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Determinants of Attitudes toward Women in the Military

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ABSTRACT In recent decades, an increasing number of women are joining the military, which has been historically a male-dominated institution. This study examined attitudes toward women in the military and the factors associated with them. The study was conducted on a random sample of 895 active service members from the Croatian Armed Forces (445 men and 450 women). The study findings indicate a moderately high approval of women in the military, but with the existence of significant gender differences. Men expressed more negative attitudes toward women in the military when compared to women. In addition, the results of the regression analyses indicated that, among men, hostile sexism, satisfaction with professional contacts with women in the military, and professional status were significantly associated with their attitudes toward women in the military. The results also showed that, among women, hostile sexism, frequency of professional contacts with other women, and educational level were significantly associated with their attitudes toward women in the military. The study findings reveal insights into gender relations in the previously unexplored socio-cultural military context, and have implications for research and practice in the Croatian military. How-

ever, this study could also contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of gender issues within NATO, and could encourage the development of new theoretical models and cross-cultural research.

Key words: gender attitudes, sexism, intergroup contact, social identity, women in military, NATO, Croatia.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, the military has been a male-dominated institution and is an example of a work environment in which women, compared to men, got the opportunity to serve in the full range of military jobs relatively late. However, in recent decades there is an increasing trend in the admission of women in most of the militaries in Western democracies (Carreiras, 2015; Moore, 2020). Despite evident progress in the admission of women in active-duty service in the national militaries of NATO members (Croatia included), women continue to be in a minority, with limited roles and fewer promotional opportunities (Egnell and Alam, 2019; Moore, 2020; Reis and Menezes, 2020). Hence, it is reasonable to ask whether the increase in women's participation has really transformed gender relations and the organizational culture of the military. Furthermore, gender prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination still hinder the professional advancement of women in traditionally male-dominated fields and institutions (Alvinius, Krekula and Larsson, 2018). Earlier research has shown that women in combat branches face numerous stereotypes and prejudices regarding their abilities, motivation, gender roles, and social and sexual behaviour (Davis, 2007; King, 2016; Weitz, 2015). In work environments where masculine qualities are highly valued, as such as in the military, negative attitudes towards women are more likely to occur (Vogt et al., 2007).

The Croatian Armed Forces (CAF) evolved in the 1990s, during the War for Independence and the state-building process. Women have joined the CAF since its establishment and made up about 5% of the total engaged military forces in wartime (Stanić and Mravak, 2012). However, the increased participation of women is primarily linked to the abolition of military conscription in 2008, and the professionalization of the CAF, which enabled all women to join active-duty service and develop a professional military career under the same conditions as men. Gender-disaggregated data shows a growing trend during the 2011-2021 time periods, from 9.7% in 2011 to 13.5% in 2021 (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2022). The wartime circumstances marked the transition process in Croatia, and made it more complex and slower, compared to other European post-communist countries (Dobrotić, Matković and Zrinščak, 2013). In the early 2000s, joining the EU and NATO was among the primary national political goals. The national laws and policies were adopted that

guaranteed gender equality in 2011, but their development, and especially their implementation, were not a priority political issue. Something similar happened in the security sector. Although the Ministry of Defense adopted a gender equality policy in 2013, its development and practice were primarily determined by national political priorities. In addition, the current political circumstances should also be highlighted. The political scene in Croatia is characterized by general radicalization and the strengthening of populist parties and movements, whose activities have the potential to seriously undermine democratic processes (Derado, 2014). The political influence of "right-wing" populists who oppose gender equality is particularly relevant. Specifically, they use different strategies to present gender equality as a dangerous and elitist ideology that threatens traditional family values and the gender division of labor (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021).

1.1. Theoretical background

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) is one of the most prominent theories that explain intergroup relations, prejudice and discrimination. It emphasizes that belonging to a particular social group affects individual social perception and evaluation of others. According to the SIT, the differences between members of their own group (in-group) are underestimated, and the differences in the characteristics of members outside of the in-group are emphasized. Therefore, there is a tendency to evaluate members of in-group more positively than members of out-group. In this way individuals achieve a positive social identity and increase their own self-esteem within their own group. Simultaneously, a discrimination against the out-group and its members occurs. *Intergroup Threat Theory* (ITT) is based on the assumption that a perception of threat is crucial for the emergence of prejudice and discrimination (Stephan and Stephan, 2000; Stephan, Ybarra and Rios-Morrison, 2009). The authors also differentiate between realistic and symbolic threats. The perception of a realistic threat refers to the experience of economic, political and/or physical threat from an out-group or its members, while the perception of a symbolic threat refers to the perception of a threat to the value system, norms, beliefs, symbols or way of life of one's in-group. The ITT is similar to the SIT because the threat to a positive group identity actually represents the essence of a symbolic threat. Besides, both theories emphasize the essential role of the perception of threat for social identity (i.e., one's in-group). However, certain dissimilarities do exist. According to the ITT, the experience of symbolic threat occurs due to the perception that the out-group threatens the specific values of one's in-group. In contrast, according to the SIT, the threat can occur due to a mere perception of differences between out-group and in-group. *Intergroup Contact Hypothesis* (ICH) (Allport, 1979) explains the possibilities of reducing prejudices among members of different social groups. Contact with members of the out-group is considered significant for forming positive attitudes, reducing intergroup prejudice and improving intergroup relations. Allport also considered that the reduction

of negative intergroup attitudes occurs if favorable conditions are met—equal status, sharing a common goal, cooperations, and institutional/authority support.

