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Developing a Well-balanced Military Identity among Female Military Personnel

Abstract: This narrative study explored the individual experience of a military woman in the development of a balanced military identity. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the challenges women in the military face in achieving a healthy balance between their gender and professional identities. A qualitative content analysis of the narratives of a servicewoman serving in a combat unit proved that she strives to retain traditionally feminine traits in order to maintain her female identity while forming a balanced military identity. But for the harmonious coexistence of gender and professional identity in a unified self-concept, femininity has the potential to change the principles and characteristics of the profession. These changes are aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the team. The members of the military team are not opposed to the changes in the professional world brought about by femininity, as they are determined to improve their performance in a situation where their health and even their lives depend on it.

Keywords: femininity, gender stereotypes, professional identity, gender identity, armed forces

Introduction

Russia's military invasion of Ukraine has led to a growing interest in shaping the professional identity of military personnel. The degree to which an individual identifies with the military profession, which shares a common body of knowledge, code of ethics, and commitment to professional ideas (Hersh 2022), affects psychological well-being (Flack, & Kite 2021), performance, and career success (Russell, Ingerick, & Barron 2023). Professional identity, which refers to a professional self-concept, is based on person's qualities, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Iatridis, Gond, & Kesidou 2022) and can be defined as a cognitive mechanism that shapes person's emotions and behaviors, as well as attitudes toward work (Wang, & Yin 2020). Thus, professional identity affects how a person formulates the purpose, self-esteem, and meaning of his or her life, and explains how he or she contributes to society (Cole et al. 2023). The formation of a military professional identity, viewed as "an individual's self-regulated social identification and internalization of the military's principal goals, values, and tasks" (Johansen, Laberg, & Martinussen 2014) is "a complex and transformational process of internalizing a profession's core knowledge, skills, values and beliefs, resulting in an individual 'thinking, acting and feeling' like a member of that professional community" (Johansen, Laberg, & Martinussen 2014). Since people with a strong professional identity

are more likely to achieve career success and stay in the profession longer (Moorhead 2019), it is crucial that the development of military professional identity is among the main priorities of Ukrainian military reform. Overcoming professional discrimination and making significant progress in achieving gender equality in the Armed Forces of Ukraine has become a prerequisite for recognizing the achievements of servicewomen and creating new career opportunities for them. This has helped to increase the number of women in this traditionally male organization. However, despite the positive developments in the achievement of gender equality, gender stereotypes continue to exist in the army, creating social barriers that contribute to the contradiction between a person's professional and gender identities (Khraban, & Vyhivska 2023). Social barriers take the form of various stressors that create identity dissonance, impede professional identity formation, and have a counterproductive effect on the military career and personal well-being of servicewomen. Thus, the formation of a professional military identity can be a difficult task for women, during which they run the risk of losing their individuality and their personal self.

In the era of the Fourth Feminist Movement, "coexisting with perpetuated gendered practices within cornerstone organizations such as the military" (Machtan 2019), further research on women's experiences of gender identity adjustment in the military offers insights into contemporary military society, and the attitudes and behaviors of male colleagues toward women in the military (Machtan 2019). Understanding the factors related to the formation of women's military identity will contribute to the complementarity and harmonious development of both personal and professional identities of servicewomen, "to the expansion of career opportunities for women in male-dominated organizations such as the armed forces, and to help them discover a healthy balance between their femininity and professional identity by providing other women's experiences as examples" (Machtan 2019). To resolve the difficulties of professional identity formation, which "range from imposter syndrome to emotions related to isolation and connection" (Shapiro et al. 2021), a person traditionally engages in reflective thinking. As a process of professional identity development, reflection enables one to deliberately connect new concepts to previous learning, as well as to challenge current assumptions and encourage new perspectives (Yakov, Riskin, & Flugelman 2021). This positively changes self-esteem and professional behavior (Tracey, & Hutchinson 2018).

