

Tom Digby
Love and War: How Militarism Shapes Sexuality and Romance
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In *Love and War*, Tom Digby offers many examples of what he appropriately calls the "complex interplay of gender and militarism" (177). Militaristic societies require a large supply of men who are able to suppress their capacities to care about the suffering of others, and about their own suffering, and who are ready to sacrifice their lives in pursuit of a "warrior ideal." Societies produce such warriors by instilling in boys and men a characteristic that relies on misogynist humiliation, and involves taunting those insufficiently "tough" as being like girls and women. Boys and men are admonished with imperatives such as "Suck it up," "C'mon, be a man," "Don't be a pussy," or a "wimp," or a "girly man," and the like. They learn, as Digby puts it, that "nothing is worse than being a girl or a woman" (136). This process in turn promotes hostility between men and women, commonly described as the "battle of the sexes," a phrase Digby uses in the titles of three of his eight chapters.

Militaristic societies such as the US's provide an invitation, Digby suggests, for men to engage in sexual violence and to suppress women who resist submission to male domination. Their messages to men also include the ideals of "protection" and of "providing for one's family," but these extend only to women deemed "good" by the standards of patriarchy, and to families where women as well as children are dependent. When men are unable to uphold their sense of masculinity through the supports of being the protector and the provider—an increasingly common situation as women, often by necessity, become breadwinners—men rely even more on an enthusiasm for militaristic expressions of strength to satisfy their search for support of their identity. These are developments that supporters of militarism and opponents of feminism have been able to exploit.

Militaristic societies also pressure women to produce large numbers of potential recruits, instilling the idea that women should devote themselves to motherhood and raising children. In this model, "womanliness . . . is defined more by a woman's role in procreation than anything else, not least because war-reliant societies are more likely than peaceful societies to experience large numbers of deaths and hence to feel a need for

maximized procreation" (33). And women are also supposed to be dependent on men for protection, and for resources, and to nurture not only their children but also their male partners.

Even though the rigidity of such roles is crumbling, Digby says, conservatives make strenuous efforts to uphold them. One way is to deny women control over reproduction. And even though men today "are far more likely to engage in vicarious, rather than actual, combat . . . the sway that warrior masculinity has over the emotional lives of boys and men continues unabated," in Digby's view (53). This is, he asserts, "a source of great harm in the lives of both men and women" (53).

As Digby summarizes it, the conception of love that prevails in militaristic cultures such as the US's is that "[m]an the warrior and controller of resources dominates, and woman as mother and nurturer serves the man and his children" (27). But the social pressures of warrior masculinity lead to the paradox that "heterosexuality is the preferred ideal of love, yet it is fraught with perils that are specific to heterosexuality" (3). The antagonism between men and women produced by militaristic culture dooms innumerable relations between women and men that might otherwise be loving relations.

Digby seeks to indicate the ways out of the battles between men and those of "the opposite sex." And, he maintains, "[t]he heterosexualism we have is tragic not just for particular couples, but for all of us, because it lays the foundation for the strands of misogyny that run throughout our culture, including sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, sexual assault, and heterosexual homicide" (30). The economic costs alone, he says, have got "to be staggering" (30). And other costs are often even worse. He takes the case of Sergeant William Edwards to be emblematic. Edwards became violent with his wife Erin Edwards, also a sergeant. When she left him he killed her, and then killed himself.

The harms of male dominance are felt not only in the domestic sphere, Digby holds: "In war-reliant cultures the faith in masculine force is so pervasive, and so far-reaching, that it leads to sweeping patterns of domination by men, not only in domestic life, but in the realms of politics, economics, religion, and popular culture" (83). "Being in charge," and "taking charge," are strongly associated with manliness. If these patterns of faith in male force were to be dismantled, most men would be freed from the burdens of excessive domination by other men.

