

A CRITICAL FEMINIST APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING VANCOUVER PRINCIPLE 11

By Dustin Johnson¹ ²

¹ *Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security, Dalhousie University;*

² *School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg.*

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I aim to provide a critical analysis of how Vancouver Principle (VP) 11 on the Contribution of Women to preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers addresses gender and women's involvement in peacekeeping. Critical feminist research on gender and war, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and international relations has examined and critiqued the important ways in which gender underlies, informs, and helps give meaning to matters of international peace and security. I draw on this diverse literature to discuss how VP 11 approaches gender and peacekeeping in a way that is at times problematic and at others nuanced and progressive, and provide concrete recommendations for how critical feminist insights can improve the implementation of the Vancouver Principles. The importance of understanding gender dynamics for peacekeeping in general, and for preventing the recruitment and use of children as soldiers in particular, necessitates more nuanced approaches to gender analysis and women's participation. The implementation of VP 11 can support both of these areas.

KEYWORDS

Gender, peacekeeping, child soldiers, child protection, Vancouver Principles

INTRODUCTION

Vancouver Principle 11¹ sits at the confluence of international agendas on peacekeeping, Women, Peace, and Security, and children and armed conflict, and in this paper I draw on critical literature on these topics to analyze how VP 11 addresses gender and women's involvement in peacekeeping as it relates to preventing the recruitment and use of children. Particularly since the Machel Report² on the impact of armed conflict on children in 1996 and the launch of the WPS agenda with Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, a growing body of literature has examined the origins, constitution, and effects of these agendas from a diverse set of theoretical and methodological perspectives. In particular, critical feminist literature has both contributed to the formation of the WPS agenda and critiqued the ways in which the WPS agenda has addressed gender. One major area of focus has been on gender and peacekeeping, particularly on women's participation as peacekeepers and on the gendered (and militarized, racialized, etc.) basis of peacekeeping.

Drawing on this literature and analyzing VP 11 and its Implementation Guidance,³ I argue that the justification for why women are important for child protection in UN peacekeeping draws on common discourses among the UN and member states that is based on problematic gendered essentializations and stereotypes about women in peacekeeping. Instead, justifications that better reflect women's right to serve and the importance of a gender balance in peacekeeping, and that are more grounded in the literature are preferable for advancing women's participation in peacekeeping in a more transformative manner. The section in the Implementation Guidance discussion the implementation of VP 11 provides a more nuanced set of recommendations that approach the inclusion of women in peacekeeping in a more progressive fashion. However, I argue that this still leaves at least two important gaps: first, the way the Implementation Guidance was written sets up a tension between the guidance and the principle and justification on how gender is understood. Second, the exclusive focus on gender fails to acknowledge the ways that gender is co-constructed with race, class, and other aspects of identity in an intersectional manner. Based on this analysis, I provide some concrete recommendations for how VP 11 can be implemented in a more progressive and gender-sensitive manner.

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- 1 Global Affairs Canada, "The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers," Global Affairs Canada, February 21, 2017, 4, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/principles-vancouver-principes-pledge-engageons.aspx?lang=eng.
 - 2 Graça Machel, "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children" (New York: United Nations, 1996), https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306.
 - 3 Government of Canada, *Implementation Guidance for the Vancouver Principles* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2019), 55–59, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2019/igvp-20190614.pdf>.

In performing this analysis, the article contributes in two main ways: first, it supports the implementation of the Vancouver Principles by bringing them into conversation with critical academic approaches that all too often do not influence policymaking and practice. Second, it contributes to the literature by applying it to a recent instrument of international peace and security that is only just beginning to receive academic attention. In the remainder of the article, I discuss some key areas of critical feminist scholarship on gender and international peace and security to situate my analysis of VP 11. I then discuss how VP 11 and the Implementation Guidance approach gender and conclude with policy implications.

