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INTEGRATION OF FEMALE
ARMY APPRENTICES

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BY

MAJOR K.E. QUINN

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ARMY APPRENTICES

by

Major K.E. Quinn

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Abstract

↙ In 1984 a small group of females started trade training at the Australian Army Apprentices school (AAS), which had up until that time trained only male apprentices. The process of integrating females into previously all male military training institutions, and the experience of being a female in a male dominated work environment, have been extensively researched. Discussions were held with the female apprentices, a small group of male apprentices, staff, and instructors, to determine the relevance of previous research to the AAS situation. Discussion revealed that the sorts of issues which emerged as significant at AAS were very similar to those described in the research literature.

Keywords: Assimilation, Stress (Psychology), Attitudes (Psychology).

The findings and views expressed in this Research Note are the results of the author's research studies and are not to be taken as the official opinion or policy of the Department of Defence (Army Office)

A

This report discusses and comments on issues which emerged as significant from discussions during a visit to the Army Apprentice School (AAS). This report, then, does not attempt to give definitive coverage to the many issues which have been identified as significant in relation to the successful introduction of integrated training in military institutions, but rather concentrates on issues raised during discussions at AAS. The discussion in this report is based on the large body of research which studies women and work, and women in non traditional work environments. A more comprehensive paper on female/male integrated military training which reviews the research is being prepared for publication.

The author visited AAS on 18-19 July 1984. Discussions were held with Company and Training Wing staff, the Female Apprentice Adviser (FAA), four of the female apprentices and a group of male apprentices. In addition, a conference attended by senior staff, was held by the Commander.

The aim of the visit to AAS was to collect information on the issues which have arisen as a result of the introduction of female apprentices into AAS. The method employed was unstructured discussion in small groups or an unstructured individual interview/discussion. After introducing herself as a research psychologist, the author indicated that she was interested in any information, attitudes or opinions that the participants would like to express or share, relating to the introduction of female apprentices to AAS. On occasions, discussion was guided onto specific topics but generally this was not necessary. Participants were eager to express views and talk about experiences. As well as receiving information, it was possible for the author to have input, and some topics were discussed in an attitudinal training workshop fashion, although this was not generally the aim.

Tokenism

As a general observation, the process of integrating females into AAS has occurred along the lines predicted by the research literature on this topic. The experiences and problems have paralleled the well documented experiences of the integrating institutions of the Canadian and American Armed Services. Underpinning the whole concept of integration, and evident at AAS, is the effect of tokenism. The term "tokenism" is used to describe the pattern of adjustment which occurs whenever an established group is forced to redefine itself by the introduction of new members who do not share all of the characteristics of the original group, especially when the new members are introduced in minority proportions. This process of assimilating a minority group into an established group involves the rejection of the new or "token" group, as the "dominants" resist redefinition.

1977): Three elements of tokenism have been identified (Kanter

- a. Visibility. The new or token group is highly visible due to its small numbers and this results in higher than normal performance pressures on the tokens. The increased attention which the tokens receive is perceived by the dominants as giving them (the tokens) an unfair advantage. Female apprentices at AAS are highly visible due to their different physical appearance.
- b. Contrast. Differences between the dominant and token group are emphasised thereby isolating the tokens as different, and excluding them from significant formal and informal activities. An example of contrast might be the emphasising of physical ability differences between males and females and using these differences to rationalise different treatments in situations where physical differences are of no relevance.
- c. Assimilation. The contrast effect often results in uncertainty about how to behave towards tokens. This uncertainty is resolved by "stereotyping" the tokens and behaving towards them in a fashion which ignores individual differences. Female stereotypes are often based on familiar family roles such as "the mother type", the little sister "pet type" or sexual stereotypes such as "the seductress". Kanter uses the term assimilation to refer to the process of perceiving new situations by "assimilation" into pre-existing attitudes.

