

We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

4,800

Open access books available

122,000

International authors and editors

135M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?
Contact book.department@intechopen.com

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.

For more information visit www.intechopen.com



The Havoc of Good Intentions: Destructive Leadership through the Gender Lens

Irja Malmio and Sofia Nilsson

Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.81539>

Abstract

One important objective of the Swedish Armed Forces, which is expressed in the plan for implementing gender mainstreaming from 2015, is to increase the number of women in the organization and especially in the higher ranks. Recruiting more women to the officers' program, while at the same time ensuring that women who have already enrolled as officers will remain in their occupation, is therefore of utmost importance. This chapter is based on a previously made qualitative study where six female cadets were interviewed regarding experiences of their time in training to become officers at the Swedish military academy, as well as how they perceive a future career in the Swedish Armed Forces. The result that emerged was analyzed as three factors: ambition, culture, and visibility. When reviewing the material from a leadership perspective, destructive leadership behaviors at strategic levels were identified as influencing the experiences of the cadets. Seen through a gender lens, destructive leadership in the Swedish Armed Forces describes a pattern where the design of equality work, which is based on good intentions, in some cases fosters leadership behaviors that have a negative impact on the room of action of women in the organization.

Keywords: gender mainstreaming, Swedish Armed Forces, recruitment of under-represented groups, destructive leadership

1. Introduction

Leadership is a complex social phenomenon, which is hard to define and measure since it is an intricate task to separate specific leadership behaviors from more general labor achievements. However, it is evident that even if positive leadership behaviors have a certain effect on the motivation of followers, then the lack of it carries a definite negative effect on the motivation of the followers as well as the well-being for that organization [1].

The ambition with this chapter is, therefore, to elucidate destructive leadership from a gender critical perspective through the experiences of six female cadets of their time in training to become officers at the Swedish military academy. This helps to describe some of the mechanisms found in the social construct of organizations that contribute to form destructive leadership behaviors, where the intention behind that behavior was to promote gender equality, but the result, in fact, had the opposite effect. Indeed, one could argue that destructive leadership is an organizational construct, which usually also is integrated into a larger set of symptoms sprung from gender inequality. The aim of elucidating destructive leadership through a gender lens is thus to acquire insights into some of the mechanisms that can create negative impacts of leadership while at the same time contributing with an understanding of how effective leadership can reduce its existence.

In 1980, applying to the Swedish Armed Forces became a possibility for women in Sweden. The purpose behind this was foremost to widen the recruitment base, but was also partly a response to a changed societal milieu initiated through the ending of the cold war, which called for a greater emphasis on diversity [2]. However, in spite of being one of the most gender equal countries in the world, the number of women working in combatting positions in the Swedish army still remains low, and women are also markedly underrepresented higher up in the hierarchy [3]. From the date that women started to enroll into the army, there has been a growing awareness of the problem with female representation and several attempts have been made to increase their numbers. In recent years, the Swedish Armed Forces (also referred to in the text as SAF) has undergone a profound transformation work, in large parts implemented as a response to the UN resolution 1325 that was passed by the UN Security Council in 2000. The conversion to this new framework also corresponds with the overall changes in the world where new technology is creating a new set up in many areas. In the military, this is seen as a reorientation of purpose introducing a new focus toward peace-keeping operations rather than the preceding emphasis on operative combatting abilities, as well as a closing in on the gap between civil and military spheres that constituted a prominent feature in the past [4]. As a response, the recruitment of women to join the defense system as well as increasing the number of women in leading positions is a highly prioritized item in the agenda of SAF. However, despite the fact that there is a firm political consensus and an outspoken determination from the supreme levels in the military regiments to focus on these matters, the ambitions have not been realized. In fact, in the year of 2015, only 5% of all the officers in the Swedish Armed Forces were women, with 10–12% found in other military positions [5]. What is also bothersome is the fact (as reported in the Swedish Armed Forces annual reports from 2016) that fewer individuals than what is needed to ensure staff provision for the military has enlisted to the officers' program. At the same time, a large number of the officer corps is expected to retire during the coming 15 years [6].

Since the year of 2008, the Swedish officers' program has been conducted as a 3-year education program by the Swedish Defense University, which leads to an officer's degree consisting of 180 academy points. The education is mostly carried out at the military academy, and in order to be accepted to the program, the applicant first has to undergo basic military training.

The number of seats available to applicants has varied between 100 and 150 in the last few years, and it has been a great challenge to fill those seats with candidates who possess the right qualifications [7].

1.1. Women in the Swedish Armed Forces

The military as an organization appears as being a highly hierarchical and traditional institution with a distinct division of different decision-making levels [8]. Military organizations carry a strong masculine connotation and can be said to exemplify organizations that are highly gendered with a stereotypical allocation of labor. Historically, the military has been powered by men and access to women has been greatly limited. Men in the military are also in a clear numerical advantage and their dominance is even further accentuated higher up in ranks [9].

