles and security spaces. These gendered power dynamics also underpin homophobia and transphobia. The WPS agenda has been criticized for its "add women and stir" approach¹⁶; merely increasing the number of women is insufficient to dismantle the structures that excluded them in the first place. A more radical analysis of gendered power requires questioning, for example, why security spaces are "masculine," if women must act "masculine" to gain access to political power, and why men are socially punished for acting "feminine." These questions cannot be answered fully without taking seriously some degree of epistemic queerness to power. Further, queer people have extensive experience navigating this liminal space, and their voices add important depth to good-faith efforts to deconstruct gendered power for everyone.

Today, we are more accepting of queer people than when UNSCR 1325 was written. Queer feminists have always been at the vanguard of women's advocacy, and it is time that their voices be mainstreamed in the WPS discourse. Audre Lorde verbalized the urgency of a deep commitment to intersectionality: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."¹⁷ Her words should guide a recognition of the latent queerness in the WPS agenda as it moves into the next decade.

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Author

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1325AndBeyond – Essay Contest

In the run up to the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325 (2000)) Women In International Security (WIIS) and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC launched an international essay competition *1325AndBeyond*.

WIIS and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC are proud to announce and publish the winning essays. The essays highlight innovative and imaginative ideas and strategies to achieve the objectives of UNSCR 1325 in the 2020s.

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An International Essay Competition

WIIS and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC would like to thank the members of the jury: Fauziya Abdi Ali; Joanna Barelkowska; Chantel Cole; Jessie Evans; Chantal de Jonge Oudraat; Karma Ekmekji; Jessica Grün; Layla Hashemi; Karin L. Johnston; Miriam Laux; Maxinne Rhea Leighton; Kayla McGill; Hannah Neumann; Chiedo Nwankor; Hannah Proctor; Liane Schalatek; Donald Steinberg; Dominik Tolksdorf; Anna Von Gall; Rokšana Verahrami; Karin Warner; Ursula Knudsen Latta. Special thanks to Kayla McGill and the members of the WIIS team for organizing the competition and to the Mobilizing Men as Partners for WPS (Our Secure Future) for contributing to the Honorable Mention awards.

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