

# The Transversal Myths and Realities of Women in Combat

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# Outline

- History of women in combat and main obstacles to integration
- Expectations of removing the combat exclusion versus realities
- Ongoing challenges facing women in defence forces
- A feminist warning about pragmatism

# What is the Combat Exclusion?



- Policy excluding women from ‘frontline,’ infantry/combat roles
- At odds with evidence of women’s contributions
- Perpetuated gender bias about women’s role in the military
- Area of rapid global policy change

# Justifications for the Combat exclusion



- Physical Fitness
- Cohesion
- ‘Emotional Arguments’

# The Power of the Band of Brothers Myth



**MEGAN MACKENZIE**



**BEYOND THE  
BAND OF  
BROTHERS**

**THE US MILITARY AND THE MYTH  
THAT WOMEN CAN'T FIGHT**

- Men as exceptional, essential, and elite
- Combat units as a sacred space for male bonding
- Women spoil the band of brothers bonds

# Expectations for Removing the Combat Exclusion

Breaking The Brass Ceiling: All Combat Roles Are Now Open To Women



Meaghan Lehrer December 3, 2015 5:02 pm



- Breaking the Brass Ceiling
- Reducing Sexual Violence
- Women as 'Combat Multiplier'
- Cultural change

# Breaking the Brass Ceiling

## Impact 1: Recruitment

Allowing women to work in more roles within the institution makes the defence force a more attractive employer.

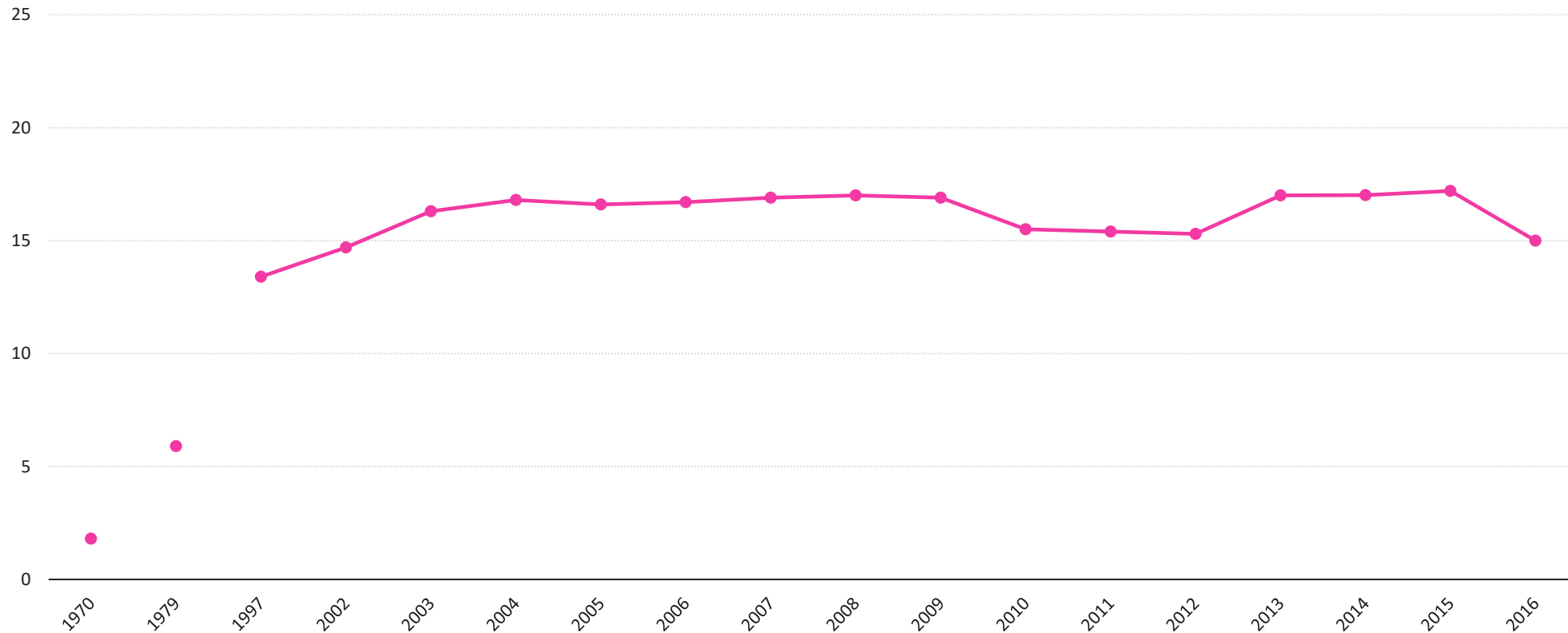
## Impact 2: Retention

Lifting the combat exclusion will improve women's career progression possibilities and increase respect from colleagues and lower harassment and bullying.