Since the beginning of the last century, women have been employed for different tasks in the military to a more or less extensive degree. From the beginning, they were deployed in different volunteer organizations where their main function was to relieve the men from less demanding assignments so that they in turn could focus on military matters. However, the demand for more manpower in the midst of the cold war opened up the discussions for women to participate in the military. In 1980, the discussions eventually led to opportunities for women to function as soldiers to a lesser degree, but in 1989, all obstacles were removed [10]. Voluntary and gender-neutral conscription was realized in 2011, but it was not until 2017 that a general conscription law, which applies to both men and women alike, was put into force [11].

Women in the Swedish Armed Forces are foremost represented in the lower ranks and are greatly outnumbered higher up in the hierarchy. Another characteristic is that most female military personnel are located in the air force where they occupy more supportive functions [5]. Berggren puts forward that the recruiting process in itself represents a problem. Besides a "glass ceiling" for women who want to climb the corporate ladder, there is also a "glass corridor" where women through the recruiting processes are being allocated to occupations of less importance, where their career is moving only in one horizontal direction [9]. Some researchers have pointed out another reason for the low representation of women in the military, namely, that the organization itself is "greedy." A greedy organization demands everything from its coworkers, which would make it challenging for women to fit in since they generally take on more responsibility for social activities outside of work [3].

According to the Swedish Armed Forces plan for implementing gender mainstreaming from 2015, the work for gender equality is carried out in two trails. Gender and UN resolution 1325 concerning military operations is one of them, and the other is gender mainstreaming in a nationwide supply of personnel and equality perspective. A conclusion made in this plan is that the work on gender equality is not seen for some employees as a vital part of the military assignment and is thus not prioritized, in spite of having a firm political and judicial anchorage [5].

1.2. Culture and social identity

Culture is a concept that has many different meanings depending on the context. From a psychosocial and institutional discourse, culture functions as a merging binder for different conducts that simultaneously recreate and challenge norms in the society. As such, it can be identified as visible and invisible norms and values that patterns human acts and behaviors and can be both including and excluding for certain groups [12]. Discrimination on basis of gender is often hidden in the cultural climate that permeates the organization as a whole, and relates to mechanisms that shape a typical attitude rather than specifying a certain action itself [13]. In order to fit into the cultural setting, a modification of behavior in ways that are acceptable to the dominating culture is needed, and the modification process transfuses the individual with masculine or feminine qualities. At the same time, the adjustment legitimizes a natural way of being, captured in the concept “doing gender” [14].

In order for a specific organizational culture to flourish, it is necessary that the members of an organization identify with the general concept of what that organization embodies. An explicit corporate identity can transfer itself to the self-image and is an important aspect of power and control in organizations [12]. This process is described by social identification theory put forth by Ashforth and Mael in the 1980s and relates to the identification of the individual as a part of a certain social group. Social identification emerges from different categories consisting of the individual, the distinctiveness of the group and its perceived prestige, and is also affected of how prominent other groups are regarded in comparison. The process of identification conducts in harmony with activities that reflects the social identity and is expressed in stereotyped assumptions based on the individual and his or her relation to others. An organization that is more well-known with a pronounced distinctiveness has a greater tendency to provide a specific social identity to its members [15]. A part of the social identification is that of role congruity described by Diekmann and Eagly as a powerful force that foster different motivations for men and women as well as different methods of fulfilling those motivations. This concept relates to human desires to feel acceptance and that they fit in to their social environment, and can push an individual to strive for conformity in order to gain acceptance from a boss or colleagues [16].

1.3. Gender and the organization

The scientific discourse on gender was originally not concerned with how gender is created and maintained in working environments but was more focused on the family and its social institutions. Today, however, many researchers agree that the organization with its hierarchies and functions constitutes an important building block in how gender is being created and maintained [17].

Rosabeth Moss Kanter put forward a primal theory based on a case study of an American company in the middle of the 1970s, which explains how the structure is created in gender-biased companies. One of the most important concepts in her theory deals with the distribution of numbers, where an effect of being the minority is that women are made into “tokens.”

This position views them as representing all women while at the same time posing as the great exception, described by Kantner as the “visibility effect.” The minority situation also accentuates perceived differences between men and women, and makes the majority group defensive of their prominent position. In order for women to cope with the minority situation, assimilation into different stereotypes on how women should behave is likely to follow [18]. Kantner received some critiques for her supposition that the distribution of numbers is the only thing that matters, since gender equality according to this principle should be easy to apply if you balance the numbers. In reality, however, when the volume of the discriminated group increases, the opposite effect has been shown to occur, since the majority group feels threatened and will then defend their position. A lot of researchers also agree that gender is a most significant factor for the reasons behind the imbalance of numbers, where negative consequences only occur when the minority group belongs to a category that has a lower social status than those in the majority group [19].

Joan Acker suggests that there is a gender-based division of labor, hidden in the concept of organizations as being “gender neutral” but implicit in the work itself, and is affected by perceived responsibility, the complexity of the work and where it is positioned in the hierarchy. These silent expectations are crucial for deciding who is to be considered most suitable for the position. Both work and hierarchy is considered to be impersonal and gender-neutral, but because of the binary demarcation between the masculine and the feminine qualities that are applied to different work categories, they are treated differently [19]. In order for women to function in a male-dominant working environment, they can adopt different coping strategies. The conformist strategy emphasizes the similarity with those of the majority group, while at the same time spacing themselves from other women and relating to the men instead. Women can also apply a positive strategy, which accentuates the advantages of belonging to a group of scarce numbers, where, however, the positive advantages of being in a minority situation are products of a negative system that greatly limits women’s possibilities to power and influence [17].