1.2. Empirical review on attitudes toward women in the military

Previous studies have confirmed that social attitudes toward women in the military have become increasingly more egalitarian over time (Szvircsev Tresch and Varoglu, 2005; Torres–Reyna and Shapiro, 2002). An increase in egalitarian attitudes was also found among military personnel (Ivarsson, Esstrada and Berggren, 2005), reservist (Vogt et al., 2007), and military affiliated students (Robinson Kurpius and Lucart, 2000). However, less approval was still observed for women in direct combat or in command positions by both civilian, and military personnel (Ivarsson et al., 2005; Matthews et al., 2009; Robinson Kurpius and Lucart, 2000; Vogt et al., 2007; Young and Nauta, 2013). A few studies of attitudes toward women in the military in Croatia showed contrasting viewpoints of Croatian citizens (Franc et al., 2010). Nearly half of the study participants showed approval for women in all military roles, while a quarter of them reported that women do not have a place in combat roles. Further, a remaining quarter of participants reported that women do not have a place in the military at all. In comparison to the civilian population, the attitudes of Croatian officers were more egalitarian—71% of them approved of women in all military roles, 25% approved of women in non-combat roles only, while only 4% of officers reported that women do not belong in the military (Smerić et al., 2008). By contrast, the attitudes of Croatian military cadets proved more traditional than the officer's attitudes—34% of cadets considered women suitable only for non-combat roles, and 8% of them reported that women do not have a place in the military (Smerić, Franc and Sučić, 2009).

Correlational studies on attitudes toward women in the military are particularly important for understanding the factors that are associated with negative attitudes and behaviour. Some studies showed that negative attitudes toward women in the military were associated with sexist beliefs (Ivarsson et al., 2005; Young and Nauta 2013). A study conducted among Swedish military officers found associations between two forms of sexist beliefs—old-fashioned and modern sexism—and attitudes toward women in the military (Ivarsson et al., 2005). The study results also indicated that older, less educated, and higher rank male officers were more likely to hold negative attitudes toward women in the military. Young and Nauta (2013) found that, among military affiliated and civilian students, old-fashioned, modern, hostile, and benevolent sexism were negatively associated with attitudes toward women in the military and with their participation in combat roles. They also documented that sexist beliefs mediated the relationship between military-affiliation status and approval of women in combat. Study conducted in the CAF confirmed a moderately high approval of hostile sexism (HS) and benevolent sexism (BS), with significant gender differences

(Trut, Sinovčić and Milavić, 2022). It is reasonable to assume that military individuals, who are high in HS, have more negative attitudes toward women in all military roles. Similarly, those who tend to idealize women and perceive them as needing protection from men (high in BS), are likely to hold more negative attitudes toward women in the military. Additional studies also indicated the association of gender attitudes with intergroup contact experience in the military (Dahl, Kotsadam and Rooth, 2021; Ivarsson et al., 2005). A study conducted in the Norwegian military showed that men's exposure to women in a traditionally male environment was associated with changes in their attitudes about mixed-gender productivity, gender roles and gender identity (Dahl et al., 2021). The authors also suggested that such attitudes are unlikely to be maintained without continued intensive exposure. The quality of the contact experience was uniquely relevant to understanding of men's attitudes toward women in the Swedish military (Ivarsson et al., 2005). Swedish officers who had more frequent contact experience with women also held more positive attitudes toward women in different military roles. Some studies in the non-military population indicated a negative association between religious beliefs and attitudes toward employed women (Galić and Nikodem, 2006). Considering that religious individuals embrace traditional values to a greater extent (Marinović Jerolimov and Ančić, 2014), it is expected that religious military members could also express a disapproval of women in the military. The relevance of religiosity in the CAF is expected due to the still dominant influence of the Catholic Church in Croatia, and its strong conservative religious beliefs towards the preservation of traditional patterns of gender relations (Dobrotić et al., 2013). Its relevance is also indicated by early estimates from the 2021 Population Census, showing that 78.97% of Croatian citizens declare themselves as Catholics (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

1.3. The present study

In general, the majority of current studies were conducted in the militaries of Western democracies, and/or among civilians and military affiliated individuals in their societies. However, there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of gender role attitudes in military settings in countries that are NATO members, and whose historical and cultural background is different from that in the Western societies. The aim of this study was to examine attitudes toward women in the military and the factors associated with them on a sample of active service members from the CAF. It could be the first important step toward better understanding of current gender relations and the impact of policy measures aimed at promoting gender equality and the integration of women in the CAF. This study investigated three distinct groups of variables: 1) socio-demographic and religiosity variables; 2) ambivalent sexism variable; and 3) contact variables. It was assumed that each of these variables would be significantly associated with differences in attitudes toward women in the military. Specifically, it was expected that age, religiosity and sexist attitudes would be negatively associated,

whereas educational level, professional status, size of place of growing up, and contact experience with women would be positively associated with attitudes toward women in the military.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted among active service members of the CAF, and the disproportionate stratified random sampling procedure was used. The separate lists of men and women were used and arranged alphabetically from the highest to the lowest rank. Due to a considerable difference in the representation of men and women, the systematic random sample interval was determined separately within each stratum. The total sample consisted of 445 men and 450 women. The male subsample comprised of 39.3% soldiers [OR-1 to OR-3 NATO rank insignia], 38.9% non-commissioned officers (NCOs) [OR-4 to OR-9], 12.1% junior officers [OF-1 to OF-2], and 9.7% senior officers [OF-3 to OF-9]. The female subsample comprised of 32.1% soldiers, 32.6% NCOs, 23.2% junior officers, and 12.1% senior officers. The average age of the study participants was 37.8. With regard to education, 65.1% of participants completed high school (74.1% of men vs. 56.2% of women), and 34.9% of them earned a bachelor's degree or higher degree (25.8% of men vs. 43.8% of women). Most participants grew up in rural areas (42.4% of men vs. 40.8% of women), and the least of them grew up in a big town with more than 500,000 inhabitants. Finally, 84% of men and 89.4% of women declared themselves as religious individuals.