The "tokenism" process is made more difficult in military institutions because the identity of the original or "dominant" group is bound up in tradition which by its very nature is rarely challenged. As well, the dominant group, in this situation, male army apprentices, will have as part of their identity, the exclusion of characteristics normally associated with females as well as the concrete exclusion of actual females. For example, a boy may have been chided for behaviour which was labelled "sissy" or "girlish" and may have learnt to define himself as "not like a girl". The problems associated with tokenism diminish over time but it is still desirable that the resolution of this process be recognised, and if necessary managed in an informed fashion. The comments in this report have that aim in mind, although time itself is probably the most significant factor in reducing tokenism providing that there is strong institutional support and dedication to the success of integration.

Related to the issue of tokenism were two factors which emerged in discussion groups. These factors were the need for an increased number of female apprentices, and the improved selection of females suited to the particular environment of AAS. These two factors will be discussed more fully in other sections of this report.

Issues Arising from Discussions

Accommodation

The question was raised, particularly in relation to increased numbers of female apprentices, about the best accommodation practice: all female apprentices in one block or within platoon lines. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with each. The female block would provide an environment conducive to the establishment of female friendships and the formation of support groups. The "block" concept however would also serve to focus attention on the separateness or apartness of the female apprentices thereby supporting the assertion of their male peers that they did not belong as legitimate apprentices. The option of segregated accommodation within platoon lines is favoured providing there are sufficient numbers of females (eg. a group of 2 to 4 within a platoon). It is more important to be seen as a member of a particular platoon and belonging primarily to that group rather than to an isolated group which can be labelled "female apprentices" and be the special focus of fears and favours.

Central to the whole question of accommodation is the problem of protection. Who is protecting whom from what and at what cost to whom? It is often the case that females pay a high cost for what is presented as "for your own benefit", "in your best interests", and "only to protect you". The cost in the case of a visibly segregated "female block" is isolation from the social peer networks, membership of which affirms "belonging". This isolation is more likely to fuel the sort of hostility which provokes assault, the very occurrence which, ironically, it is intended to prevent. Rather than assuming that the worst might happen and configuring accommodation to prevent it, and thereby inadvertently maintaining a situation of risk, it might be better prevention to educate instructors and staff about the dynamics and motivations behind assaults on females, particularly staff who may have to investigate assault. What may appear on the surface to be a simple case of a room break-in may have much more serious overtones if the break-in is by a male of a female's room. For example, evidence may exist of intimidation with sexual overtones, associated with the break-in and even though no theft may occur the victim is likely to experience the incident as a personal violation. In this circumstance, the investigation of such an incident as a case of break-in with a possible theft motive would be completely inappropriate and exacerbate considerably the distress of the victim who would experience the situation as the target of intense hostility.

The other side of the protection coin is of course the defensiveness of male staff and apprentices to the perceived threat to their authority as a result of female behaviour. Persons in positions of authority are likely to feel that their authority is being threatened if they perceive that they are not 'in control' of situations. This situation may occur in male NCOs, WOs, Officers and teachers who are not experienced in dealing with females, especially those females who use 'womanly

wiles' to manipulate situations. Such persons should be made aware that this type of behaviour is simply another example of favour-carrying or sycophancy, to be disdained, as such behaviours would be when displayed by males.

From the viewpoint of the boys, it should become apparent, as the girls become more accepted as legitimate peers, that their goals are really the same as those of the boys, ie. to be successful in their trade. The suspicion of females and the distrust of their influence over males should give way to a more healthy respect as peers. At the same time it needs to be understood by the females that their acceptance depends on the demonstration of skill and competence in their chosen trade and not on being popular in the romantic sense or being "loved". Discussions with the female apprentices indicated that they felt strongly about wanting to be treated as "people" not oddities and that they wanted to be judged solely on their performance as Army apprentices.

Differences in Physical Ability.