## Impact 3: Promotion

Women's entry into combat positions will result in more women in leadership positions within the services, thereby breaking the so-called brass ceiling.

# Women's Representation in Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)







# INTERVIEWS WITH THE FIRST COMBAT WOMEN

Pressure to represent all women

Physical fitness

Overcompensating

Emotional labour

Male standards

Outsiders

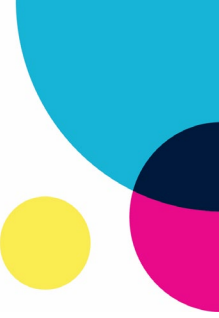
*“If one of us failed catastrophically we would be the anecdotal evidence that women don’t belong here.”*

*“Men don’t want to be outperformed by women, especially in a field that has been restricted, that they’ve told for so long that we can’t do it. So, when a woman comes in and can do it- and does it better than them- they don’t want to accept that. I think it is also a part- not lack of acceptance but...they would like it more if I wasn’t as good as them.”*

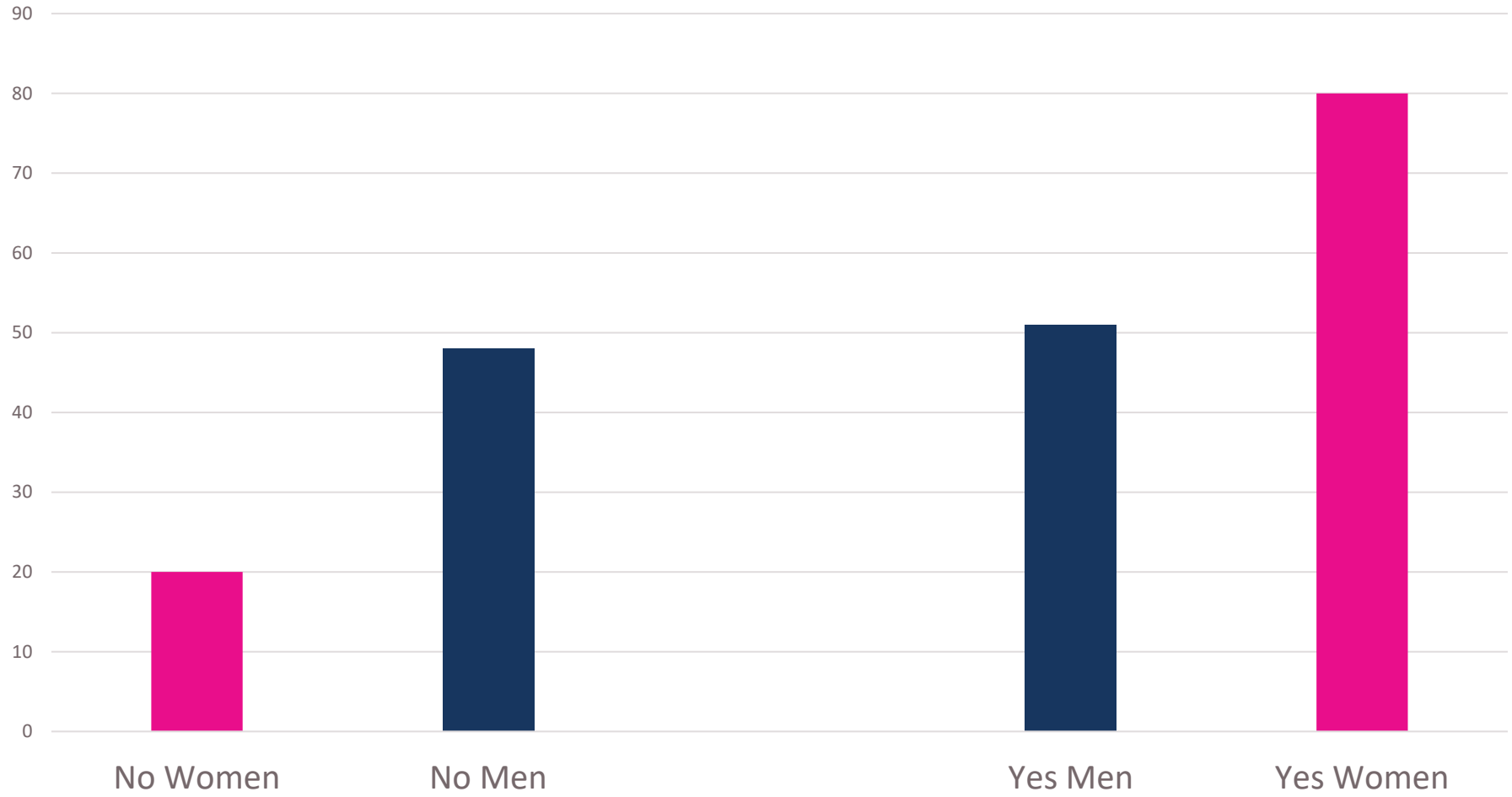
# DOUBLE BINDS FOR THE FIRST COMBAT WOMEN



- Equal/Transform
- Integrate/Empower
- =endless, exhausting adaptations



# Are there obstacles to women being leaders in the New Zealand Army?



Not for circulation or citation

**Megan MacKenzie**

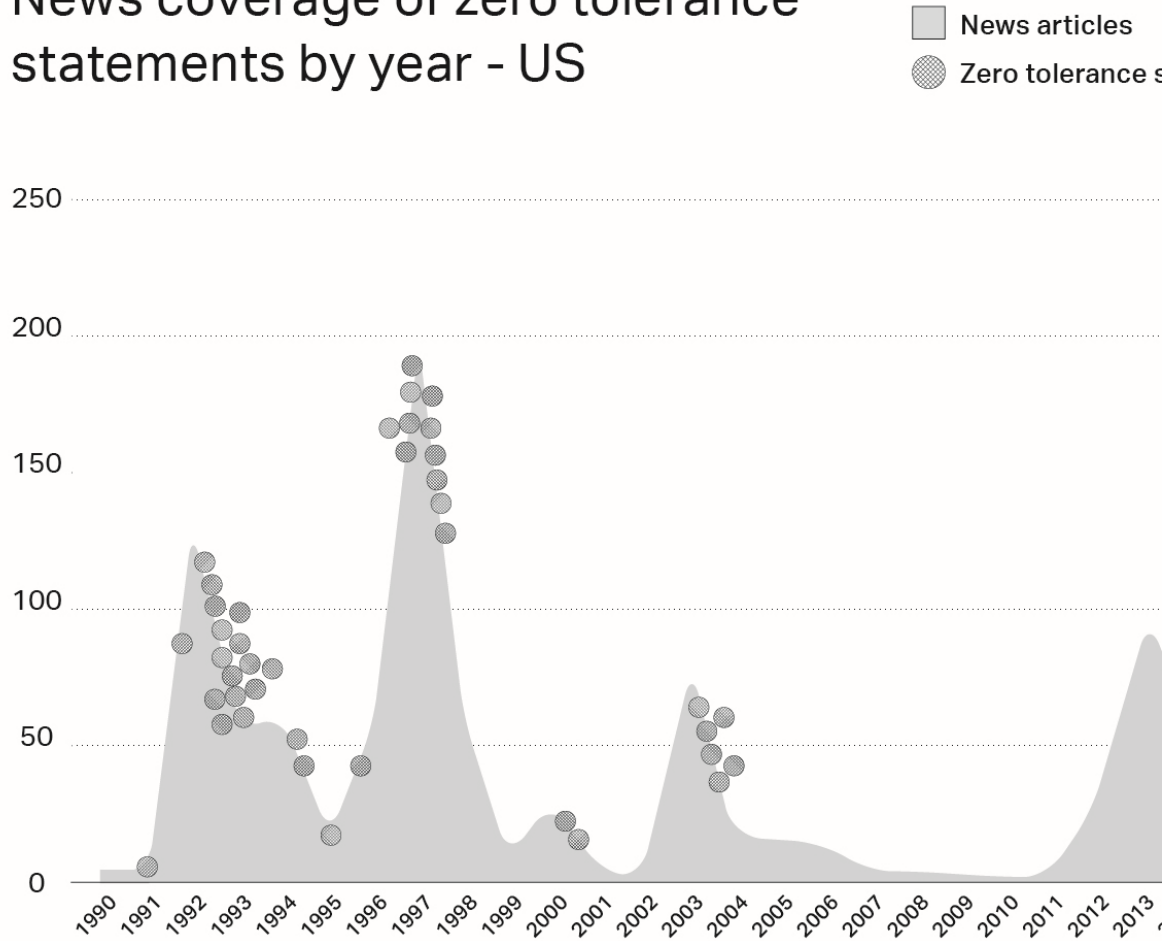