2.2. Measures

Attitudes toward women in the military. The *Women in the Military Scale* (WMS; Hurrell and Lukens, 1995), with Likert type 5-point scale (1–strongly disagree; 5–strongly agree) was used. The PCA revealed that items of the original WMS scale were projected onto three latent dimensions, which showed the heterogeneity of the construct of attitudes toward women in the military. Following the item selection procedure, four items of the original scale were discarded in order to improve the homogeneity and reliability of the scale. An adapted, one-dimensional WMS–C scale was created, which had a slightly higher reliability compared to the original scale. The new scale included eight items, had good reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$), it was completely homogeneous, and the only extracted factor explained 52% of the common variance. After the inversion of the negatively formulated items data, the result was calculated as an average of the item scores. Higher result indicated more positive attitudes toward women in the military. After the adaptation, the final version of scale, which was named WMS-C, contained eight items. Cronbach's α of the WMS-C was good ($\alpha = 0.86$).

Ambivalent sexism. The *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* (ASI; Glick and Fiske, 1996), adapted for the Croatian military setting (ASI-C**;** Trut et al., 2022), with a 6-point scale (0–strongly disagree; 5–strongly agree) was used. After the inversion of the negatively formulated items, the overall results of the scales were calculated as an average of the item scores. Higher score indicated higher level of sexism endorsement. The original ASI scale consists of 22 items and has two subscales: HS and BS. The validation of both original scales in the Croatian military sample determined the one-dimensional structure of the HS scale and the two-dimensional structure of the BS scale. The new, adapted HS scale contained 10 items and had excellent reliability (**α** = 0.92). Two separate scales were adapted to measure BS construct. The first adapted BS scale measured the concept of *Complementary Gender Differentiation* (BS_CGD), which refers to the idealization of women due to the unique characteristics they possess compared to men (Connor, Glick and Fiske, 2016). The scale contained three items and the scale's reliability was conditionally satisfactory (α = 0.69). The second adapted BS scale measured the concept of *Heterosexual Intimacy* (BS_HI), which refers to romantic beliefs about the complementary role of a woman in an intimate relationship with a man (Connor et al., 2016, 2017). This scale contained four items and its reliability was satisfactory (α = 0.70). Validation did not establish the third theoretical subdimension of BS, which the authors entitled *Protective Paternalism*.

Contacts with women in the military. Two measures were used. The *frequency of professional contacts with women* was assessed with one item, and the frequency range varied from 1 (never) to 4 (every day). *Satisfaction with professional contacts with women* was assessed with one item on a scale ranging from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). The results were used as two separate measures of contact in which a higher score reflected more frequent professional contacts with women, i.e. a higher degree of satisfaction with contacts.

*Religiosity***.** Two items taken from the *European Values Study* were used (Baloban, Nikodem and Zrinščak, 2014). The first item was used as an indicator of *religious practice,* in which the frequency of participating in religious rituals was estimated on a scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 7 (more than weekly). A second item was used as an indicator of *faith importance*, in which the relevance of faith was estimated on a scale ranging from 1 (completely irrelevant) to 10 (very important). The results were used as two separate measures of religiosity, in which a higher score reflected a higher level of religiosity.

*Socio-demographic and professional characteristics***.** The participants were asked about *age*, *gender, place of growing up,* and *education.* The educational level was evaluated by: 1–completed high school; 2–completed bachelor's degree or higher degree. The place of growing up was rated by: 1–village; 2–town up to 10,000 inhabitants; 3–town up to 100,000 inhabitants; 4–town up to 500,000 inhabitants; 5–town over 500,000

inhabitants). According to their professional status, the participants could classify themselves into one of four CAF's military categories: 1–soldier, 2–NCOs, 3–junior officer, 4–senior officer.

2.3. Procedures

This study was part of a broader research project aimed at investigating the determinants of gender equality in the CAF (Trut, 2021). The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb. The Ministry of Defence gave an approval to select study participants from the Personnel Database and to conduct the survey. Data were collected from February to June 2019, according to a previously prepared list of randomly selected active service members. The survey was conducted by military psychologists, and it was administered anonymously, in smaller groups. All participants gave their informed consent to participate.

2.4. Data Analysis

Validation and adaptation of the WMS scale on the Croatian military sample was performed to determine the basic measurement characteristics of the scale. To determine the latent structure and the *homogeneity* of the scales, an exploratory *Principal Component Analysis* (PCA) was used. The item selection procedure was additionally applied in order to refine the *homogeneity* of the adapted scale. To determine the *reliability* of the scales, *Cronbach's alpha* internal reliability coefficients were calculated for scale. To assess the *sensitivity* of the scales, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov *goodness-of-fit* test and *skewness* and *kurtosis* coefficients were used. Standard statistical procedures were used to calculate the descriptive characteristics of the variables (*central value measures* and *measures of dispersion*). To identify *gender differences* in all measures *Student t-test* was used. Finally, to assess the association among variables *Pearson's correlation coefficients* were calculated and two *hierarchical multiple regression analyses* (HMR) were performed to identify the determinants of attitudes toward women in the military.

3. Results

Table 1 shows descriptive characteristics of the items of the adapted WMS-C scale for men and women, and the results about their gender differences.