FEMINIST ENGAGEMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

A central focus of feminist research on international relations is illuminating how gendered identities, meanings, and power structures play a key role in enabling, perpetuating, and organizing armed conflict, and the international system at large.⁴ The gendered division of labour in international peace and security is clear in the primarily male makeup of politicians, diplomats, and soldiers who take part in armed conflict.⁵ While on the decline in some states, military culture and training continue to draw on a strong connection between manhood and soldiering in a manner exclusionary of and in many cases denigrating towards women or attributes seen as feminine.⁶ Protection or the provision of security is understood as a masculine concept,⁷ including in UN peacekeeping,⁸ and security institutions such as the military tend to be masculine, patriarchal organizations.⁹

- 4 Cynthia Cockburn, "Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War: A Feminist Standpoint," in *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices*, ed. Annica Kronsell and Erika Svedberg (New York: Routledge, 2013), 19–34; Nadine Puechguirbal, "Discourses on Gender, Patriarchy and Resolution 1325: A Textual Analysis of UN Documents," *International Peacekeeping* 17, no. 2 (April 2010): 179, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533311003625068> referencing Cynthia Enloe (2005).
- 5 Jeff Hearn, "Men/Masculinities: War/Militarism—Searching (for) the Obvious Connections?," in *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices*, ed. Annica Kronsell and Erika Svedberg (New York: Routledge, 2013), 35–38.
- 6 Judith Hicks Stiehm, "The Protected, the Protector, the Defender," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 3–4 (January 1982): 367–76, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(82\)90048-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(82)90048-6); Nancy Taber, "The Profession of Arms: Ideological Codes and Dominant Narratives of Gender in the Canadian Military," *Atlantis* 34, no. 1 (2009): 27–36; Sandra Whitworth, *Men, Militarism, and UN Peacekeeping: A Gendered Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007).
- 7 Iris Marion Young, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29, no. 1 (September 2003): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1086/375708>.
- 8 Kathleen M Jennings, "Conditional Protection? Sex, Gender, and Discourse in UN Peacekeeping," *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 30–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy048>.
- 9 Annica Kronsell, "Methods for Studying Silences: Gender Analysis in Institutions of Hegemonic Masculinity," in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108–28.

The passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 marked a key milestone in recognition of these gendered dynamics of war, building on a long grassroots struggle by a diverse international feminist movement.¹⁰

Scholars and activists have devoted considerable attention to the implementation of the WPS agenda in the two decades since Resolution 1325, both to support and expand the agenda, and to critique its shortcomings. In particular, they have identified several problems with the WPS agenda that are relevant to my discussion of VP 11. First, there has been an emphasis on the protection pillar of WPS, particularly from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) while neglecting women's participation in matters of international peace and security.¹¹ This tends to reinforce the idea of women primarily being victims of armed conflict, rather than political actors with agency. Second, the understanding of gender and gender mainstreaming often used in WPS implementation has been critiqued for removing the political content of these ideas to make them palatable to those in power by not seriously challenging the extent to which the subordination of women underpins the modern international system through militarism, capitalism, and racism. It has also tended to rely on gendered essentializations and stereotypes about women being inherently peaceful. This ignores the social construction of gender, that men also have gender identities, and the diversity of women's experiences, identities, and motivations.¹² Third, implementation of WPS, such as through National Action Plans, has generally failed to engage with the co-construction of gender with race, class, and other aspects of identity, leading to these practices reproducing a global North/South hierarchy with colonial roots.¹³

The participation of women in UN peacekeeping has received some of the greatest attention both programmatically, rhetorically, and academically as part of the participation pillar of WPS. The three relevant issues with WPS discussed in the preceding paragraph also play an important role in research on and critique of UN peacekeeping. The UN and member states are undertaking significant efforts to increase the number of uniformed women in

10 Soumita Basu, Paul Kirby, and Laura J Shepherd, "Women, Peace and Security: A Critical Cartography," in *New Directions in Women, Peace, and Security*, ed. Soumita Basu, Paul Kirby, and Laura J Shepherd (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), 1–25.

11 Basu, Kirby, and Shepherd.

12 Maria Martin de Almagro, "Producing Participants: Gender, Race, Class, and Women, Peace, and Security," *Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations* 32, no. 4 (October 2018): 396; Whitworth, Men, Militarism, and UN Peacekeeping; Hannah Wright, "'Masculinities Perspectives': Advancing a Radical Women, Peace and Security Agenda?," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, November 11, 2019, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2019.1667849>.

13 Martin de Almagro, "Producing Participants: Gender, Race, Class, and Women, Peace, and Security."

peacekeeping missions, such as through the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy¹⁴ and Canada's Elsie Initiative.¹⁵ Due to, in part, the masculine nature of the military and peacekeeping missions, justification is usually needed for why women should be deployed as peacekeepers, while justification is not similarly needed for deploying men.¹⁶ While the importance of gender equity and women's equal right to take part in international peace and security is often noted, this is usually in combination with an emphasis on what "added value" women bring to peacekeeping by virtue of their gender.¹⁷ These justifications tend to be based on a combination of problematic gendered stereotypes and essentializations that see women peacekeepers as inherently more peaceful, empathetic, and approachable by civilians, especially women and children. While these are important skills and attitudes for peacekeepers to practice in their work, they should be fostered through training and professional culture, and encouraged in both male and female peacekeepers.