Another concept important to theorizing of gender in organizations was brought forward in the 1980s by Raewyn Connell who formulated a theoretical concept called hegemonic masculinity, which describes mechanisms that create masculinity. The concept implies an idealized notion that men relate to while at the same time provides a justification that men as a group is superior to women. The hegemonic system is seen as a process contingent of its historical and cultural setting and needs the approval of other men and women who are not a part of it [20]. In this research, Jeff Hearn made out the strong association between men and the military, where in fact, the obvious connection makes the masculinity neutralized and invisible. In this way, the military incarnates the very concept of masculine hegemony [21]. Closely related is the concept of homosociality, which describes how men relate to other men and is often expressed in rituals where the purpose is to indicate the superiority of the male group. Heterosociality on the other hand describes how women relate to and confirms men for example by being negative toward issues on gender equality [17].

1.4. Destructive leadership

The research on leadership has emerged from a long tradition, which has one-sidedly focused on the positive aspects of leadership. Nonetheless, in the article, “Bad is stronger than good,” it is suggested that negative experiences have a profoundly more far reaching and long-lasting effects than the positive ones [22]. In fact, there is a great need for a paramount force in numbers of good experiences in order to overcome one single bad event. The reason for this is explained through an evolutionary reasoning that it has been more beneficent from a survival standpoint for humankind to be more vigilant toward dangerous situations rather than memorizing positive events [1].

Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad define destructive leadership as the systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor, or manager that violates the legitimate interests of the organization by undermining the organization’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness, while also having a negative impact on the motivation, well-being, or job satisfaction of subordinates. Furthermore, destructive leaders may not intend to harm, but due to their thoughtlessness, insensitivity, or lack of confidence, they effectively do so [23]. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser bring the focus of the leader and suggest that destructive leadership occurs in a synergy of leaders, followers, and environmental contexts described as the “toxic triangle” [24]. Several studies have also pointed out that destructive leadership consists of both active and passive forms of actions and behaviors, and both active and passive forms of destructive leadership have a greater effect over time on coworkers’ job satisfaction than on constructive forms of leadership [25]. In fact, passive forms of destructive leadership, so-called *laissez-faire* leadership, have been shown to be more inclined to cause frustration and problems with the coworkers than active forms of destructive leadership in terms of the leader creating a work environment characterized by uncertainty, role ambiguity, and conflicts [26]. These behaviors are also more difficult to detect, which can cause the negative effects on the organization and co-workers to last for a longer period of time [1]. An interesting study by Yan et al. concluded that *laissez-faire* leadership is particularly destructive when it comes to organizational learning, as this is obstructing the feedback process and inhibits open communication [27].

A somewhat neglected part of leadership studies, which historically has been more concerned with the top-down, leader-centric processes, is the role of followership. Focusing on the interaction process between followers and leaders is, however, helpful when identifying as well as curbing destructive leadership in organizations [28]. From a gender-critical point of view, this is also an interesting perspective to take into consideration, since female and male leaders are perceived differently by their followers [29], which in some cases can breed an unhealthy imbalance.

The organization itself is a factor contributing to destructive leadership, and one big indicator of an unhealthy organization is so-called narcissism. When ascribed to an organization, this indicates a culture of self-aggrandizement, where failing to take responsibility for organizational failures or admitting mistakes is current, as well as perceiving oneself as more worthy of attention than other organizations. These characteristics can be applied to military organizations and can fertilize the existence of toxic leadership and unethical behavior [30].

2. Method

This chapter is based on a previous research study that focused on acquiring insights into six female cadets' experiences of their training to become officers at the military academy. A qualitative research method with a thematic analyze was applied in the original study. The data collection consisted of semistructured interviews and open interview questions, where the purpose and question formulations directed the selection of informants to be deployed in the study. Data were there after interpreted and put in relation to prior research and relevant concepts, which then constituted the result where the implications were based on.

2.1. Participants

Conducive to the aim of this study, six female cadets ranging from age 21 to 29 were chosen for the interviews. The cadets represent the three grades as well as the three combat forces, the army, the navy and the air force in order to give a wide variation of experiences. Access to interview persons was assisted via a contact who is currently working at the school. Lists of female cadets enlisted to the program were also handed down, which helped with the selection. The selection can be described as a comfort selection, since participants were selected who were available during the time the study was planned to take part [31].

2.2. Data collection

The initial contact with the informants was taken via email. Two of the interviews were conducted at the military academy in Stockholm, two at the Swedish Defense University, and two via Skype, since the informants were not currently present in Stockholm, Sweden. One of the authors was present during the interviews. The interviews were introduced with a recap of information previously given on the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, and that the participants could chose not to answer a question they did not feel comfortable with. Permission to record the interviews was asked for, which was made with the assistance of an iPhone 6s. The interviews emanated from a preconstructed interview guide with a set of themes and open questions and took approximately 1 hour to conduct.