Table 1.
Gender differences of items of the WMS-C scale

Items	Men		Women		t-test	p =
	M	SD	M	SD		
Women in the military are as capable as men in carrying out war-time assignments and responsibilities.	2.99	1.19	3.99	0.90	14.06	<0.001
Women's roles as wives and mothers make them less well suited than men for the military. (–)	3.05*	1.17	3.50*	1.29	5.49	<0.001
Women in the military should not be assigned to active combat duty. (–)	3.55*	1.27	4.10*	1.09	6.93	<0.001
Women have as much to offer in the military service of their country as men.	3.48	1.26	4.48	0.80	14.04	<0.001
Women have the same capacities for military leadership as men.	3.54	1.23	4.64	0.66	16.63	<0.001
Having children should not be an obstacle to a woman contemplating the military as a career.	4.07	1.04	4.41	0.81	5.37	<0.001
Women can perform as well as men in all facets of the military.	3.02	1.38	4.18	0.93	14.71	<0.001
Men are better suited than women for combat. (–)	2.21*	1.21	3.42*	1.35	16.63	<0.001
WMS-C	3.24	0.85	4.10	0.62	16.95	<0.001

Note: * – item result is oriented onto positive direction

The results confirmed the existence of gender differences on all items of the adapted WMS–C scale with women's mean scores higher than men's mean scores on all scale items. As expected, women expressed more positive attitudes toward women in the military when compared to men ($t = 16.95$; $p < 0.001$). The study also investigated gender differences in other study variables, and significant gender differences were revealed for all the variables used (for more, see the Supplemental file). Gender differences in the approval of ambivalent sexism on the same sample were confirmed previously in the study of Trut et al. (2022). Compared to men, women had relatively more frequent professional contacts with women in the military and were more satisfied with them. Religion was more important to women than to men, and correspondingly they participated in religious rituals more frequently. The sensitivity of all variables, except the variable *frequency of contacts,* were estimated as satisfactory (George and Malley, 2010), and the criteria for using parametric statistical procedures in further analyses were satisfied. Due to the identified gender differences, all further statistical analyses were performed separately for each gender group and interpreted accordingly. That included calculating the intercorrelations between all the study variables separately, as well as conducting separate regression analyses for men and women. Generally, most of variables were significantly associated, but their correlation coefficients were ranged from *low* to *medium* values.

3.1. Determinants of the attitudes toward women in the military

Groups of predictor variables were introduced into the HRM analysis in accordance with theoretical assumptions, and in the order related to their assumed stability. Prior to contextual variables, those predictor variables that were less subject to change were introduced into the regression analysis. Due to the assumption that sexism is in the background of prevailing beliefs about women's abilities to work in different military roles, the variables of ambivalent sexism were introduced in the step two of the analysis as a separate predictor set. For each HMR analysis, socio-demographic and religiosity variables were introduced in the step one, ambivalent sexism variables were introduced in the step two, and contact variables followed in the step three of the analysis.

The results of the analysis for men are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the *attitudes toward women* for men

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			
	BETA	t (387)	p	BETA	t (387)	p	BETA	t (387)	p	Tolerance
Intercept	–	11.95	<0.001	–	14.59	<0.001	–	9.62	<0.001	–
Age	0.28	4.28	<0.001	0.13	2.32	0.021	0.11	1.95	0.052	0.51
Education level	0.16	2.15	0.032	0.11	1.67	0.10	0.08	1.29	0.20	0.42
Professional status	-0.07	–0.81	0.42	–0.13	–1.72	0.09	–0.16	–2.22	0.027	0.29
Place of growing up	0.11	2.12	0.034	0.07	1.59	0.11	0.05	1.31	0.19	0.92
Faith importance	0.04	0.66	0.51	0.01	0.11	0.91	0.00	0.05	0.96	0.60
Religious practice	–0.05	–0.73	0.47	–0.05	–0.99	0.32	–0.06	–1.13	0.26	0.61
Hostile sexism	–	–	–	–0.54	–11.90	<0.001	–0.40	–8.34	<0.001	0.66
Benevolent sexism CGD	–	–	–	0.07	1.72	0.09	0.04	0.95	0.34	0.91
Benevolent sexism HI	–	–	–	0.07	1.63	0.11	0.05	1.28	0.20	0.87
Frequency of contacts	–	–	–	–	–	–	–0.01	–0.14	0.89	0.82
Satisfaction with contacts	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.34	6.79	<0.001	0.60
R	0.33			0.60			0.66			
R^2	0.11			0.36			0.44			
Adjusted R^2	0.10			0.34			0.42			
F (df)	7.80 (6,381)			23.54 (9,378)			26.45 (11,393)			
p =	<0.001			<0.001			<0.001			
R^2 change	0.11			0.25			0.10			
F change (df)	7.80 (6,381)			49.11 (3,378)			25.70 (2,376)			
F change p =	<0.001			<0.001			<0.001			

Notes: BETA—regression coefficient; R—multiple correlation coefficient; R^2—coefficient of determination; Adjusted R^2— adjusted multiple determination coefficient; F—coefficient of significance of multiple regression; df—degrees of freedom; p—level of coefficient of significance of multiple regression.

The results of HRM analysis among men revealed that the socio-demographic and religiosity variables entered in step one accounted for 11% of the variance in attitudes toward women in the military, and participants' *age* was the most significant independent predictor ($\beta = 0.28$; $p < 0.001$). In addition to *age*, the *education level* and *the place of growing up* were also significant predictors. Ambivalent sexism variables, entered in step two, explained an additional 25% of the variance of the dependent variable, and this model was significant ($F = 49.11$; $p < 0.001$). In step two, the *HS* was the most significant predictor ($\beta = –0.40$; $p < 0.001$). At the same time, the positive effect of *age* decreased, and the positive effect of *education* and the size of *the place of growing up* lost. Finally, the addition of contact variables to the regression model in step three explained another 10% of the variance of the criterion variable ($F = 25.70$; $p < 0.001$), and *satisfaction with professional contacts* was the significant predictor ($\beta = 0.34$; $p < 0.001$). In step three, the positive predictive effect of *age* was lost, a low negative effect of *professional status* appeared, whereas the negative effect of *HS* decreased. Overall, all used predictors accounted for 44% of the variance of the criterion variable.