# **GOOD SOLDIERS DON'T RAPE**



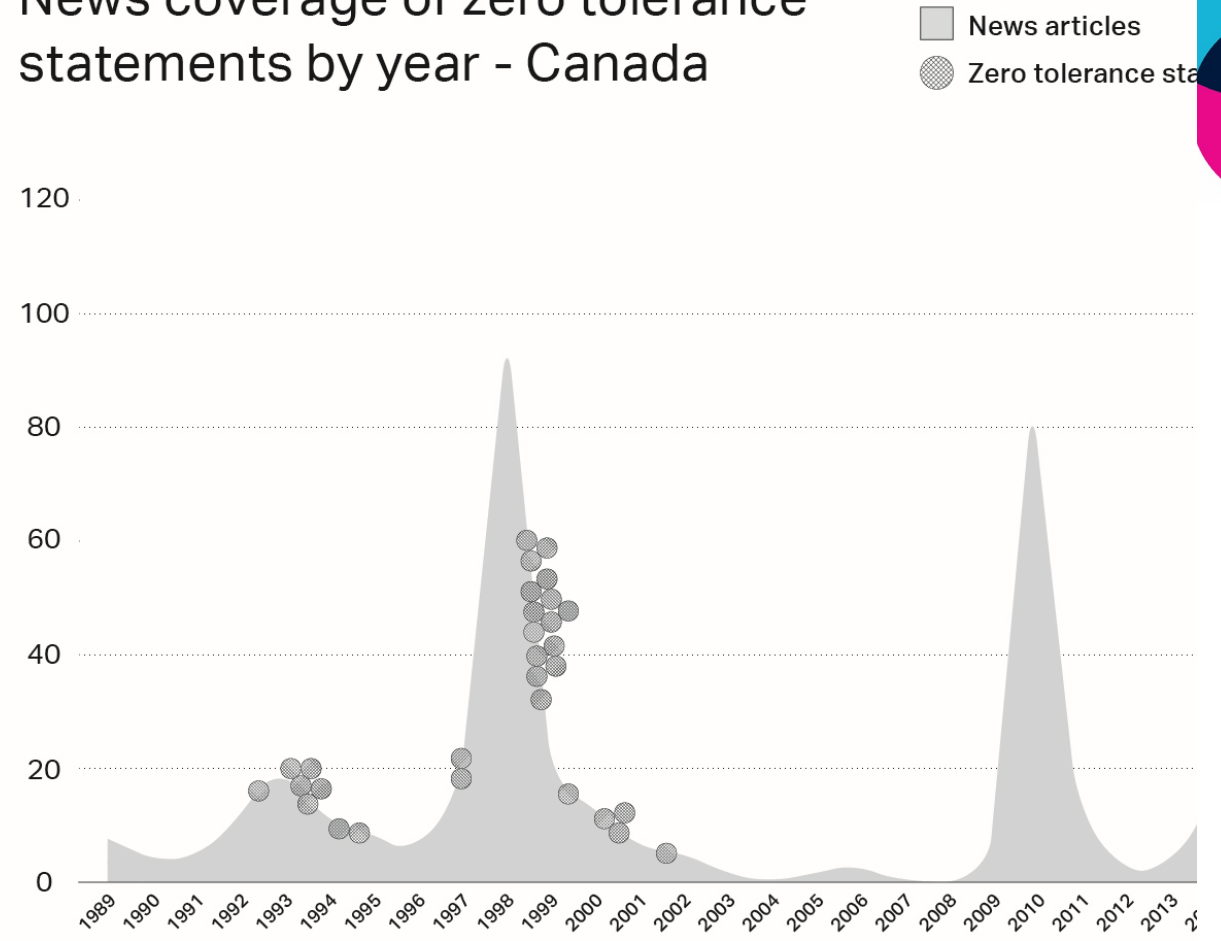
**The Stories We Tell About  
Military Sexual Violence**

## **MSV as an Ongoing Challenge for Defence Forces**

News coverage of zero tolerance statements by year - US



News coverage of zero tolerance statements by year - Canada



# Zero Tolerance Statements

# Overarching Narratives About MSV

1. There are essential elements to military culture that lead to MSV.
2. Militaries are hostile institutions for women.
3. Only military leaders know how to handle the problem of sexual violence





# Feminist Caution About Pragmatism