Digby discusses the roles of violent pornography and misogynist video games in the responses of men to the changing roles of women. He examines the role of competitive sports in programming boys into warrior masculinity, and how the latter requires the suppression of empathy. He offers examples from news accounts of the larger pattern of "gender terrorism." In gang culture, for instance, boys are terrorized into "staying within the confines of a sacrificial, self-destructive ideal of manhood" (138). But such gender coercion is not confined to gang culture; it comes also "from parents, coaches, clergy, teachers, and other adult agents of cultural programming who are devoted to conserving

and continuing the sacrificial warrior ideal of manhood as an integral part of the broader pattern of cultural militarism" (138).

Digby usefully elaborates why and how gender liberation is not a zero-sum matter. He tries to show how "amelioration of the harms that are specific to men is interwoven with amelioration of the harms that are specific to women, and vice versa" (124). Digby's discussion contributes to our understanding of how gains for women do not imply losses for men, as is so often assumed. Rather, "dissipation of the gender binary is profoundly liberatory," but men and women "can escape from the zero-sum gender game only if they do it together" (151).

Digby's consideration of the role of biology rather than culture in bringing about a society that is militaristic or not would benefit from stronger social-scientific treatment. He disputes E. O. Wilson's claim that throughout history, warfare "has been endemic to every form of society" (7), and holds that male tendencies toward aggression, or the disposition to use force, or a society's reliance on war to deal with its problems with other societies, are almost entirely cultural. He rests his position largely on anecdotal evidence and very small samples rather than on more substantial treatment.

It is worthwhile to suppose, as Digby does, that "just as war-reliant societies culturally program their members to believe that women are determined by nature to be breeders and mothers, they also program the belief that men are natural warriors. One common way to accomplish this is to promote the more sweeping belief that men are biologically determined to be both violent and emotionally tough" (16). But thinking about how some "natural" tendencies ought—like diseases—to be controlled, countered, or redirected, can often be sounder than assuming that they do not exist. In any case they need to be understood.

Digby says he is interested in "description and explanation, rather than argument" (xi) in the interest of making philosophy less adversarial. But countless feminist philosophers engage in clear and well-developed argument, striving in nonadversarial ways to arrive cooperatively at the most plausible positions possible. Pointing out affinities and associations can be interesting and suggestive, but for many issues they are not a substitute for scientific study and persuasive argument.

Sadly, there is no mention in this book of the important previous feminist work of Nancy Hartsock, Sara Ruddick, Cynthia Enloe, or Judith Stiehm on linkages between militarism and conceptions of masculinity. Hartsock explored how images of the warrior shaped conceptions of citizenship (Hartsock 1983; 1989). Ruddick examined the neglected insights that practices of mothering could provide that are highly relevant to working toward peace and nonviolence (Ruddick 1989). Enloe provided powerful examples of linkages between militarism and cultural images of masculinity (Enloe 1983). And Stiehm and others examined affinities between constructions of manhood and the uses of violence (Stiehm 1984). Digby could have learned much from these predecessors, and could have provided some deserved appreciation.

Also less than satisfactory is Digby's reduction of feminism to a mere preference rather than something normatively recommended. "[F]eminism," he holds, "is a preference that girls and women not be subjected (by society or individuals) to disadvantage just because they are girls or women. I consider feminism to be a preference, rather than an ideology or theory. People who share this preference might well strive to further it through political means, but the preference does not imply any particular political agenda . . . [or] specific prescriptions . . ." (149–50).

This conception of feminism means that if anyone wants to deny women equal rights, or to maintain the cultural influences he describes that support male domination, they are not wrong to do so. They just have a different preference. Feminists of various persuasions may agree on the need for a more substantial understanding than this of their aims.

Digby shows how one can see feminism as preferable for men as well as for women. The changes it would bring would free women from the disadvantages they would otherwise suffer, and it would free men "from the primary source of harm and disadvantage to which they are subjected as men," the pressures of society that "culturally program warrior masculinity" (150). His depictions of what love between men and women could be without misogyny and cultural militarism are appealing. When gender becomes incidental, relationships might be "characterized by mutuality and equality, partnership and collaboration, with each nurturing the flourishing of the other" (150). Digby suggests that "getting beyond the cultural programming of warrior masculinity opens whole new possibilities for men and women to love each other—as partners and spouses, as friends, as colleagues and coworkers, as neighbors" (189).

Such a world, we might say, would be better.

References

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