The results of the HMR for women are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the *attitudes toward women* for women

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			
	BETA	t (404)	p	BETA	t (404)	p	BETA	t (404)	p	Tolerance
Intercept	–	27.03	<0.001	–	24.03	<0.001	–	16.56	<0.001	–
Age	–0.04	–0.65	0.51	–0.12	–1.85	0.06	–0.11	–1.66	0.10	0.52
Education level	–0.19	–2.41	0.02	–0.24	–3.20	0.001	–0.23	–3.07	0.002	0.38
Professional status	0.09	0.95	0.34	0.11	1.17	0.24	0.09	0.97	0.34	0.26
Place of growing up	0.03	0.49	0.62	0.04	0.85	0.40	0.05	0.92	0.36	0.87
Faith importance	0.02	0.24	0.81	0.04	0.62	0.53	0.03	0.55	0.58	0.59
Religious practice	–0.02	–0.37	0.71	–0.04	–0.59	0.56	–0.03	–0.55	0.58	0.61
Hostile sexism	–	–	–	–0.34	–6.92	<0.001	–0.33	–6.69	<0.001	0.92
Benevolent sexism CGD	–	–	–	0.00	0.06	0.96	–0.00	–0.04	0.97	0.77
Benevolent sexism HI	–	–	–	–0.05	–1.04	0.30	–0.04	–0.84	0.40	0.80
Frequency of contacts	–	–	–	–	–	–	–0.11	–2.18	0.030	0.92
Satisfaction with contacts	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.07	1.41	0.16	0.90
R	0.14			0.37			0.38			
R^2	0.02			0.13			0.15			
Adjusted R^2	0.01			0.11			0.12			
F (df)	1.35 (6,398)			6.75 (9,395)			6.09 (11,393)			
p =	0.23			<0.001			<0.001			
R^2 change	0.02			0.11			0.01			
F change (df)	1.35 (6,398)			17.21 (3,395)			2.83 (2,393)			
F change p =	0.23			<0.001			0.06			

Notes: BETA—regression coefficient; R—multiple correlation coefficient; R^2—coefficient of determination; Adjusted R^2— adjusted multiple determination coefficient; F—coefficient of significance of multiple regression; df—degrees of freedom; p—level of coefficient of significance of multiple regression.

The results of the HMR analysis among women revealed that the socio-demographic and religiosity variables entered in step one accounted for only 2% of the variation in attitudes toward women in the military, and this model was not significant ($F = 1.35$; $p = 0.23$). The three ambivalent sexism variables entered in step two explained an additional 11% of variance, and only a significant negative effect of *HS* was found ($\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.001$). Contact variables entered in step three explained another 1% of the variance in a criterion variable, and only *frequency of contacts with women* was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < 0.05$). Overall, all predictors accounted for 15% of the variance of criterion variable, and regression model was significant ($F = 6.09$; $p < 0.001$). The results indicate that more positive attitudes toward women in the military are held by military women who endorse HS less, who have less professional contacts with other women in their workplaces, and who are less educated.

4. Discussion

The study findings indicated a moderately high approval of women in the military, with existence of significant gender differences. Three important findings could be distinguished. At first, men held more negative attitudes towards women in the military than the women, which is consistent with the results of previous research (Robinson Kurpius and Lucart, 2000; Rosen et al., 1996; Vogt et al., 2007; Young and Nauta, 2013), and in line with SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Second, HS was the most significant predictor of attitudes toward women in the military among both men and women, which is consistent with theoretical assumptions that negative attitudes toward women are largely a function of prevailing sexist beliefs (Glick and Fiske, 2001). Third, professional contacts with military women were a significant predictor of attitudes toward women in the military only for men. This finding, for men, is consistent with the contact theory and previous studies that have confirmed the importance of intergroup contact in combating prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

4.1. Determinants of Attitudes toward Women in the Military among Military Men

The findings of this study indicate that HS, satisfaction with contacts with military women, and professional status are significantly associated with men's attitudes toward women in the military. The most significant independent effect of HS is expected because it is directed towards women who oppose male dominance and threaten the traditional gender hierarchy of power in society (Lorenzi-Cioldi and Kulich, 2015). As the predictive effect of BS has not been determined, it is possible that men direct it towards women who perform "gender" appropriate duties in the military, and do not pose a threat to the status and power of their male colleagues (Trut et al., 2022). The study findings are consistent with the SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and the ITT (Stephan et al., 2000). In accordance with the SIT, military men could perceive

women in the active service as a threat to the well-being of their own social group and to their own social identity. According to the ITT, real and symbolic threats generate intolerance and negative attitudes toward members of out-group. It is reasonable to assume that military men would perceive military women as a realistic and symbolic threat. Therefore, men could perceive the employment of women in active service, sending them to military training and education, and assigning them to combat, command or higher hierarchical duties as a realistic threat. Conversely, a symbolic threat refers to a threat to the system of values, norms or lifestyle of one's in-group. Its incidence is key to wrong and/or exaggerated assumptions about differences in in-group and out-group characteristics. Thus, men who believe in "natural" and unalterable gender differences could consider women as a symbolic threat to group identity and masculine military culture.

The finding on the significant predictive effect of satisfaction with contacts with women on men's attitudes is in line with the ICH. Due to the assumption that the professional contacts of men and women in the military meet at least three favorable conditions—common goals, cooperation and institutional support—this finding was also expected. Moreover, men could also develop friendly relationships with women during their military careers. Intergroup friendship is considered an ideal contact experience because it is likely to meet all four conditions and thus reduce intergroup prejudice (Pettigrew, 1997). Positive contacts can also reduce feelings of threat and anxiety associated with future intergroup interactions. However, the positive effect of more frequent contacts was not confirmed. An explanation can be found in Tropp and Pettigrew's study (2005), which indicates different effects of Allport's conditions for optimal contact, depending on belonging to a majority or minority group. The majority members, due to limited opportunities to establish more frequent contacts with minority members, base their attitudes primarily on information about the quality of those contacts.