The evidence for such assertions tends to be anecdotal and not based on systematic research. In existing research, it is difficult to untangle the interactions between a peacekeeper's gender, what training and background they have, and what role they are deployed to in the mission. These factors are then also influenced by their gender.¹⁸ This is not to say that there are not real gendered differences between how peacekeepers perform their duties and how others interact with them, but policy and justification need to be based on nuanced and contextualized research rather than essentializations and stereotypes.

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- 14 Department of Peace Operations, "Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028" (New York: United Nations, 2018), <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/uniformed-gender-parity-2018-2028.pdf>.
 - 15 Global Affairs Canada, "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations," Global Affairs Canada, February 21, 2017, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/elsie_initiative-initiative_elsie.aspx?lang=eng.
 - 16 Nina Wilén, "What's the 'Added Value' of Male Peacekeepers? (Or – Why We Should Stop Instrumentalising Female Peacekeepers' Participation)" (Brussels: Egmont: Royal Institute for International Relations, February 13, 2020), <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/whats-the-added-value-of-male-peacekeepers/>.
 - 17 Gretchen Baldwin and Sarah Taylor, "Uniformed Women in Peace Operations: Challenging Assumptions and Transforming Approaches" (New York: International Peace Institute, 2020); Sandra Biskupski-Mujanovic, "Smart Peacekeeping: Deploying Canadian Women for a Better Peace?," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 74, no. 3 (September 2019): 405–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702019874791>; Wilén, "What's the 'Added Value' of Male Peacekeepers?"
 - 18 Marta Ghittoni, Léa Lehouck, and Callum Watson, "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study" (Geneva: DCAF, 2018), https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Elsie_GenderReport_2018_Final.pdf; Kari M Osland, Jenny Nortvedt, and Maria Gilen Røysamb, "Female Peacekeepers and Operational Effectiveness," Research paper (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2020), 3.

The prioritization of these competencies in peacekeeping through a discourse of “added value” based on gender, rather than a discourse of women’s rights and proper training, is concerning for several reasons. Nina Wilén argues that in practice the emphasis on “added value” places an added burden on female peacekeepers to go above and beyond what their male colleagues have to contribute to the mission.¹⁹ As Elin Bjarnegård and Erik Melander write, “When gender equality and women’s rights are instrumentalized, they are no longer primarily valued as ends in themselves. Instead, they are used as a means of efficiently implementing other policies and reaching other, more desirable, ends.”²⁰ Such an instrumentalization undermines the importance of women’s rights as a central component of the WPS agenda. The essentialization of women’s contribution to peacekeeping as based primarily on their gender ignores the complexity and diversity of personal identity, including the construction of gender, and the importance of professional skills and experience for women peacekeepers.²¹ While the participation of women in peacekeeping does help to challenge the construction of men as protectors and women as victims underlying much of the rhetoric on armed conflict, “there is a risk of essentializing women’s capacities and skills, with women being seen as different security providers, with nurturing and caring skills, due to their sex role.”²² Finally, basing the participation of women in peacekeeping on gender stereotypes ignores the diversity among women, “as the assumptions made about women’s essential nature and their suitability for nurturing and caring might not be reproduced and appropriated by female security forces.”²³

The emphasis on protection over participation in WPS implementation can also be observed in UN peacekeeping in several ways. First, the focus on prevention of SGBV in conflict, while a critical issue, tends to be conflated with women’s participation in peacekeeping in problematic ways. Principally, the presence of women peacekeepers is seen to deter sexual exploitation and abuse committed by their male colleagues. This places the burden on women peacekeepers to control the behaviour of men, rather than on those men, and also essentializes men in peacekeeping as unable to control their own behaviour.²⁴ Such a justification for the

19 Nina Wilén, “Female Peacekeepers’ Added Burden,” *International Affairs*, September 26, 2020, iiaa132, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa132>.

20 Elin Bjarnegård and Erik Melander, “Women’s Participation and Peace? The Decline of Armed Conflict in East Asia,” in *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325*, ed. Louise Olsson and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis (London | New York: Routledge, 2015), 19.