2.3. Data analysis

Processing data was initiated with a transcription of the recorded material, where audial data are transferred into written text before the analyzing process takes place. The transcribing work was made in sequence to the conducted interviews, and adjustments that emerged from new information were made accordingly. The process of analyzing data was set up in accordance with thematic analyze, with examining the interviews and comparing them to find similarities and disparities in expressions, speech, and quotes [32]. The overall theme emerging from the data was the female cadets' experiences of their situation at the military academy while studying in the officers' program and from their time in the Swedish Armed Forces. Factors that affect that experience are the ambitions of the individual, the culture of the organization, and visibility, which will be further investigated below. In order to exemplify (see

Significant unit	Subcategory	Category
My knowledge that I actually want this. I do not do it for anyone else, but for my own sake and that is what is most important. This is something that I want to do and I am not giving up. I am going to move forward and I really want this.	Personal objective	Ambition
/.../ I believe that due to this male jargon that exists, in order for a woman to be recognized as a part of the team, you almost have to become like one of the men, both subconscious and deliberately /.../	Personal treatment and jargon	Culture
There is a lot of focus when combat camera has filmed an exercise that an even though only a small part of consisted of women, they are the only ones who are seen.	Gender before performance	Visibility

Note that the symbol /.../ is sometimes present with regard to single quotes in the result section to indicate that parts of that quote have been left out in order to make more sense in the context.

Table 1. Example drawn from the study's data analysis.

Table 1), opinion-bearing units were made from quotes where similar aspects were coded and categorized into one theme.

When analyzing the results in terms of destructive leadership, we need to first address the question: what in the experiences of the female cadets can be linked to destructive leadership? There are several quotes where one could argue for the presence of active forms of destructive leadership, but it is also hard to tell if these behaviors have been repeated for a long period of time or is just instances of bad judgment on behalf of the supervisor. Following the lines from the definition of destructive leadership, the destructive behavior needs to be repeated over time [25]. The passive forms of destructive leadership have been easier to spot, and will therefore be the focus of this chapter.

2.4. Ethical considerations

In accordance with the ethical principles described by Bryman as the requirements of science, which is information, consent, confidentiality and usage [31], the study respondents were given thorough information beforehand on the purpose of the study. The participants were also informed that participation was voluntary and that they at any point in the process could terminate their involvement, or to pause a question they did not want to answer.

3. Results

The three factors that were identified in the original study as most significant in describing the shared experiences of the interviewed female cadets at the military academy were ambition, culture, and visibility. Ambition describes motivation and reasons for choosing a career initially within SAF as well as future aspirations, which also includes thoughts on family planning. Culture is connected to traditions, narratives on special treatment, personal treatment and jargon, the ideal of masculinity present in army culture, and adaption strategies.

Visibility deals with how women are made visible in marketing campaigns as tokens, visibility in the form of transformation work, and the invisibility of achievements. All of these factors can be seen as the indirect result of leadership failures, which will be further investigated in the discussion below.

3.1. Ambition

The informants of this study describe SAF as a natural choice of employer since they share a deep sense of meaningfulness in the work conducted by the military and reciprocate the values that the organization incorporates. Working as a team toward a common goal and having a varied job description was also stated as reasons why the informants thrive in SAF and why they initially chose the military profession.

The initial expectations of the informants on the educational contents of the training were high and were to a certain extent influenced from what senior commanders and colleagues had told them of their own experiences at the academy. Other contributing factors that have formed pre-existing expectations were the information given by the Swedish Defense University and military academy and from SAF. The informants also expressed expectations that the education would have a profound relevance to their future employment as officers and leaders. However, the impression of the informants is that these expectations have not materialized. One quote illustrates the general opinion:

I had enormous expectations actually. /.../ My bosses that I look up to had all attended the military Academy. Now in hindsight I have understood that maybe not all of them attended the Military Academy but just belong to the older generation, but I expected a lot more of everything.

The physical demands at the military academy are experienced by the informants as a certain problematic area. The heavy significance put on physical capacity forms a general idea that how well you perform physically has a great influence for your social status at the school, and even tends to put a shadow over other achievements. The informants also experience that there is a great lack of acceptance for different biological prerequisites that individuals possess when it comes to the physical performance, captured by one informant in this quote:

There was one teacher who I still recall/.../ he said to me that 'if you cannot manage to bang up your 80 kg fighting comrade with full combat gear over your shoulder and run away with him then maybe you shouldn't be here' /.../ At first I did not really get that 'wow, did he just say that to me' but it got me more afterwards. I was more in a state of shock but laughed it off.

The informants share high ambitions regarding their future career paths within SAF, as well as having an explicit career goal, which is a great motivation in pursuing their aspirations. A cloud of worry regarding future career aspirations centers around thoughts on how to combine a military career with raising a family. One of the informants stated that in order to make a prosperous career within SAF, it is crucial for women not to have children and that women who choose to plan for a family get slighted in terms of promotion or positions that are viewed as more demanding.