The practice of reflection, which contributes to the defining of the professional self, is more meaningful when it becomes the result of creative self-reflection, which acts as a "complex artistic and mental complex of the self-awareness realization" (Shtepenko 2017). People's capacity to reflect on themselves by mastering their own spiritual experience through narrative creation (Shtepenko 2017) makes it possible to achieve the regulation of identity internalization, "in which coercive practices are transcended and self-actualization confirmed" (Nurhamidah, Purwanto, & Ekaningsih 2019). Study of military women's narratives can shed new light on the question of "how professionals struggle to adopt timely and relevant identities" (Obling 2022), and "can serve as a comparative means for military women to understand their present identity phase as well as identify shared commonalities with other women service members" (Machtan 2019).

Theoretical Background and Scientific Research on this Issue

This study used Culver's Gender Identity Development for Women in the Military (GIDWM) model as its central theoretical framework. Culver's Model of Identity Development presents four specific stages of identity development, beginning with gender management in the form of wearing a mask and ending with shedding the mask, self-acceptance, and transitioning to a balanced military identity (Culver 2013). Each phase is characterized by particular coping strategies used by women to cope with the interpersonal stressors common in the hyper-masculine setting of military units. In the first stage, the self-doubts that women experience as they try to assimilate into the male collective while coping with the potential loss of their true selves leads to a "feeling the need to put on a mask" (Culver 2013). The self-doubt which arises from the dominant culture of military masculinity can be of two types. In the first case, a woman feels unable to live up to male social standards and therefore has internal doubts about her social recognition by male peers and about her ability to perform tasks in the style and manner that a typical man is used to. Or she may feel powerless to preserve the femininity that defines her as a woman (Culver 2013). "Donning a mask" becomes a coping strategy to reduce the pressure of stress. This strategy aims to manage the feelings of confusion and anxiety that result from not living up to social norms and expectations. In the second stage, referred to as "wearing a mask", women use compensatory coping strategies to obscure features that make up the true self and that are considered to be unacceptable by the social culture. The "warrior mask" compensates for society's and the military's expectations of a stereotypically accepted model of a soldier. At the same time, society's expectations of femininity are balanced by the "mask of femininity". Women may adapt their appearance and/or behavior to the warrior concept in order to avoid marginalization and gain social favor. The third stage can be seen as a turning point in the woman's consciousness. She experiences an inner revelation, realizing and experiencing the consequences of "wearing a mask" (Culver 2013). The turn to self-reflection brings the realization that the strategy of coping with stress by "wearing a mask" damages a woman's true self-identity. As a result, servicewomen begin to develop the concept of the woman warrior. This is a military identity based on self-actualization, self-efficacy, and coping with social stressors (Edwards & Jones 2009). In the fourth stage of mask removal, women transcend the masculine ethics of military culture and stereotypical identity expectations, gain self-acceptance, and completely embrace their true identities as women warriors. However, not all women are able to maintain a healthy balance between their femininity and soldiering (Culver 2013).

The four-phase model of the development of women's gender identity in the armed forces has proven its validity in works that address the following issues: 1) the consequences of gender stereotypes in the armed forces leading to the marginalization and gender management of women in the military (Crowley, & Sandhoff 2017; Machtan 2019); 2) the existence of specific interpersonal stressors, such as sexual harassment, that are used in a hypermasculine environment to actualize masculine ethics (Wood, & Toppelberg 2017; Meade 2020); 3) interpersonal stressors and their impact on military women's careers, particularly with regard to psychological health and well-being (Roche, Manzi, & Bard 2020; Khraban 2022; Adams et al. 2021); 4) the need for the restructuring of

the armed forces as a gender organization (Nilsson, & Österberg 2022; Holmberg, & Alvinius 2023).

This narrative study explored the individual experience of a military woman in the development of a balanced military identity. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the challenges women in the military face in achieving a healthy balance between their gender and professional identities.