Selected socio-demographic and religious variables did not confirm a strong predictive effect on men's attitudes toward women. In the last step of the analysis, only professional status was determined as a significant but unexpected negative predictor. It could be related to the high correlation between professional status and educational level. Furthermore, the religiosity measures used were not significant predictors of men's attitudes toward military women. It can be assumed that despite the highly declared religiosity, the surveyed men (as well as women) are not a homogeneous group. Like religious individuals in the Croatian population, they could simultaneously accept both traditional and modern values, and therefore accept certain religious beliefs to a different extent (Nikodem and Zrinščak, 2019).

4.2. Determinants of Attitudes toward Women in the Military among Military Women

It was found that HS, education, and frequency of contacts with women were significant predictors of women's attitudes toward women in the military. In accordance with expectations, HS was the strongest, and negative predictor of attitudes among women as well. Two possible explanations are mentioned by Young and Nauta (2013). First, individuals (men and women) who strongly support sexist beliefs and the traditional pattern of gender relations might be more inclined to serve in the military, in general. This explanation is supported by study findings of high negative correlations between HS and age among surveyed men and women, which indicate higher endorsement of HS among younger CAF members. Another explanation is that working in a traditionally male setting could in some way encourage the maintenance or even strengthen sexist beliefs of service members, that is in line with the findings of relatively high acceptance of both HS and BS among CAF members (Trut et al., 2022). More precisely, the previuos study found that a large number of women in the CAF (46.5%) moderately endorse ambivalent sexism, i.e., traditional beliefs about women (Trut et al., 2022). Therefore, it is expected that there are a significant number of women who approve the traditional pattern of gender roles and share some negative beliefs about their own social group.

Among the socio-demographic and religious variables used, education level was the only significant and negative predictor. This finding is unexpected because egalitarian attitudes are usually more strongly held by more educated individuals (Brajdić Vuković, Birkelund and Štulhofer, 2007), and therefore could be attributed to specific contextual circumstances. Considering the characteristics of the military population, less educated women are predominantly members of professional military categories with lower status (soldiers or NCOs). Hence, they could be at a disadvantage based on no less than two characteristics—gender and professional status. According to the SIT, members of minority groups tend to identify more strongly with their in-group than members of the majority. Besides, strongly identified individuals are usually more motivated to maintain the positive recognisability of their group (Dovidio, Gaertner and Sagay, 2009). Furthermore, according to the ITT, the main determinant of intergroup relations is the perception of a threat directed towards in-group (Stephan et al., 2009). Members of a group who strongly identify with their in-group consider it important for their own determination, so, unlike those who identify less, they react sooner to any threat coming from out-group. It is possible that less educated military women—due to lower status in the military—perceive to a greater extent the characteristics, beliefs and actions of out-group members as a threat (real and symbolic) to their own social identity. Likewise, they could identify more strongly with their own social group, and consequently express more positive attitudes toward women in the military.

The frequency of professional contacts with women was the weakest predictor of women's attitudes toward military women, with an unexpected, negative sign. That could indicate differences in the professional status of the surveyed women. In the interpretation of these results, it is crucial to point out that we are speculating about in-group contacts. It is reasonable to assume that women, who more often professionally cooperate with other women, are assigned to such workplaces where women are generally more represented. A possible explanation is that women who have more frequent contact with other military women are female officers, and therefore may perceive other women as a professional threat.

4.4. Limitations of the Study

There are several considerable limitations of this study. First, the use of cross-sectional study design does not allow a determination of cause-and-effect relationships among the study variables. Further, a large portion of the variance of the criterion variable remained unexplained, which is why future research should include some other individual, group and/or contextual variables. In addition, the selected variables better explained a variance of attitudes toward women in the military among men, which indicate that the regression model used was to a greater extent adapted to the pattern of intergroup relations of the majority group. The aforementioned indicates the need to use separate regression models for men and women in future research. Furthermore, there were insufficient answers offered in some of the measures used (e.g., education measure), and some measures included only one item (e.g., religiosity and contact measures). Substantial attention should be paid to the development and use of improved measures, particularly contact measures in future studies. Ultimately, this study did not include the all cultural, historical and working specific characteristics of the Croatian military environment, along with the Croatian society in which this research was conducted. Therefore, the results and conclusions of the study cannot be generalized and applied to other cultural and/or work environments.

5. Conclusion

This study confirmed that gender determines attitudes toward women in the military. Despite the established gender differences, both regression analyses proved HS to be the most significant determinant of attitudes toward women in the military. Further, the contact experience also significantly contributes to determining attitudes toward women in the military. These findings indicate the direction of possible institutional actions aimed at greater acceptance of women into the military. Along with interventions aimed at improving intergroup contacts, it is necessary to develop various anti-discrimination measures, primarily targeted education. As gender prejudices are pervasive and acquired through socialization, service members should be provided

with various types of education aimed at raising awareness of the negative impact of gender prejudice on gender relations and military effectiveness. In order to facilitate changes in gender attitudes, it is recommended to use new media channels more often for this purpose (Men, 2014). In all these activities, special attention should be paid to the professional socialization, and to the important role of military commanders, who must implement a gender perspective in this process. During professional socialization specialist skills and knowledge are adopted, and personal values are harmonized with the values of professional culture (Seron et al., 2016). After all, study findings contribute to a greater overall understanding of attitudes toward women in the military in the NATO, especially among countries that are historically and culturally similar to Croatia. A greater understanding of the position and experiences of women in the military from different cultural and historical backgrounds within NATO enhances NATO's capabilities and is essential for effective joint military operations. Therefore, we hope that this study could encourage the development of new theoretical models and cross-cultural research on gender issues that could lead to improvement of NATO gender policy and its implementations across the NATO members.