Regarding ambitions, expectations and aspirations, the overall impression is that the participants express a certain disappointment. They feel that the information they were given

beforehand is not corresponding to the reality, and that their expectations on what has been described as “one of the best educational programs on leadership in Sweden” have not been matched on any level.

3.2. Culture

There is a certain cultural environment, or a collective social identity, at the military academy, which is referred to in the interviews as the “Essence of Karlberg,”¹ and which is reproduced through different social activities based on tradition and historical anecdotes. The majority of the informants appreciate these traditions and feel that they contribute to the creation of affinity among the students and strengthen the overall cohesion. At the same time, however, there is a sense that this culture also creates barriers, which has been experienced by the informants in various ways.

The cultural climate at the military academy is also greatly centered on an estimation of the masculine ideal, which is evident in several ways. First, there is a strong emphasis of the most male-dominated military force, namely the army, where large contents of the education are focused on this area. Former experiences of the cadets are evaluated with reference to previous army experience where affinity with an army troop is considered to carry a more prestigious implication. Second, the masculine ideal is eminently implicit in the military lingua, which invokes the soldier with a masculine connotation. The masculine majority in SAF and at the military academy contributes to a feeling in our informants and that there is a masculine ideal that you have to conduct yourself too, and if a woman wants to be fully accepted as “one of the boys,” she needs to act in a more masculine way. One informant reflects on this:

I believe that much of the male jargon that exists here is due to the fact that in order for a woman to be accepted as a part of the group she has to become almost like the men, consciously and subconsciously. That is what I have reflected on from outside of it all, that the women who maintain their female approach get more contested than the ones who try to behave as the men.

Third, the masculine ideal contributes to a culture where women get exposed to assumptions that they have an easier time than the men in the army or are receiving advantages just because they are women, and many of them have received comments that they are only being where they are because of gender quotas or positive special treatment.

In order to adapt to a culture that glorifies the masculine ideal, two adaption strategies were most common. The first can be described as a positive strategy with a heterosocial approach, exemplified by comments such as “that it was nice to bypass fussy quarrels amongst women, intrigue and drama.” Another adaption strategy was identified as silently accepting a certain jargon, simply because the women felt outnumbered by the men and did not have the energy to confront a colleague every time they felt that the comments were offensive. It can also be a sort of survival mechanism to consciously and subconsciously ignore the negative experiences in order to socially fit into a masculine environment.

¹ Name of the location of the Academy.

Personal treatment at the school and in SAF in general is described by the informants as both positive and negative, where the positive treatment is described by the informants as a good camaraderie and affinity. The adverse treatment on the other hand arises from both teachers and other male soldiers, officers and fellow cadets. The initial reflection made by the informants was usually very positive regarding personal treatment in general, but when asked questions on other topics, several instances of situations where treatment had been experienced in a negative manner were revealed. One informant who initially said that she never had experienced any problems with ill treatment said later in the interview that:

I have experienced things where I had to grab that person and say 'now you better calm down, because if you do this to the wrong person you can lose your job'.

During the time when the interviews were carried out, several scoops in the media appeared, which focused on negative treatment that some women have experienced in SAF, and a "me too-appeal" was released in the form of a debate article in one of the most distributed newspapers in Sweden, "Dagens Nyheter" [33]. Therefore, a part of the data made from the interviews centered around experiences of the "me too-appeal," and the informants shared recollections of episodes that either happened to themselves or to other female cadets who had experienced sexual harassment, bullying, and other offensive special treatment, as exemplified by this quote:

When you consciously subject individuals to bullying or harassment because you do not share the same opinion or want that person there /.../ I know of a situation where a guy expressed to a girl that 'I have bullied you during the whole time during studies because I did not want you here' /.../.

3.3. Visibility

Visibility originates from two aspects. First, that of belonging to a minority, which brings out a feeling that all your actions are more visible. Second, it deals with the manner in which SAF works on promoting gender mainstreaming where the informants experience that "all the lights are being put on women," which in turn has both positive and negative impacts. The negative aspects of the visibility correspond with a feeling that as women, they constantly need to prove themselves and defend their position both in the academy and in the organization. One informant reflects:

I have to prove that I belong here /.../ in some situations you have to bang your head into the wall in order to get respected.

The fact that women often are singled out as the main attraction in advertisement campaigns while still being scarce in numbers in the rest of the organization, makes the informants feel that they are made visible mainly because of their gender rather than for their achievements, which brings some feelings of frustration.

The informants also voiced critique on how SAF is working with integrating equality work in the organization, where the feeling is that the work is being conducted in an unsystematic way. The intention behind this is generally good, but the outcome has a negative result. With few opportunities to follow up on a failed gender mainstreaming agenda, this actually contributes to create a general adverse sentiment where gender mainstreaming is seen as a

source of annoyance. Therefore, a more structured plan that focuses on equality and gender issues as an integrated part of the curriculum is desired, rather than ad hoc lectures thrown in last minute. Getting the tools for practically implementing the value system into the daily routines after finishing the education is something that one informant claimed would be of huge benefit from a leadership perspective.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The main purpose of this chapter was to elucidate destructive leadership patterns in the Swedish Armed Forces through the experiences of six female cadets during their training at the officers' program. We will now continue to analyze in more detail the content of the results three factors: ambition, culture, and visibility, and how they can be understood from a perspective of destructive leadership.

