

Women's Experience of their Military Careers

A Socio-pedagogical Study

Summary

This publication deals with the issue of military careers as experienced by women. The author reconstructs the experiences of women from the Officer Corps of the Polish Army and analyses the processes by which military careers are constructed.

The need to explore this issue is highlighted by the deficit in knowledge about the way female officers experience their professional career development. An analysis of the subject literature leads to the conclusion that there are very few publications and very little research devoted to this phenomenon. The social importance of the issue raised in this monograph is part and parcel of a broader context of cultural transformation regarding gender roles. On the one hand, this means a gradual shift in the conviction that biological gender determines educational and professional choices. On the other hand, it points to the lingering traditional assumptions regarding the scope of duties belonging to the notions of male and female. This is reflected, among other things, in the division of professions into feminized and masculinized, with the army categorised as the latter. With these considerations in mind, the author considered it necessary to ask about the content of social controversies related to the profession (service) of a soldier, as well as about the difficulties and dilemmas encountered by women in this profession.

The publication consists of three theoretical chapters, one methodology chapter and six chapters devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the research material accumulated. The first chapter covers key terms such as gender, work and career, and provides an overview of the basic concepts of socio-cultural gender. The author presents the main trends in the way professional careers are presented, emphasizing, among other things, the dualistic approach. The final part of the first chapter is devoted to women's professional careers in terms of pedagogical research and presents the main controversies around women's professional roles, including the problem of segregation, labour market exclusion and difficulties in balancing family and professional roles.

In Chapter Two, the author reflects on the socializing context in which gender roles are shaped, and takes three levels into account: family, educational and cultural (mass media). In order to demonstrate the role of individual socialization actors in the process of reproducing social inequalities, she uses Bowles and Gintis' theory of economic reproduction and the Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction. The subsequent section of Chapter Two provides an overview of the diverse (alternative) forms of women's family/social life, pointing to the variety of options expressed in the fluidity of the limits of what is now considered to be the private sphere.

In the third chapter, the author presents the dynamics of women's access to military careers in historical and present-day terms. The cultural context of the army's specificity in terms of gender

roles is presented in reference to R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. It also brings closer the specificity of the military as a work organization. It analyses the formal aspects of military careers and the importance of education for shaping career paths.

The fourth part is devoted to methodological assumptions, allowing aspects of the reality of professional soldiers' careers to be grasped empirically. The author conducted research using qualitative methods within the constructivist paradigm and used a semi-structured individual interview as her main research tool. The empirical material, collected in the form of statements from participants, was analysed and interpreted through the analytical categories of gender and factors regulating the course of professional military careers.

The research findings are presented in chapters five to ten. The research material is divided into six thematic areas, the aim being to organize the structure of the narrative. The empirical chapters are arranged according to the order of the research questions. This procedure gives an insight into both the similarities and differences in the way the careers are experienced.

The research findings indicate that gender stereotypes and prejudices are still present, and appear at different stages of military careers. It can be assumed that in selected cases their origins go back to the period of higher education (military schools and universities). It transpires that although paths to promotion paths are clear, in the formal sense, some of the research participants have experienced, still experience or have noticed (in other women) difficulties in the process of pursuing a military career. Only about half believe that they have realized, are realizing or are starting to realize their career goals. Those interviewed emphasize the process nature of their careers, placing themselves at one of the stages (the majority at the initial stage, fewer at an advanced stage), which indicates their great caution in thinking about themselves in terms of pursuing a career. The research findings also indicate the ambiguous nature of patterns that fit into the image of female soldiers. Using a trial and error method and by reconstruction, the study participants create alternative visions of their own soldierhood, oscillating around three models: essential, masculinized and indirect, based on the idea of individual differences. This research also shows that it is common, especially in the early stages of a military career, to strive to confirm one's competence in the eyes of soldiers. This is probably due to the beliefs about men as an embodiment of the military.

Translated by Rob Pagett