21 Martin de Almagro, “Producing Participants: Gender, Race, Class, and Women, Peace, and Security”; Elina Penttinen, “Nordic Women and International Crisis Management: A Politics of Hope?,” in *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices*, ed. Annica Kronsell and Erika Svedberg (New York: Routledge, 2013), 153–65.

22 Martin de Almagro, “Producing Participants: Gender, Race, Class, and Women, Peace, and Security,” 405–6.

23 Martin de Almagro, 406.

24 Baldwin and Taylor, “Uniformed Women in Peace Operations”; Laura Hebert, “Analyzing UN and NATO Responses to Sexual Misconduct in Peacekeeping Operations,” in *Making Gender, Making*

deployment of women in UN peacekeeping should thus be abandoned in favour of addressing root causes of why some male peacekeepers commit sexual violence.

This view also tends to downplay or ignore the threat of sexual harassment or violence that women peacekeepers themselves face from their colleagues. Instead, women peacekeepers are often seen as *in need of protection* from the mission environment, despite being experienced security professionals, and are less frequently deployed to what are perceived as riskier assignments where their presence might make more of a difference.²⁵ However, female peacekeepers have reported that they are more at risk of harassment or violence from their colleagues than from the mission environment.²⁶ Finally, while women peacekeepers are important for working with survivors of sexual violence in mission locations, it is too often viewed that this is by virtue of their gender alone, rather than their gender in combination with their training and professional experience. This view risks women being deployed without the proper training for such sensitive work, or only being assigned to duties such as this, or for instance child protection, that are viewed as gender appropriate.²⁷

Finally, the WPS agenda and attention to women in peacekeeping largely views gender as a standalone category of identity, rather than one that intersects and is co-constructed with other aspects of identity such as race and class. Peacekeepers come from a wide range of countries from the global North and South, deployed to countries largely within the South, and operate within a system still heavily influenced by the legacies of colonialism and racial hierarchies. Consequently, an intersectional analysis²⁸ that sees gendered identity as not separable from race, class, etc. is essential to understanding the gendered dynamics of peacekeeping.²⁹ For

War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices, ed. Annica Kronsell and Erika Svedberg (New York: Routledge, 2013), 116; Penttinen, "Nordic Women and International Crisis Management: A Politics of Hope?"

- 25 Baldwin and Taylor, "Uniformed Women in Peace Operations"; Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, "Ladies Last: Peacekeeping and Gendered Protection," in *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325*, ed. Louise Olsson and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis (London | New York: Routledge, 2015), 62–95.
- 26 Lotte Vermeij, "Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations" (New York: International Peace Institute, October 2020), <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/10/taboo-and-stigmas-facing-military-women-in-un-peace-operations>.
- 27 Baldwin and Taylor, "Uniformed Women in Peace Operations"; Georgina Holmes, "Female Military Peacekeepers Left Feeling Overwhelmed after Inadequate Training," *The Conversation*, May 29, 2020, <http://theconversation.com/female-military-peacekeepers-left-feeling-overwhelmed-after-inadequate-training-114887>.
- 28 Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989), <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>; Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.
- 29 Marsha Henry, "Peacexploitation? Interrogating Labor Hierarchies and Global Sisterhood Among

instance, people living in peacekeeping mission locations perceive the security provided by peacekeepers in different ways based upon both gender and nationality.³⁰ The assumption that women peacekeepers will relate to and engage better with local women fails to take into account how race, nationality, and class also matter in these relationships, along with how much contact peacekeepers are allowed to have with civilians.³¹ The international community's engagement with women in peacebuilding through the WPS agenda, including in peacekeeping and security institutions, is not equal but influenced by racial and sexual hierarchies that include or exclude certain groups of women from the participation called for under Resolution 1325.³²

It should be noted that, with some exceptions, much of this literature draws primarily on data from peacekeepers from Northern countries, or on analysis of how documents relevant to peacekeeping understand and construct gender. Consequently, in the academic literature there is still insufficient analysis at the level of peacekeeping practice that would provide a more nuanced view. However, my analysis is particularly directed at the way gender is understood in VP 11 and its implementation guidance, rather than on how peacekeepers are actually putting it into practice.