Materials and Methods

Collecting data on servicewomen's behavior in forming a professional military identity was central to this study. The data was searched on Facebook accounts, the context of which was filled by military personnel serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It should be noted that during the war, almost all the military personnel who had accounts had their access to their accounts cut off for a variety of reasons. For servicewomen, the reasons for this decision were not only security requirements to avoid the threat of account hacking and data leakage, but also the barrage of negative comments posted by social media users if a female servicewoman manifested an identity that was not consistent with their stereotypical perceptions of a female professional soldier. Therefore, due to the war, the research material was extremely limited. However, Tetiana, an officer in the Armed Forces of Ukraine who is serving in a unit that operates in the combat zone, has given us permission to use her Facebook posts (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana) for the study. Tetiana is a well-known Ukrainian publicist and journalist. Since February 24, 2022, Tetiana had fought on the front lines as a combat officer of the 72nd Separate Mechanized Brigade. Since the beginning of 2023, Tetiana has been fighting in the Ivan Bohun 1st Separate Special Forces Brigade. In her account, which is followed by more than 46,000 social network users, Tetiana identifies herself as an officer of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Tetiana's account is unlocked, any social media user can see her posts and comments on them. The main content created by Tetiana is information based on personal experience. It's about survival on the front lines and gender relations among military personnel. The content is posted in the form of videos with Tetiana's obligatory presence and in the form of explanatory comments. The videos are amateur (non-professional) in nature and are accompanied by explanatory comments specifying who of the fellow soldiers made the video, on what occasion and in what situation. The number of posts varies by time period. On average, one post is added every two weeks. The timeframe for the publication of the posts used as material for the study is the period from February 2022 to August 2023. But even in this limited form, this study provides empirical evidence regarding the development of a military course of gender integration in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and enables women in similar situations "to become informed, enlightened, and empowered to take steps toward positive change in identity development and self-actualization" (Machtan 2019).

A qualitative content analysis was used as the method of the research. Content analysis is a research method that systematically describes the core consistencies and meanings of qualitative material (Schreier 2012). It involves subjectively interpreting the meanings of textual data through a systematic process of coding and identifying themes or patterns

(Selvi 2019). Qualitative content analysis concentrates on material aspects that are relevant to the research topic, significantly reducing the amount of analyzed data. The material for analysis can be obtained from descriptive responses, open-ended questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observations, or print media (Kondracki, & Wellman 2002). The characteristics of language as a means of communication and the contextual meaning of the text are the central aspects of the content analysis (McTavish, & Pirro 1990). We chose the conventional method of content analysis, which involves a comprehensive examination of language to categorize large amounts of text into a limited number of groups conveying similar meanings (Weber 1990). The data analysis started with multiple readings of all the data to achieve immersion and gain an understanding of the entire dataset (Mayring 2019). Meanwhile, we recorded our initial observations, thoughts, and conducted a preliminary analysis. We then extracted words from the text that reflected the key thoughts or concepts used to create the code markers. The code markers often consisted of words taken directly from the text. These words then formed the initial coding scheme. The categories that were developed were utilized to categorize the codes into thematic groups. This process aided in the identification of patterns within the data (Creswell 2007). The interpretation of the data was the final stage of the content analysis process. Interpretation is a complex process in which we combine our perception of the material with our own individual experience— what we know about the topic, in what situation we encountered it, how we feel at that moment, and much more (Schreier 2012).

The Code of Ethics for Scientists of Ukraine (https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v000 2550-09) was followed during the study.

Results and Discussions

Table 1 summarizes the results of the coding and theme development conducted on the narrative material.

In her narrative stories, Tetiana focuses on the processes by which she comes to be recognized as a woman and as a professional. The author considers two parallel aspects on the path to a balanced military identity: factors influencing gender identity development/reconstruction and factors influencing professional identity development. Tetiana's narratives also present situations in which a balance is created between gender and professional identities, thus resulting in the formation of a balanced military identity. Four themes were formed based on the main content of the narratives: "The need to put on a mask," "Wearing a mask," "An inner revelation that recognizes the consequences of "wearing a mask," "Mask removal."