Differences between males and females in physical performance characteristics exist but the significance given to these differences will largely depend on attitudinal factors. Often the importance given to the difference far outweighs the actual differences. Physical (and military) skills differences provide a point of focus for the contrast effect described earlier. The symbolic significance of physical activity might be quite different for boys and girls. Traditionally, sport and display of physical competence have been important ways of proving worthiness and exhibiting virtuous qualities, such as stamina and bravery for boys. A boy who does well in trade subjects will know the importance of also performing well in physical and military skills training. He will understand that dropping out of a run means letting the side down, failing to display reliability, and indicating a lack of commitment to the ideals of the institution. The same meaning will not necessarily be understood by the female, as physical proving is rarely part of the female culture. A girl dropping out of a run might simply be saying that she sees little value in putting effort into activities the meaning of which, to her, is obscure. Such behaviour is not necessarily an indication of laziness or lack of commitment. While some girls may need to be taught the symbolic meaning and value of physical training, the boys, on the other hand, need to know that what is required is evidence of full effort and not necessarily displays of male level competence.

Dress

The question of dress was raised in several discussions and there was a difference of opinion expressed. On the one hand, dressing the females so that it is difficult to distinguish them from male apprentices might be seen as denying or hiding the fact that they are female. The other side argues that the female apprentices are the focus of much attention, (which results in stress), and that any practice which reduces their visibility is

desirable. The weight of opinion, including that of the female apprentices, favoured the latter. It is more important that they be seen as apprentices rather than emphasising that they are female by virtue of their attire. Practices which reduce the contrast between the new or token group, and the dominant group, are more conducive to successful integration.

Trade Choice Restrictions

Strong trade commitment is probably one of the more important correlates of success at AAS and this may prove to be especially the case with female apprentices. Being able to project an image of themselves as successful in their chosen trade, and dedicated to the achievement of that trade as a goal, would seem necessary if as individuals, female apprentices are to withstand the pressures of AAS. Two of the four female apprentices interviewed indicated that they were not doing the trade training of their choice because they were informed that the trade was not available to female apprentices. This will be true for some of the males as well, but it is unlikely that half of them will be unhappy with their trade. The female who wants to be an Army Apprentice is likely to elect the available trade/s simply because she has no other option. There will therefore be a disproportionate representation of trade disenchantees within the group of female apprentices. Also, restricting trade choice, for whatever reason, is likely to reduce the pool of available and suitable female applicants. As an adjunct, trade restrictions for female apprentices may mean that a distinction will grow between the trades which "have" and those which "have not"; a distinction which may perpetuate divisive attitudes.

The Female Apprentices

The six female apprentices who commenced training were described as six individuals who failed to form a cohesive support group. One means of overcoming or countering this lack of cohesiveness is by fostering a sense of pride in being female from the understanding of belonging to a female tradition. This is discussed more fully later in the paper. It has been found that as the females become more integrated they are more likely to form supportive subgroups.

For the male who is inexperienced in dealing with groups of females in the workplace, it may come as a surprise to discover that females display a range of behaviour that is as broad as the range of male behaviour. Some males are ill-prepared and uncertain about how to behave towards females in these circumstances regardless of whether these females are his superiors, peers or subordinates. The limitation of the male response in these cases is attributable in part to lack of experience in dealing, as an individual, with groups of females. His experience has been within social or family contexts. A common response to this uncertainty for him is to conform to his stereotyped image of what females are like or how they should

be. What this means is that all individuals within the group are treated according to his standardised "typical" image of females, and the strengths and weaknesses of individuals are disregarded when they fail to conform to the stereotype.

It was noted in one discussion that the female apprentices seem to take criticism more personally. Research suggests that females are less likely to have been exposed to the sorts of learning experiences which teach them how to distance criticism and use it constructively in pursuit of goals. It is therefore not surprising that some females will be poorly prepared to cope with the disciplinary style which is used more comfortably with young males. When faced with criticism it is not uncommon for the female to believe that she is being told she is "a bad person" rather than that her performance is not good enough. Rather than modifying disciplinary style to avoid this personalised reaction it is better to attempt to modify the reaction. Resorting to the attitude that girls are too hard to discipline because they get upset easily is of little value. Simple statements or tips of the type that would be given to a boy who showed this sort of behaviour, such as "it is not you personally that I am criticising just your performance" are recommended. It is not advisable to encourage the maintenance of personalised reactions to criticism as these are not conducive to high levels of achievement.