Despite the many challenges, shortcomings, and failures, it is important to draw on this literature to productively engage with peacekeeping practice and transform it. Peacekeeping is effective at ending armed conflicts and reducing violence, and there is need for better research to support improvements in peacekeeping practice.³³ Even the more critical scholars examining peacekeeping argue that it can deliver significant benefits for the people it is supposed to protect, and transforming the gender dynamics present in peacekeeping is a key element of improving its implementation.³⁴ It is equally important to substantially increase

Indian and Uruguayan Female Peacekeepers," *Globalizations* 9, no. 1 (February 2012): 15–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2012.627716>; Marsha Henry, "Problematising Military Masculinity, Intersectionality and Male Vulnerability in Feminist Critical Military Studies," *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 182–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2017.1325140>.

- 30 Gurchathen Sanghera, Marsha Henry, and Paul Higate, "Peacekeepers as New Men? Security and Masculinity in the United Nations Mission in Liberia," Working Paper (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2008), <http://www.bris.ac.uk/media-library/sites/spais/migrated/documents/sanghere0208.pdf>.
- 31 Henry, "Peaceexploitation?"; Kathleen M. Jennings, "Service, Sex, and Security: Gendered Peacekeeping Economies in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 4 (August 2014): 313–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614537330>.
- 32 Martin de Almagro, "Producing Participants: Gender, Race, Class, and Women, Peace, and Security."
- 33 Barbara F. Walter, Lise Morje Howard, and V. Page Fortna, "The Extraordinary Relationship between Peacekeeping and Peace," *British Journal of Political Science*, November 24, 2020, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342000023X>.
- 34 Cynthia Cockburn and Meliha Hubic, "Gender and the Peacekeeping Military: A View from Bosnian Women's Organizations," in *The Postwar Moment: Militarities, Masculinities and International*

the proportion of uniformed peacekeepers who are women, and this should be done on a firmer basis of their rights, how gender parity may contribute to peacekeeping effectiveness, and empirical evidence of gender dynamics in peacekeeping. Child protection, especially preventing the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, is a particularly important yet under-studied component of UN peacekeeping where gender dynamics are critical to understand.³⁵ Consequently, in the next section, I draw on the above discussion to examine, critique, and support the implementation of VP 11 on the contribution of women.

PITFALLS AND PROMISES OF VP 11

Vancouver Principle 11 is “To recognize the essential contribution of women to peacekeeping operational effectiveness, and the distinct and critical roles of both men and women in the protection of children and the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers.”³⁶ Further detail is provided in the 2019 Implementation Guidance, which has two sections on each principle: a justification section about its importance, and a section about how it can be implemented. As well, each principle has a box noting connections to key Security Council Resolutions. Several issues are raised in the wording of the principle itself and in the justification section.

Drawing on the previous discussion, the primary issue with the wording of VP 11 itself, and the justification section in the Implementation Guidance, is that they primarily reproduce a discourse that assumes women make a distinct contribution to peacekeeping with certain skills and perspectives that are due to their gender, without attention to how the intersectional nature of identity, and professional training and experience, mediate this contribution. The principle refers to the “distinct and critical roles of both men and women”³⁷ while the Implementation Guidance refers to the “*distinct roles of men and women*”³⁸ (emphasis in original) in child protection in peacekeeping. While it does not explicitly state what roles in child protection are distinct between men and women, the Implementation Guidance states that women “offer important perspectives on communities and cultures, they can often access populations and venues that are closed to men, and they can serve as role models to empower women and girls

Peacekeeping, Bosnia and the Netherlands, ed. Cynthia Cockburn and Dubravka Žarkov (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2002), 103–21; Claire Duncanson, *Forces for Good? Military Masculinities and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq*, Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Whitworth, *Men, Militarism, and UN Peacekeeping*.

35 Dustin Johnson and Allyssa Walsh, “Gender, Peacekeeping, and Child Soldiers: Training and Research in Implementation of the Vancouver Principles,” *Allons-y: Journal of Children, Peace and Security* 4 (2020): 51–60.

36 Global Affairs Canada, “The Vancouver Principles,” 4.

37 Global Affairs Canada, 4.

38 Government of Canada, *Implementation Guidance*, 56.

in the local community.”³⁹ This sentence is backed by a citation to the Elsie Initiative baseline study,⁴⁰ which included a brief literature review on the current state of knowledge on women in peace operations. This report notes that the evidence presented is largely anecdotal, though it does also draw on Karim and Beardsley’s⁴¹ more systematic work as well.