The theme of "The need to put on a mask" consists of the following sub-themes: "exclusively male (military) environment," "prejudice against women in the military," "stereotypical and patriarchal notions," "gender status." Tetiana emphasizes these aspects as the main factors prompting female soldiers to use the strategy of "putting on a mask" to reduce the pressure of experiencing the consequences of stress in a male-dominated environment. When it comes to the question of the possibility for servicewomen to demonstrate their true gender identity in the armed forces, the main obstacles that Tetiana

Table 1

Coding and Theme Development

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
The need to put on a mask	— exclusively male (military) environment; — prejudice against women in the military; — stereotypical and patriarchal notions; — gender status.	— social exclusion; — devaluation; — violation of justice; — need for kinship
Wearing a mask	— cognitive dissonance; — self-doubt	— anxiety; — conflict; — stress; — anger; — sadness; — depression; — vulnerability
An inner revelation that recognizes the consequences of "wearing a mask"	— lower standards for women; — exemption from heavy duty; — less responsibility	— self-esteem; — self-respect; — self-worth
Mask removal	— unit cohesion; — effectiveness of combat missions; — self-acceptance	— qualities; — skills; — competencies; — psychological wellbeing

believes women face are the generalized beliefs shaped by and widespread in Ukrainian culture that the army is "the main arena for the formation of masculine identity" (Sasson-Levy 2011). The integration of women into the exclusively male (military) environment undermines society's notion of masculinity, so some comments on Tetiana's posts are an expression of the historically formed prejudice against women in the military, which is manifested in the disapproval of women in military professional activities:

I had posted two videos on Facebook of my working days as an anti-tanker… There was nothing special to be found in these videos. A fragment of reconnaissance and sheltering in one location… And then I received so many negative comments… Mostly, that I lie about being at war. If I put up a video of me shooting down a tank, it's still a lie, and if I'm in combat, I do it wrong. It was especially insulting because I've been doing well lately… But there were also hateful posters put up by the mothers of the soldiers. At first, I did not understand them at all. I am fighting, I have a mother too, I have children, I am widowed. Why is there such hatred? (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 27.07.2023).

In this fragment, Tetiana describes the situation of social exclusion manifested in the devaluation of her by her supposed partners (mothers of military men). It is noteworthy that in times of war, the social exclusion of servicewomen, despite the fact that it is a violation of justice and moral guidelines, may be a coping behavior of the parents of servicemen. According to social comparison theory, people tend to compare themselves to others to maintain a stable and accurate sense of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-worth (Wang, & Li 2022). Some parents of military personnel may experience stress and depression due to perceived inequities in the distribution of good fortune (Tussing et al. 2022). This happens because of envy (Breidenthal et al. 2020)—someone is alive, well, and even getting honored, while someone else is injured or dead. The situation is further complicated by

stereotypical perceptions of gender roles in society. Tetiana's social exclusion by a group of military mothers may be a reaction to the perceived threat to their sons' gender status.

The theme of "Wearing a mask" is completed by the sub-themes of "cognitive dissonance" and "self-doubt," which, on the example of Tetiana, reveal the main psychological state characteristic of female military personnel and which correlates with the expectations of society and the military community in terms of the stereotypically accepted image of a soldier and of femininity. Tatyana is a person with a pronounced tendency to be recognized by the public—

As an individual, do I have any special terms and conditions of service? Sometimes I'm going to get indulged, it's true. And sometimes it's the other way around. I am often loved. This is also true. And this is another reason why I love fighting. There are not many female commanders, and I try to work well and generally try to be loved for my work and eagerness, and for being the only flower))) In short, for everything)))) (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 27.07.2023)

—therefore, social exclusion hinders the satisfaction of one of their basic needs—the need for kinship, which has an impact on emotional processes. Resentfulness is the main emotional characteristic of social exclusion, but it can also increase other negative emotions (anxiety, anger, sadness, depression and jealousy) and trigger a conflict between a person's gender and professional identity (Wang, & Li 2022).