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Supplement

Supplemental table 1.
Structural and metric characteristics of the WMS scale before and after item selection

Items		WMS original scale						WMS-C
		F1	F2	F3	M	±	SD	F1*
1.	Women in the military are as capable as men in carrying out war-time assignments and responsibilities.	0.85	-0.04	0.13	3.49	±	1.17	-0.83
2.	Women's roles as wives and mothers make them less well suited than men for the military.(–)	-0.31	0.14	-0.46	3.28$^{\beta}$	±	1.25	0.50
3.	Women in the military should not be assigned to active combat duty.(–)	-0.40	0.42	-0.32	3.83$^{\beta}$	±	1.21	0.54
4.	Women have as much to offer in the military service of their country as men.	0.79	0.03	0.29	3.98	±	1.17	-0.83
5.	Women who are in the military should not have children. (–)	-0.10	-0.02	-0.78	4.68$^{\beta}$	±	0.79	-
6.	Women have the same capacities for military leadership as men.	0.79	0.06	0.27	4.09	±	1.13	-0.81
7.	If reinstated, both men and women should be subject to draft.	0.08	-0.36	0.25	3.66	±	1.33	-
8.	Having children should not be an obstacle to a woman contemplating the military as a career.	0.23	-0.10	0.69	4.24	±	0.95	-0.51
9.	A woman in the military should not be given an assignment which separates her from her children. (–)	0.03	0.83	0.06	2.93$^{\beta}$	±	1.26	-
10.	Women can perform as well as men in all facets of the military.	0.86	-0.01	0.17	3.60	±	1.31	-0.85
11.	In time of war, military women who have children should be excused from duty which places them under physical threat. (–)	-0.01	0.84	-0.03	3.24$^{\beta}$	±	1.25	-
12.	Men are better suited than women for combat. (–)	-0.75	0.28	-0.08	2.81$^{\beta}$	±	1.41	0.75
Eigen value		3.59	1.82	1.69	-		-	4.12
%		29.9	15.2	14.1				51.5
Alpha		0.81			-		-	0.86

Notes: F n – factor saturation of item; F n * – factor saturation of item after *item selection*; Eigen value – inherent component variance; % – total percentage of explained variance; Alpha – Cronbach's Alpha coefficient; Mean ± SD – arithmetic mean and standard deviation; (–) – in+verted item.

The PCA revealed that items of the original WMS scale were projected onto three latent dimensions, which showed the inhomogeneity of the construct of attitudes toward women in the military in our sample. Following the item selection procedure, four items of the original scale were discarded in order to improve the homogeneity and reliability of the scale. Out of a total of four rejected items of the original WMS scale, children are mentioned in three items, whereas compulsory military service is mentioned in one item. Through the item selection procedure, an adapted, one-dimensional WMS-C scale was created, which had a slightly higher reliability compared to the original scale. The new, adapted WMS-C scale included eight items, had good reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$), it was completely homogeneous, and the only extracted factor explained 51.5% of the common variance.

Supplemental table 2.
Gender differences and sensitivity of study measures

Variable	Women (N = 447)					Men (N = 438)					t-test	p =
	Mean ± SD	MED	SKEW	KURT	KS D	Mean ± SD	MED	SKEW	KURT	KS D		
WMS-C	4.10 ± 0.62	4.13	-0.77	0.55	0.09*	3.24 ± 0.85	3.25	-0.09	-0.43	0.05	16.95	<0.001
HS	1.82 ± 1.02	1.70	0.33	–0.55	0.08*	2.72 ± 1.13	2.70	–0.17	–0.44	0.04	12.32	<0.001
BS_CGD	2.32 ± 1.24	2.33	–0.03	–0.75	0.08*	1.95 ± 1.07	2.00	0.05	–0.59	0.07*	4.76	<0.001
BS_HI	2.86 ± 1.17	3.00	–0.30	–0.48	0.09*	3.23 ± 1.00	3.25	–0.47	0.02	0.08*	5.06	<0.001
Frequency of contacts	3.85 ± 0.47	4.00	-3.22	10.07	0.52*	3.55 ± 0.72	4.00	-1.54	1.60	0.41*	7.16	<0.001
Satisfactions with contacts	5.42 ± 1.42	6.00	-0.95	0.66	0.19*	5.13 ± 1.54	5.00	-0.62	-0.31	0S8*	2.86	0.004
Faith importance	7.95 ± 2,40	9.00	-1.21	0.72	0.20*	7.52 ± 2.76	8.00	-1.06	0.08	0.19*	3,56	<0.001
Religious practice	4.48 ± 1.63	5.00	-0.66	-0.54	0.18*	4.08 ± 1.71	4.00	-0.27	-0.97	0.17*	2.47	<0.001

Notes: Mean ± SD – arithmetic mean and standard deviation; MED – median; SKEW – coefficient of the asymmetry of distribution results; KURT – coefficient of the kurtosis of distribution results; KS D – Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness-of-fit test; * – significant KS D test coefficient; t-test – t-test coefficient; p = – significance of the t-test coefficient.