The Implementation Guidance states that “Women peacekeepers can also communicate and engage with children differently, and they can offer valuable perspectives on the gender dynamics associated with the recruitment and use of child soldiers.”⁴² This statement is not supported with a citation, and hence it is not known whether it was written based on existing research or on gendered assumptions.

The statements that women can offer important perspectives on communities, cultures, and gender dynamics of recruitment imply a universality to women’s experience that has long been critiqued, especially by postcolonial feminists. It also implies a sufficiency of lived experience for effective peacekeeping practice, neglecting training, professional experience, and education on particularities of the mission context. While women’s lived experience is a critical basis for understanding gender dynamics and building solidarity with other women, there are usually significant differences of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and other aspects of identity between peacekeepers and the host community. These differences challenge the degree to which gendered experience alone equips female peacekeepers for the skills and perspectives described in VP 11. For instance, Marsha Henry’s research with Indian and Uruguayan female peacekeepers demonstrated how shared identity as women did not fully overcome differences in class, race, and military identity for connecting or empathizing with local women.⁴³ Georgina Holmes found that Rwandan women peacekeepers were deployed to deal with sexual and gender-based violence without proper training on assumption that their gender equipped them sufficiently for such a sensitive role.⁴⁴

While there are certainly real differences in how men and women carry out child protection, and in how they interact with and are received by people living in a peacekeeping mission host state due in part to their gender, these differences need to be empirically understood to form the basis of improved policy. The context of specific troop and police contributing countries, the mission context, and training and professional experience need to be understood better

39 Government of Canada, 55.

40 Ghittoni, Lehouck, and Watson, “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study.”

41 Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States*, Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

42 Government of Canada, *Implementation Guidance*, 56.

43 Henry, “Peaceexploitation?”

44 Holmes, “Female Military Peacekeepers Left Feeling Overwhelmed after Inadequate Training.”

through future research on child protection. This will not only help ensure that more women are deployed in peacekeeping, but that they also receive the needed training and support to excel in their roles.

A second problem with the justification section of the VP 11 Implementation Guidance, which is also a challenge faced by WPS more broadly, is how to understand the construction of gender and the role of men and masculinity. Feminist scholars point out that gender identity is constructed in a relational manner, and a focus on women that ignores the role that men and masculinity play in gendered power dynamics can be problematic. At the same time, gender inequality necessitates a specific focus on women, and bringing men into this picture can dilute this focus in problematic ways.⁴⁵ This is important to consider for VP 11, since the principle itself and the justification section both discuss men, despite the principle being about the contribution of *women*. However, beyond the mention of the distinct roles of women and men in child protection, VP 11 leaves out further discussion of men. While we should be cautious on how to focus on men and masculinity in elements of international peace and security focused on women,⁴⁶ it is important to note that the way in which VP 11 briefly addresses men contributes to the gender essentialism discourse. The focus on women contributing certain skills by virtue of their gender, ones which are traditionally seen as feminine, simultaneously neglects that men may also possess these skills and that men can deploy them in peacekeeping.

For instance, the Elsie baseline study notes that men deployed in mixed-gender engagement teams in Afghanistan felt more comfortable expressing empathy,⁴⁷ and an interview conducted by Sara Singleton and Anne Holohan in Lebanon indicated that the focus on women interacting with civilians, including children, may make men who are otherwise comfortable doing so to hold back.⁴⁸ Such findings need more systematic research, which would also improve this section of the Implementation Guidance. Given that the aim of the Vancouver Principles is focused on improving child protection to prevent the recruitment and use of children, focusing the Implementation Guidance on a more nuanced approach to gender in which women make an important contribution, rather than maintaining a focus solely on women, might be beneficial.

45 Wright, “‘Masculinities Perspectives.’”

46 Wright.

47 Ghittoni, Lehock, and Watson, “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study.”

48 Sara Singleton and Anne Holohan, “The Case for ‘Trust Awareness’ as a Key Soft-Skill for Peacekeepers,” *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 3–4 (April 28, 2017): 224–45, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18754112-02103003>.