Tetiana's stories describe a situation in which the sensitivity of servicewomen to gender stereotypes and the urge to conform to society's stereotypical expectations can result in a rejection of their gender identity:

I often give thanks to God. But why did he choose to make me into a girl? That's the only thing I'm not grateful for. It's not about discrimination, and it's not even about the fact that as a boy I would have had more of the qualities that I required, such as physical strength… The point is that I seem to myself to be even more immoral, that I like all of this. I have a daughter who is morning sun and a son who is sunshine. I love them very much. And I'm a mom. A mom who needs her children so much… And this war has taken my soul, it has taken my heart. We are friends or spouses with this war (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 11.02.2023).

The consideration of patriarchal societal (collective) expectations in professional identity formation may impair the actual effectiveness of service women through the stress caused by the anxiety to confirm negative stereotypes about their gender's deficient abilities in stigmatized occupations (Kahalon, Shnabel, & Becker 2019; Tabassum, Nayak 2021). Vulnerability to gender stereotypes amplifies the effects of social conformity stressors—in masculine and especially hyper-masculine organizations, such as the armed forces, women vacillate between affirming their professional identity and gendered beliefs. This situation can be a source of cognitive dissonance. In the example above, cognitive dissonance manifests itself in conflicting desires—on the one hand to be a mother and be devoted to her children, and on the other hand to be a professional soldier and fulfill her commitment.

The theme "An inner revelation that recognizes the consequences of "wearing a mask" represents Tetiana's individual experience of awareness of the effects of wearing a mask. With regard to the compromise reconciliation of her gender and professional identities, Tetiana reflects on the factors that contribute to the creation of a harmonious identity and concludes that the privileges granted to women in peacetime, such as setting lower standards for women, exemption from heavy duty, assignment to posts with less

responsibility or risk, unreasonable support for women's career development, etc. (Khraban 2022), which can reinforce stereotypes and lead to the destruction of women's career ambitions, are minimized during war in combat units:

But if we have to be sent to hell, because we have to be, we will be sent, believe me, without pity or indulgence, as anti-tankers. And the command does not care what sex the commander of these anti-tankers is. And the command has no interest in the sex of the commander of these anti-tankers (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 27.07).

The "Mask Removal" theme is completed by Tetiana's narratives, which focus on possible factors contributing to the self-realization of female military personnel and to the overcoming of coercive practices, and thus positively influence the internalization of organizational and gender identity of women serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Tetyana's stories provide empirical evidence that convincingly demonstrates the impact of unit cohesion on achieving a healthy balance between gender and professional identities. Tetiana summarizes her experience in forming a balanced military identity in terms of effective group cohesion:

… I was dreaming of berries. I was dreaming of them with trust. On the business side. And today my dreams have become reality. 100 hectares and the first strawberries are blushing all over the place. Why not in uniform? The enemy is at a distance of 3.5 kilometers. And you're not even in line of sight when you move below the weeds)))). So it's better to look like a girl and not stick out like a sore thumb. I also gathered for the boys. They can't disguise themselves as girls like I can (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 25.05.2023).

In forming her professional military identity, Tetiana strives for "a sense of self-balance between a woman and a warrior (Iverson et al. 2016).

And only of an integrated unit that accepts women service members for their qualities and competencies, absent of socially based coercion, a balanced military identity development can be nurtured (Forsyth 2018). Tetiana adapts her feminine qualities according to what she feels makes her effective as a professional soldier:

In this case, I am 3 kilometers away from the enemy (in direct line of sight). I am looking for a position to place the launcher… I shot down four tanks and damaged a fifth during the days preceding this video. It's about who should be giving advice to whom about how to work and how to dress in order to be successful. And it's elementary, the enemy looks for "stugnists," not women in headscarves) … War is not a parade, dear friends. And if civilian women's clothing better disguises me for a particular job, in this case. And if civilian women's clothing better disguises me for a particular job, in this case it is intelligence, I choose it (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol. tana. 10.07.2023).