The factor identified as ambition revealed that the participants of this study display high levels of ambitions and have clear-cut aspirations for their professional careers. They start their training with an ambitious outlook on career goals, but experience disappointment as their expectations are not substantiated. The informants also expressed a desire to be recognized on grounds of their competence and ambitions, with the aspiration to be accepted as soldiers. The ambition of reaching out for high set career goals, however, gets conflicted by that of becoming a mother. According to the informants' own perception, these roles are hard to combine and the mutual feeling is that women who start a family do not get promoted or considered for more demanding positions. Behind this notion lies stereotypical gender role that still appears sustained within SAF, where women are seen as naturally associated with communal qualities, which implies that they are not suited to the general conception of leadership [34]. Another hindrance to women lifted by the informants is the physical demands, since they are not adjusted to different biological conditions or even corresponding to the ones set by the different army forces, which can also be perceived as a way to confirm a stereotypical image of SAF as, in essence, masculine, and can in fact lead to performance decrements [16].

The study identifies the second factor culture, as a perception of a collective identification formed by hereditary traditions that sustain and preserve "the essence of Karlberg." Culture in this way is expressed symbolically and contributes to the framing of the military as a distinctive organization liable to its own set of rules and provides a unified social identity for its members [15]. Seen in this way, the cultural framework can also help to explain the context that contributes to forming destructive leadership behaviors, since the exclusivity brings an exclusion for those who belong to a deviant category or for some other reasons do not want to participate in the social activities. The identification process also adds to the formation of the masculine ideal, a sort of "male glorification" as stated by Regnö [35]. The strong masculine connotation of the soldier fits like a glove with the ideal of hegemonic masculinity [20] and aids the construction of attitudes on men and women in the military. Evidence for this pattern is seen in an idealized image-making of the male-dominated army troops, which not only dictates the basic training at the academy, but also renders employees that has a professional background from the army with a higher social status. Taking into account Ackers theory on

the internal division in masculine and feminine categories [19], a binary division in core activities (the army) and supporting activities (air force and navy) is identified, also substantiated by the research made by Persson [36]. The masculine ideal corresponds with a depreciation of feminine aspects apparent in the experiences of the informants who feels that a female soldier or officer does not have the same prominence as their male counterparts. The degradation construct is further created and sustained through the spreading of myths and rumors where female militaries are suspected of being the recipients of positive special treatment and thus having an easier time in the military than their male colleagues.

The result also brought up personal treatment and jargon as culturally contingents, where jargon or negative treatment is neutralized and ignored. This can be seen as a coping strategy since depreciatory discourse on women has a profoundly negative impact on the self-image [37]. Another adjustment strategy that was identified is the accepting approach where women put up with an existing jargon. This strategy proceeds from a cultural setting, which defines boundaries for what is approved topics of conversation. Questions concerning equality and sexual harassment are approached with great caution, corresponding well with the process of social identification where strong bonds are created with unwritten contracts of what you can and cannot reveal to outsiders. Another explanation that describes the cultural setting is that the military organization itself is greedy, demanding everything from its associates [3], a notion that can also be linked to the concept of self-image since a greedy organization also demands great conformity to its own set of ideals. The image construction of the military as being a peculiar kind of organization, and as such liable to its own set of rules also reveals a "narcissistic" organizational trait. It appears that there is a prevailing culture of silence on sensitive topics, and sometimes a lack of follow ups on actual mistakes [30]. This in turn can have effects on the leadership, especially in terms of learning from errors, which according to Yan et al. involves: "*identifying, analyzing, and transforming an error into experience and utilizing the knowledge to correct actions and improve performance*" [27]. At the same time, admitting to mistakes can damage the collective identity, more so if there are narcissistic tendencies in that organization.

The third factor visibility derives from personal experiences of the women at the military academy as well as in SAF that they receive a high visibility because their sex is female. This visibility is enhanced by the exposedness of being in a minority position, and highlighted in the marketing campaigns of SAF where female soldiers often are the focal point. Behind this policymaking, one can clearly detect the good intentions gone awry, manifested in a desire on behalf of the strategic levels of leadership to make the women more visible in order to improve their situation and also to attract more women, which is not a bad idea. The impending dilemma though for the women who already are in the organization, this visibility further increases the pressure to maintain their position, while at the same time removes the focus away from actual performance. Visibility in this way consolidates the general acceptance that the soldier is a male construct, which makes women that hold this profession to stand out as an anomaly. It also aids to the commonly accepted image of the military as a male construction, closely intertwined with hegemonic masculinity, where one significant function historically has been "to turn boys into men" [21]. The deviant group, which in this case consists of the female cadets, is made visible because they do not belong to the normative group, which

means that the individual woman becomes a representative for all women, a token [18]. SAF heightens the visualization on female employees in the marketing campaigns both externally and internally. Questions on what grounds the female employees are being highlighted for fertilize the spreading of myths and rumors on gender quotas and special treatment where personal achievements and competence are set in the background. The image of SAF and its operations as a work reserved for men only will be further established if the focus of marketing campaigns is perceived as showing off women just because they are women. The visibility effect is identified in the implementation plan for SAF from 2015 as a negative aspect of gender mainstreaming [5], but there is no suggestion of how to overcome this dilemma. A sentiment shared by the informants is that the visibility consolidates the idea that women are seen as the abnormality, a norm further reconstituted by the equality work. At the same time, however, this work needs to take place.