In comparison to the justification section, the implementation section proposes a set of suggestions that are much more progressive and nuanced concerning gender. It details seven areas of implementation for VP 11:

1. Collecting gender-disaggregated data on organizations relevant to peacekeeping as a first step towards dismantling barriers to women's participation;
2. Working to increase the representation of women in peacekeeping contributing organizations, including through a National Action Plan under Resolution 1325;
3. Increasing the meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping through promoting them to senior positions, fostering a safe work environment, and ensuring women have the career support and skills they need to deploy;
4. Aim for gender balance across Child Protection Focal Points in missions;
5. Deploy mixed-gender units to peacekeeping missions, including engagement teams, formed police units, and "gender strong" units;⁴⁹
6. Train and educate peacekeepers on gendered dimensions of children in armed conflict, gender-sensitive approaches to protection, and SGBV against children;
7. Support research on the intersection between women in peacekeeping and child protection.⁵⁰

Each of these implementation approaches demonstrates a much more gender-sensitive approach to women in peacekeeping and child protection than does the justification section. The first three together focus on the barriers to women becoming peacekeepers and being deployed to mission locations where they can put their skills to use, a major focus of the Elsie Initiative and a range of research.⁵¹

Points four and five are most relevant to this discussion, as they focus on the importance of having a gender balance in peacekeeping missions, rather than a sole focus on what women bring to peacekeeping. While some of the description under the fourth suggestion

49 "A 'gender-strong unit' is a military unit or a formed police unit (FPU) that includes the substantial representation of women overall and in positions of authority, has provided gender-equity training to all unit members, and has adequate equipment and other materiel to ensure parity of deployment conditions for women and men peacekeepers" Government of Canada, *Implementation Guidance*, 57.

50 Government of Canada, 56–58.

51 e.g., Baldwin and Taylor, "Uniformed Women in Peace Operations"; Ghittoni, Lehouck, and Watson, "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study"; Louise Olsson, Anita Schjølset, and Frida Möller, "Women's Participation in International Operations and Missions," in *Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325*, ed. Louise Olsson and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis (London | New York: Routledge, 2015), 37–61.

is still problematic as it repeats the language about the “unique and distinct contributions”⁵² of men and women in child protection without elaborating what they are or the evidence for their uniqueness and distinctness, they do indicate an understanding that is both theoretically informed and increasingly supported in the literature that mixed-gender teams in peacekeeping are more effective. Such a view is more amenable to a relational approach to gender that includes men, women, masculinity, and femininity and their construction, and better fits with a rights-based perspective on women’s equal right to serve with men in peacekeeping. It also leaves open the potential that men can bring beneficial contributions to peacekeeping in part due to their gender, which helps to balance the important focus on the harms caused by militarized masculinities in peacekeeping.⁵³ Finally, points six and seven focus on the importance of educating and training peacekeepers on gender perspectives, regardless of their gender, and on improving the empirical foundation for peacekeeping practice. Point six’s attention to training on the gendered dynamics of recruitment in the mission location is particularly important, as this challenges the implication in the justification section that such an understanding emerges primarily from gendered experience.

Two issues stand out between the justification and implementation sections. First, these clear differences in how the two sections (and the principle itself) approach gender are in tension with one another. This can be dealt with largely in future editions of the Implementation Guidance by updating the justification section to reflect a more nuanced understanding of gender, taking a relational perspective to its construction, and including the latest research on gender and peacekeeping that continues to emerge.

Second, the Implementation Guidance fails to engage in an intersectional perspective, which the critical literature on peacekeeping has demonstrated is essential to understanding the importance of gender in peacekeeping. Such a perspective particularly illuminates the problems with the universality of women’s experience implicit in the gender essentialism in the justification section of the Implementation Guidance. The Black Lives Matter movement is helping to draw more critical attention to race and intersectionality in the security sector, and in implementing the Vancouver Principles, security practitioners and policymakers should learn from these perspectives and critique the underlying assumptions of their work. The Implementation Guidance could be updated to note the importance of an intersectional analysis and suggest that it be included in data disaggregation, addressing barriers to women’s participation in peacekeeping, and in research. Furthermore, an intersectional perspective is important in child protection as it can also interrogate the ways in which age matters in identity.

52 Government of Canada, *Implementation Guidance*, 57.

53 e.g., Paul Higate, “Peacekeepers, Masculinities, and Sexual Exploitation,” *Men and Masculinities* 10, no. 1 (July 2007): 99–119, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X06291896>; Sherene Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Whitworth, *Men, Militarism, and UN Peacekeeping*.