At the same time, the qualities stereotypically attributed to women become a valuable asset to a combat unit:

I am very proud of this Silver Cross, I know what it is for, for what tanks, for how much work… for what Cossack luck, and for a woman's sixth sense (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 07.06.2023).

The enhancement of the overall effectiveness of combat missions becomes a powerful incentive for the acceptance of women as professionals in a hypermasculine environment on a non-sexual basis, and this suggests "that women service members in a sex mixed integrated MOS can gain social acceptance based on professional performance" (Machtan

2019). Women have the opportunity to accept their true selves and develop a military professional identity "based on skill and competence, while retaining a token status based on the male hegemonic social culture" (King 2015).

Tetyana's stories is a direct proof that female soldiers are able to meet the challenges of military emergencies, their professional and physical training and overall performance are comparable to the standards required of male soldiers. In this case, psychological resilience and maintaining individual psychological wellbeing are demonstrated:

I like my sewn-in, well-worn, but comfortable military uniform and the way I look in it. I like my skin and strong nails that don't need a manicure. I like the fact that my hands are always covered with scratches, dirt that is embedded in my heels, and I don't have to hide them as I used to do when I didn't have time to renew my shellac… So I am now in my element (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 11.02.2023).

Tetiana's psychological resilience and well-being are based on her self-acceptance. Moreover, Tetiana finds the strength to fight against the pressure of gender stereotypes. Her evaluation and perception of herself does not come from the outside, for example from those who write negative comments under her posts, but from the inside—through an inner feeling when she is sure that only she can know what she really is. Self-acceptance is evidence that Tetiana was able to reach the fourth phase of Culver's (2013) model of identity development and form a balanced military identity. Discourse analysis revealed that military women's general emotional state may be related to their professional identity formation—Tetiana describes a state of her psychological comfort

(I love my platoon, our communication, our jokes, our life… our special relationship of brotherhood. I really like being in contact with similar units. I admire the military on the front line, and I feel the same way about myself. I like to set up positions. I like to disguise. I like to sit in ambush for weeks. I like when it is cold and hard, because I like to overcome difficulties, and I am proud of my role in actually creating such comfort and warmth, at least enough to keep the water from freezing. Oh, how I love shooting… (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 24.02.2023)

and a sense of pride in herself and her achievements, without arrogance and vanity

(I am proud to have learned not only rational shooting from "Stugna" anti-tank missile system (i.e. how to destroy the enemy without losing personnel, equipment and wasting a missile), but also practical artillery (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 24.02.2023).

Based on Tetiana's example, we can conclude that the formation of a balanced military identity is not achieved by suppressing and/or dominating one gender or professional identity over the other, but by developing both in harmony. Since Tetiana values both identities, she realizes that she is under great strain and will need additional strength to simultaneously maintain her gendered identity and develop her professional identity:

Another drawback of mine is that I haven't taken a vacation in a year, haven't seen my son. I need to learn to do everything and see my son as well (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 24.02.2023).

The example of the integration of gender and professional identities that we have examined allows us to question the claim that, unlike masculinity, which identifies itself through clear lines of demarcation, femininity incorporates into its identity the qualities necessary for professional success in masculine professions (Bhatia, & Bhatia 2021;

McCristall, & Baggaley 2019). We argue that in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, when forming a balanced military identity, women continue to be oriented toward traditionally feminine characteristics in order to maintain their female identity, but for the harmonious coexistence of gender and professional identity in one self-concept, femininity can transform the principles and characteristics of the profession, and these changes are aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the team. The changes brought about by femininity are not met with resistance when team members focus on increasing their effectiveness, especially when their health and even their lives depend on it. This situation is typical for the army in times of war. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are currently at the forefront of eliminating gender inequality in the professional sphere.