It is our conclusion that all three factors are the result of destructive leadership patterns that are forming at the strategic levels of leadership in SAF, and that this particular type of destructive leadership has its origin in what appears to be a benign wish to take proactive steps to improve the situation of women in SAF. The ambition of SAF to increase the number of female employees partly through implementing a new set of values at the very heart of the organization has indeed run into a few problems. One dilemma is how the new values appear to have been practically put to use where the informants of this study feel that there is a great discrepancy with what is said in writing and what the reality actually looks like. Instead of being a common goal for employees to strive for together, the work on gender mainstreaming has become a symbol of the void between management and administration and the remaining organization where the activities are of more operative nature [4]. One important part in the definition on destructive leadership is that what makes leadership destructive has less to do with the leader's intentions than with the outcomes of the leaders' behavior [1]. A leader can have the best of intentions, but if his or her actions have a negative result, it is still considered a destructive behavior. Considering the experiences of the female cadets, it is evident that although the intention of the strategic leadership of promoting women is most benign, the result of, as well as how it has been carried out has had a negative impact on the working conditions of women in SAF. This fits well with the notion that destructive leadership is seldom absolutely or entirely destructive. Both constructive and destructive forms of leadership exist side by side, and can in fact be seen as two sides of the same coin [25].

Another feature that stands in the way for gender mainstreaming in SAF is the basic understanding on what the military profession in its essence signifies. This image construction is created around the notion that the military is a distinctive and particular organization with its own set of values and rules, an idea that hinders gender mainstreaming. However, this exclusivity is becoming less and less prominent as societal and political demands on transformation are increasing, while the gap between the civil and the military sphere at the same time is shrinking [26]. This conversion has been hard for SAF to adapt to, which in the case of the organizations highly held ambitions on gender mainstreaming appears to have led to some destructive outcomes for those achievements. In the lines of arguments put forth in this

chapter, destructive leadership can be interpreted as the havoc of good intentions, a manifestation as well as a creation of gender inequality, and as such it is a most intricate problem to solve. The only way forward, however, is to admit to mistakes, learn from them, and figure out a better way to approach the issue, where an open communication with those involves a far better strategy than putting all the spotlights on women.

5. Practical implications and further research

Practical implementation made from this study would be to introduce a better follow up on how the agenda with gender mainstreaming in reality is affecting the situation of women in the organization. A major obstacle is that the discussions on gender mainstreaming and sexual harassments are most profound high up in the hierarchy, where, in order to gain more momentum, individuals from the lower ranks of the hierarchy need to be included. One way of achieving this is to integrate a more structured implementation plan for carrying out the value system into the curriculum of the officers program. Effective leadership tools suggested is clear and open communication with an emphasis on developmental leadership, as well as with ethical leadership styles [1].

The women in the study asked for mentorship that enhances the function of female role models. The already existing network for women in the military, network officer/employed woman (NOAK) is perceived by the informants of this study as greatly associated with the precarious situation of being a woman in SAF.

Another suggestion on the basis of this study is to nuance the emphasis on women in the advertisement campaigns. Equality issues involve both men and women, and it is essential to put a gender neutral protocol on all individuals on all levels. It would be interesting to study in further detail how the current recruitment strategy and exposure of women in the communication internally and externally is affecting the working environment of the women in SAF. Highly relevant to destructive leadership is the occurrence of complaints of sexual harassment and negative treatment, where, in the wake of “me too” campaign revealed that as much as 10% of all women in the SAF shared the experience of sexual harassment and special treatment [38]. Further research should be made in order to illuminate how the male-dominated culture is affecting the working environment for women.