A final point for the future consideration of academics, practitioners, and policymakers is how to move beyond the binary approach to gender that still dominates even more critical discussions of international peace and security. Activists and scholars have long demonstrated the construction, limits, and exclusionary nature of the gender binary, and we should begin thinking through its implications in peacekeeping.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the preceding discussion of the literature and VP 11, I conclude with some policy implications that can complement and deepen the Implementation Guidance and provide ideas to policymakers and practitioners responsible for the implementation of the Vancouver Principles. These recommendations aim to be pragmatic in addressing the criticisms of WPS and peacekeeping from feminist literature as it is important to recognize both the importance of these critiques for improving practice, and the difficulty of making drastic changes in conservative, masculine institutions. Improving child protection in UN peacekeeping is vital. It is also important to ensure that the implementation of the Vancouver Principles is done in a way that does not reinforce some of the problems with previous attention to women in peacekeeping.

- The theoretical knowledge and life experience needed to bring a feminist approach to the Vancouver Principles is plentiful not just in academia, but among activists, civil society, think tanks, policymakers, and in the security sector. All of these sources should be drawn on, while ensuring that there is space for critique and honest conversation, especially for those in academia and civil society who have legitimate concerns about their work being co-opted.
- Despite the many problems with gendered essentializations and stereotypes about female peacekeepers, strategic use of essentialism can be productive and is often unavoidable in highly masculine institutions in order to make advances in women's participation.⁵⁴ In many institutions responsible for implementing the Vancouver Principles therefore some use of essentialism is likely needed, with the aim of moving beyond it. For instance, it may be unavoidable to draw on certain gendered essentializations to convince key policymakers of the importance of supporting increasing the number of women in peacekeeping. It is important to make sure that such approaches do not inadvertently further the added burden for female peacekeepers or neglect their training. However, it seems likely that the essentialization that women are better suited to child protection duties is commonplace already, and

54 Anne Marie Goetz, "Foreword: Toward Strategic Instrumentalism," in *New Directions in Women, Peace, and Security*, ed. Soumita Basu, Paul Kirby, and Laura J Shepherd (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), xxv.

for implementation of VP 11 more nuanced approaches focused on a gender balance in child protection personnel may be more appropriate.

- In combination with this, it is important to shift conversations towards women's equal right to serve, achieving gender parity in missions, and how these improve the legitimacy of the mission. Improved effectiveness of the mission should be seen as an important result of this, rather than the reason for doing so.
- Particularly, the equal right to serve must include an equal basis for receiving the training and education needed to be an effective peacekeeper, regardless of gender. This is especially important in more specialized fields such as child protection, and all peacekeepers deployed in roles where child protection is an important component should receive quality training in this area.
- Gender analysis needs to consider men and masculinities, particularly in moving beyond gender essentialism in peacekeeping, and for changing the gendered basis of the security sector. Such a relational approach to gender must be carefully balanced with maintaining an important focus on women.
- Look for internal allies and champions who can support efforts to include women in peacekeeping, challenge the masculine culture of the security sector, and provide support, including men who share these perspectives on gender and peacekeeping.
- Look for synergies between the Vancouver Principles and existing national policies and priorities. For instance, the implementation of VP 11 is likely to be mutually supportive with existing National Action Plans developed under WPS.

CONCLUSION

A central insight of feminist scholarship on peacekeeping is that many of its failures of protection and the harms committed by peacekeepers are rooted in the forms of militarized masculinity that dominate military and police organizational cultures. For peacekeeping to meet its full potential, this gendered nature of security sector institutions needs to be challenged and transformed, rather than abandoning peacekeeping entirely. While not the only component of the solution, achieving gender parity in the military and police is an important part of transforming the masculine culture of the security sector and peacekeeping. Given the urgency of better protecting children during armed conflict and particularly preventing their recruitment, VP 11 can serve as an important leverage point for tackling the barriers to women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping and provide an opening for transforming the security sector's gendered basis through appreciation for women's and men's role in child protection. At the same time, it is urgent to guard progress to date against the global backlash to women's rights and more critical approaches to gender while continuing to push ahead, so it is critical for the security sector to recognize the importance of feminist critique. Feminist

insights on gender and international peace and security can serve as an important basis for making these advances. They should be considered and taken up by practitioners and policymakers responsible for the Vancouver Principles so that they are implemented in a more gender-sensitive and transformational manner that both improves protection of children and supports women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping.

Dustin Johnson is the Research Advisor at the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace and Security, where he currently studies gender and child protection practices in UN peacekeeping. He is concurrently pursuing this research project as a doctoral student in peace and development research at the School of Global Studies at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. He has worked at the Dallaire Institute since March 2016 after completing his master's degree and holds master's and bachelor's degrees from Dalhousie University.

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