Attitudes of Male Apprentices

The male apprentices expressed the sorts of attitudes which would be expected from those whose status had been threatened. Indeed their reaction of defensiveness to perceived threat, even if that threat was simply a lack of understanding, was similar to the male staff reaction. For example they thought that the "wrong types" of females had been selected and that girls who had had some sort of experience in the world were the most suited. However, when asked to clarify what they meant it was apparent that they applied "no win" judgemental criteria to females and that these criteria were unrelated to success as an apprentice. When pressed for a description of "the right type" it became apparent that the idealised 'she' was unlikely to actually exist. What did become apparent from the comments on female apprentice suitability, was the defensiveness of the males. They were envious of the special treatment and attention given to females, whom they perceived as having greater access to power, such as mixing with apprentice corporals and having personal grievances dealt with by higher authorities. Further discussion revealed that it is more likely to be the corporals who initiate contact, and the special treatment and attention given to the females is ironically perceived by them (the females) as a disadvantage not an advantage. As well, the males made general statements to the effect that the girls were not ambitious and did not try as hard. This is a fairly commonly held belief by males about females and it often persists even in the face of contrary evidence.

Asked how having females at AAS had affected their pride in being apprentices, they responded that the prestige associated with being apprentices had gone. What this meant in practical terms is best illustrated by this quote: "when you meet people and tell them you are an army apprentice all they want to talk about is the girl apprentices." It is unlikely that this attitude will have a significant detrimental long term effect on their achievement and performance. The emergence of similar attitudes has been observed in other integrating military training institutions without any noticeable falling off of male performance levels. Part of their growth into mature and responsible adults should involve the development of attitudes which would enable them to work comfortably with female peers, and not feel that the presence of females represented a threat to their personal esteem. From the short discussion time with them, it appeared that they would be receptive to different attitudes about females other than the rigid stereotypes which they seemed to apply.

There was concern expressed by one instructor about the telling of sexual jokes and the effect this had on females who were present. The telling of sexual jokes is a form of sexual harassment as is the display of posters which show females as objects of pleasure for males. Sexual jokes should be discouraged not because they are ungentlemanly or naughty but because their intention, albeit at times unconscious, is to alienate the female whose kind is often the butt of the joke. Such behaviour is not conducive to team cohesiveness and erodes morale. Simply prohibiting "dirty jokes" is likely to invite responses such as, "it's not fair", "it's not fun any more with girls here", "girls spoil everything", which satisfies the original intention of the jokes and confirms the need to deride the odd one out.

Swearing under most circumstances is not a form of sexual harassment and many females, as well as males, like to be able to use the extra expressiveness that the odd swear word adds to language. Comments such as "watch your language there is a female present" are simply ways of excluding females even though this might not be consciously intended. Although there are some women who like this sort of treatment, it is becoming apparent to many that it is better to be respected as a "mate" rather than excluded by virtue of being protected from essentially innocuous language. This sentiment was expressed by the four female apprentices.

The Question of Femininity

There was some concern that the females should maintain "their femininity". The Oxford dictionary defines feminine as "having the qualities or appearance considered characteristic of a woman". This definition suggests that the term is open to interpretation. It is useful and important to distinguish between cultural and psychological femininity. Cultural femininity refers to the more superficial appearances that are considered characteristic of females and relate to "beauty", for example, wearing make-up, dresses, soft pretty clothes that do

not get dirty, high heeled shoes, and having clean manicured nails. This definition of femininity is largely irrelevant and "make up" or other 'beauty' type classes need not be part of the formal training for female apprentices. These sorts of courses would suggest that the females are expected to conform to a cultural stereotype which to some extent conflicts with the main aim of achieving trade competence. As well, it is not essential to the aim of becoming mature responsible citizens. It is not necessary to conform to this cultural stereotype to be a valid woman. It is probably more important to reinforce this attitude and to stress that acquiring such cultural accoutrements is purely a matter of personal choice and is neither condemned nor condoned. To a large extent the girls who apply for AAS have already rejected significant aspects of this cultural definition of femininity and are not conforming to a cultural expectation.