Author details

Irja Malmio^{1*} and Sofia Nilsson²

*Address all correspondence to: irjamalmio@hotmail.com

1 Leadership Department, Swedish Defence University, Stockholm, Sweden

2 Department of Leadership and Security, Swedish Defence University, Karlstad, Sweden

References

- [1] Fors Brandebo M, Nilsson S, Larsson G. Leadership: Is bad stronger than good? *Leadership & Organization Developmental Journal*. 2016;**37**(6):690-710
- [2] Carreiras H. *Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies*. New York: Routledge; 2006
- [3] Alvinus A, Krekula C, Larsson G. Managing visibility and differentiating in the recruitment of women as leaders in the armed forces. *Journal of Gender Studies*. 2016;**25**:1-13
- [4] Egnell R, Hojem P, Berts H. *Gender, Military Effectiveness, and Organizational Change-The Swedish Model*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; 2014
- [5] FM2015-15593:1 "Försvarsmaktens handlingsplan för jämställdhetsintegrering 2015-2018" "Swedish Armed Forces implementation plan for gender mainstreaming 2015-2018"
- [6] FM2016-17170:2 "Försvarsmaktens årsredovisning 2016" "Swedish Armed Forces annual plan of 2016"
- [7] Swedish Defense University webpage (20171201) "Officersprogrammet" <http://www.fhs.se/sv/utbildning/officersprogrammet/oversikt/>
- [8] Wong L, Bliese P, McGurk D. Military leadership: A context specific review. *The Leadership Quarterly*. 2003;**14**:657-692
- [9] Berggren A. Undercover operations in no-woman's land: The Swedish armed forces through a gender lens. In: Disputation. University of Lund, Department of Psychology; 2002
- [10] Sundevall F. *Det sista manliga yrkesmonopolet—Genus och militärt arbete i Sverige 1865-1989*. Gothenburg: Makadam; 2011
- [11] SOU 2016:63. En robust personalförsörjning av det militära försvaret. Official Reports of the Swedish Government. Swedish Defence Department. pp. 227-231
- [12] Alvesson M. *Organizational Culture*. London: Sage Publications; 2016
- [13] Alvesson M, Due Billing Y. *Understanding Gender and Organizations*. London: Sage Publications; 1997
- [14] Magnusson E. *Psykologi och kön. Från könsskillnader till genusperspektiv*. Natur och Kultur; 2015
- [15] Ashforth B, Mael F. Social identity theory and the organization. *The Academy of Management Review*. 1989;**14**:20-35
- [16] Diekmann AB, Eagly AH. Of men, women and motivation, a role congruity account. In: Shah YJ, Gardner LW, editors. *Handbook of Motivation Science*. New York: Guilford Press; 2008

- [17] Holgersson C. Recruiting managing directors: Doing homosociality. *Gender, Work & Organisation*. 2012;**20**(4):454-466
- [18] Kantner R. *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: BasicBooks; 1977
- [19] Acker J. Hierarchy, jobs, bodies. A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*. 1990;**4**(2):139-158
- [20] Conell R, Messerschmidt J. Hegemonic masculinity, rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*. 2005;**9**(6):829-859
- [21] Hearn J. Men/masculinities: War/militarism—Searching for the obvious connections. In: Kronsell A, editor. *Making Gender, Making War: Violence, Military and Peacekeeping Practices*. Svedberg: University of Lund; 2011
- [22] Beumeister RF, Bratslavsky E, Finkenauer C, Vohns KE. Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*. 2001;**5**(4):323-370
- [23] Skogstad SA, Nielsen B, Hetland M, Einarsen. The relative effects of constructive, Laissez-faire, and tyrannical leadership on subordinate job satisfaction. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*. 2014;**222**(4):221-223
- [24] Padilla A, Hogan R, Kaiser BR. The toxic triangle: destructive leaders, susceptible followers and conducive environments. *The Leadership Quarterly*. 2007;**18**:176-194
- [25] Einarsen S, Aaslano MS, Skogstad A. Destructive leadership behavior: A definition and conceptual model. *The Leadership Quarterly*. 2007;**18**(13):207-216
- [26] Holmberg A, Alvinus A. How pressure for change challenge military organizational characteristics; 2018. Manuscript in preparation
- [27] Yan Q, Bligh MC, Kohles CJ. Absence makes the errors go longer. How leaders inhibit learning from errors. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*. 2014;**222**(4):233-245
- [28] May D, Wesche JS, Heinitz K, Kerschreiter R. Putting forward an integrated theoretical framework for the interaction process between leaders and followers. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*. 2014;**222**(4):203-213
- [29] Eklund EK, Barry SE, Grunberg EN. Gender and leadership. In: Alvinus A, editor. *Gender Differences in Different Contexts*. InTech; 2017. DOI: 10.5772/65457
- [30] Alvinus A, Ohlsson A, Larsson G. Organizational challenges and leaders' coping strategies: a qualitative study of Swedish military staff organization. *Journal of Military Studies*. 2018 ahead of print
- [31] Bryman A. *Social Research Methods*. 5th ed. Oxford: OUP; 2015
- [32] Kvale S, Brinkmann S. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage Publications; 2014
- [33] DN Debatt (20171202). 1768 Kvinnor i försvaret: "Alla anmälningar måste tas på allvar"

- [34] Eagly AH, Karau SJ. Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*. 2002;**109**:573-598
- [35] Regnö K. Det osynliggjorda ledarskapet. Kvinnliga chefer i majoritet. In: Disputation. KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Departement of Organization and Leadership; 2013
- [36] Persson A. Changing boundaries, defending boundaries, gender relations in the Swedish armed forces. In: Disputation. University of Linköping, Department for Thematic Studies; 2011
- [37] Wahl A. The impact of gender equality on management and leadership: Reflections on change and resistance. In: Husu L, Hearn J, Lämsä A-M, Vanhala S, editors. *Leadership Through the Gender Lens*. Helsinki: Hanken Research Reports; 2010
- [38] DN Debatt (20171202). 1768 Kvinnor i försvaret: "Alla anmälningar måste tas på allvar. <https://www.dn.se/debatt/1768-kvinnor-i-forsvaret-alla-anmalningar-maste-tas-pa-all-var/>