As expected, women expressed more positive attitudes toward women in the military when compared to men ($t = 16.95$; $p < 0.001$). This finding is in line with the results from previous studies (Matthews et al., 2009.; Robinson Kurpius and Lucart, 2000.; Torres–Reyna and Shapiro, 2002.). Gender differences in the endorsement of sexism in the military environment on the same sample were confirmed previously in the study of Trut et al. (2022.). Compared to men, women had relatively more frequent professional contacts with women in the military and were more satisfied with them. Religion was more important to women than to men, and correspondingly they participated in religious rituals more frequently.

The distribution of most variables for both subsamples deviated significantly from the regular distribution. However, the sensitivity of all variables, expect variable *frequency of contacts*, were estimated as *satisfactory* (George and Malley, 2010.)., and the criteria for using parametric statistical procedures in further analyses were satisfied.

Supplemental table 3.
Correlations between study measures

Variable*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 *Age*	–	0.20¥	0.57	0.25	0.07	0.16	-0.19	-0.26	-0.26	0.11	0.16	-0.02
2 *Education level*	0.27§	–	0.73	0.22	-0.07	-0.00	-0.13	-0.23	-0.17	-0.02	0.01	-0.12
3 *Professional status*	0.62	0.70	–	0.30	-0.08	0.07	-0.15	-0.33	-0.25	0.04	0.11	-0.06
4 *Place of growing up*	0.04	0.19	0.13	–	-0.12	-0.03	-0.02	-0.15	-0.19	-0.03	-0.05	0.02
5 *Faith importance*	0.02	-0.06	-0.05	-0.17	–	0.61	0.00	0.19	0.23	0.06	0.10	0.00
6 *Religious practice*	0.13	0.05	0.06	-0.16	0.59	–	-0.04	0.13	0.14	0.06	0.07	-0.01
7 *Hostile sexism*	-0.37	-0.26	-0.37	-0.13	-0.01	-0.05	–	0.21	0.14	-0.00	-0.14	-0.31
8 *Benevolent sexism* CGD	-0.10	-0.05	-0.13	-0.04	0.12	0.13	0.07	–	0.38	-0.01	-0.06	-0.04
9 *Benevolent sexism* HI	0.06	0.01	0.01	-0.05	0.30	0.23	-0.04	0.16	–	0.06	-0.03	-0.07
10 *Frequency of contacts*	0.22	0.20	0.18	0.04	-0.03	0.00	-0.13	-0.00	0.01	–	0.25	-0.08
11 *Satisfaction with contacts*	0.31	0.27	0.33	0.10	0.02	0.04	-0.51	0.06	0.10	0.38	–	0.09
12 WMS-C	0.27	0.20	0,23	0.13	-0.00	-0.02	-0.57	0.04	0.10	0.19	0.57	–

Notes: * - results for *women* are shown above the diagonal, and results for *men* are shown below the diagonal; ¥ - range of significance of coefficients for *women:* 0.10 – 0.12 coefficient's are significant at $p \leq 0.05$ level, 0.13 – 0.15 coefficients are significant at $p \leq 0.01$ level, and 0,16 or higher coefficients are significant at $p \leq 0.001$; § - range of significance of coefficients for *men:* 0.10 – 0.11 coefficients are significant at $p \leq 0.05$ level, 0.12 – 0.15 coefficients are significant at $p \leq 0.01$ level, and 0.16 or higher coefficients are significant at $p \leq 0.001$

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Generally, most of variables were significantly associated, but their correlation coefficients were ranged from *low* to *medium* values. The most prominent were intercorrelations between individual socio-demographic variables (*age*, *educational level*, and *professional status*), still this finding was expected.

Most of the predictor variables in the male subsample were correlated to the criterion variable. The highest correlations were obtained between the WMS-C variable and two predictor variables: negative correlation to HS (r = –0.57) and positive correlation to *satisfaction with contacts with women* (r = 0.57). The variables *age*, *education*, *professional status*, *place of growing up*, *BS_HI*, *frequency of contacts* and *satisfaction with contacts with women* were positively correlated to WMS-C.

Low to *moderate* intercorrelations between the predictor variables were also largely found in the female subsample. Most of the predictor variables were not associated to criterion variable. Negative relations of the WMS-C were found only with the *hostile sexism* variable (r = –0.31) and with the *education* variable (r = -0.12).

Izvorni znanstveni rad

Odrednice stavova prema ženama u vojsci

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Sažetak

Posljednjih se desetljeća sve veći broj žena priključuje vojsci, instituciji kojom su povijesno gledano dominirali muškarci. Ovim su istraživanjem ispitane odrednice stavova prema ženama u vojsci, a istraživanje je provedeno na slučajnom uzorku 895 pripadnika djelatnog sastava Hrvatske vojske (445 muškaraca i 450 žena). Nalazi istraživanja ukazuju na umjereno visok stupanj odobravanja žena u vojsci, ali uz postojanje značajnih rodnih razlika. Muškarci su u usporedbi sa ženama izražavali negativnije stavove prema ženama u vojsci. Rezultati regresijskih analiza pokazali su da su među muškarcima hostilni seksizam, zadovoljstvo profesionalnim kontaktima sa ženama u vojsci te profesionalni status značajno povezani s njihovim stavovima prema ženama u vojsci. Rezultati su također pokazali da su kod žena hostilni seksizam, učestalost profesionalnih kontakata s drugim ženama te razina obrazovanja značajno povezani s njihovim stavovima prema ženama u vojsci. Nalazi istraživanja donose uvide u rodne odnose unutar ranije neistraživanog sociokulturnog vojnog konteksta te imaju implikacije za istraživanje i praksu u Hrvatskoj vojsci. Ujedno, mogli bi doprinijeti i boljem razumijevanju složenosti rodnih pitanja unutar NATO-a te potaknuti razvoj novih teorijskih modela i budućih međukulturnih istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: rodni stavovi, seksizam, međugrupni kontakt, socijalni identitet, žene u vojsci, NATO, Hrvatska.