Our findings are in line with the changes in leadership styles that feminism has brought about. Tatiana's story shows that when women are appointed to leadership positions, the conceptualization of leadership changes by incorporating new components such as emotional and social intelligence and a focus on people (Khraban, & Silko 2023). Rejecting the stereotypical notion of military leadership, Tetiana views leadership as "an integrative strategy that involves leader-team relationships, affective experiences, social influence processes, and cooperation" (Khraban, & Silko 2023):

I always have an ear for my sergeants, and I don't hesitate to tell the whole platoon that they are better than I. In general, without the sergeants, without any of my soldiers, I would not have been able to survive, because we are a good team (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 24.02.2023).

In contrast to the stereotypical military leader, Tetiana rejects the principles of forceful leadership as ineffective and turns to the principles of servant leadership, with empathy as a key factor:

The last thing I remember is pulling a pair of dry socks out of my pack. "I can give you one!"—I offer Narcissus,— "What's wrong with that? My sister and I used to share flippers at sea when we were kids, she got the right one, I got the left…" (https://www.facebook.com/chornovol.tana. 24.02.2023).

Whether in battle or in garrison, care for the soldier is "exactly what you need to help your people win and achieve their aims" (Boden 2014), therefore, the feminine leadership style promotes successful group cohesion based on competence and efficiency when actions are separated from prejudices (King 2015). On the other hand, effective group cohesion contributes to the formation of a women's balanced military identity. This confirms King's hypothesis about the key role of cohesion at the unit level in the successful gender integration of women in the armed forces, in the implementation of which the policy of gender neutrality, based on a balanced number of men and women, plays only a supporting role (King 2015).

Conclusion

The impact of gender stereotypes is the main obstacle to the formation of a harmonious military identity of women serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. They put pressure on the self-concept of the servicewoman, and the negative influence comes from both the

outside and the inside. Depending on the vector, the pressure of gender stereotypes can have different psychological manifestations. The external pressure of gender stereotypes can lead to a situation of social exclusion or marginalization of servicewomen. This is manifested in their devaluation by their supposed partners. The social exclusion of female servicewomen can be the result of a defensive reaction on the part of the civilian female population who, because of existing stereotypes, perceive gender equality in the armed forces as a threat to the gender status of their husbands or sons. In times of war, the external negative influence of gender stereotyping can be reinforced by the coping strategies of the population, which are designed to reduce the stress and depression caused by envy over the unfairness of the Fate (one person is killed or wounded while another is unharmed). Experiencing social exclusion can enhance other negative emotions, such as anxiety, anger, sadness, depression, and jealousy and lead servicewomen to internal conflicts between their gender and professional identities. The internal pressure of stereotypes can cause stress for women serving in the military, as they fear confirming negative beliefs about the low abilities attributed to women in stigmatized fields. This can not only impede the development of their professional identity, but also lead to the rejection of their gender identity. Engaging in hostilities makes it possible to find a middle ground in reconciling the gender and professional identities of female service personnel, thus promoting the creation of a harmonious identity. The rejection of gender paternalism by male soldiers is one factor: in situations where the health and life of each soldier is at risk, the gender of the soldier becomes irrelevant. In this case, the personal qualities of the servicewoman are of the utmost importance. Women can only be viewed as professionals in terms of their ability to handle military emergencies and be a valuable asset to a combat unit. A key role in maintaining a healthy balance between gender and professional identities is played by the group cohesion of the servicewoman's unit. Psychological compatibility within a unit along with positive personal and professional qualities of each team member can facilitate successful gender integration of women within the armed forces. This holds true even if there's only one woman in a team, meaning the ratio of women to men is no longer a factor. Servicewomen tend to retain traditionally feminine traits in order to maintain their female identity while forming a balanced military identity, but for the harmonious coexistence of gender and professional identity in a unified self-concept, femininity can transform the principles and characteristics of the profession, and these changes are aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the team. If team members are committed to improving their work performance, especially when their health and even their lives depend on it, they won't resist the changes in the professional world brought about by femininity.

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