Psychological femininity is more to do with the personal qualities that are thought to be characteristic of females or thought to be desirable in females. Traditionally masculinity and femininity were seen as opposites and were associated with separate qualities. For example, active-passive, detached-emotional, independent-dependent, competitive-co-operative. In general terms masculinity has been associated with an emphasis on "getting the job done", or task orientation, whereas femininity has been associated more with having concern for the welfare of others, or a 'feelings' orientation. This conceptualisation of masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive opposites was challenged some time ago and recent sex role research (Bem 1974) has concentrated on defining the androgynous personality. The androgynous person is one who is capable of responding appropriately to situational needs. Thus for a young woman to survive and successfully complete apprentice training she will need to have some of the qualities which were traditionally associated with masculinity such as ambitiousness, toughness and competitiveness. This does not mean that she will not be able to be concerned and caring in other situations where this sort of behaviour is appropriate. Conceivably, the types of females who will be attracted and suited to a military/trade career will have as part of their personality makeup, some of those qualities which were traditionally seen as belonging to males. Attempts to modify this aspect of the personality would result in a loss of the very qualities that are necessary for survival and success. It is better to encourage individuals to become comfortable with their own masculine/feminine personality mix and emphasise situation appropriate rather than traditional gender appropriate behaviour.

The Female Response to Stress

One staff member raised the problem of the amount of stress that the female apprentices endure. Being an army apprentice has its own set of stressors, as well as the "normal" stressors which are perceived as coming from staff and instructors and those associated with leaving home and adjusting to a communal environment. Females have the additional stressors associated with high visibility and peer rejection (from male apprentices). The high visibility means that they are under

constant assessment pressure, more so than their male peers who will be able to blend into "team" obscurity at times. The rejection attitude of their male peers means that they are being constantly assessed against a set of negative expectations. For example, they are expected 'not to do as well', or expected to 'feel out of place'. As well as the pressure to perform against an expectation of failure, there is the added significance that failure on the part of the females will be perceived as evidence that they do not belong there anyway. How this is experienced at the personal level is perhaps best illustrated by the comment "they are trying to wear us down, they are trying to get rid of us" which was endorsed by the four female apprentices.

There are several ways that females respond to, or individually cope with, what amounts to constant challenges to their right to be in traditionally all male or male dominated work environments. Psychologically there are many different ways of coping. For some it might be a rejection of that which is seen as the source of the stress, that is being female, and may result in a rejection of other females and all that is traditionally associated with femaleness. Ultimately however this style of coping involves a rejection of self. Similarly, the determination to keep going regardless may be fuelled by anger and outrage at the way one is being treated. In the long run, this method may also be self defeating and there is always a risk that the anger will internalise and become depression. In any case it is not advisable to try to change an individual coping style particularly if it is working. Apart from the obvious way of dealing with stress by removing some of the stressors or attempting to minimise them, the soundest remedial or corrective action is to promote the formation of a strong supportive basis as well as sympathetic supportive and inspiring leadership. The next section describes one possible way of doing this. Apprentices and staff expressed concern about the fact that some of the female apprentices put on a lot of weight after starting at AAS. In some cases this might be a response to stress and is not necessarily bad as long as the person remains fit. There might even be some advantage in being a bit bigger, stronger and more robust whilst trying to deal with the demands of AAS. The "thin" ideal is more associated with appearance and beauty than with fitness and strength.

Maintaining a Female Identity

Traditional concepts of desirable and undesirable female behaviour should be dismissed as inappropriate when these behavioural qualities are incompatible with that which is required for high levels of achievement and success in work. However it is important that females retain a sense of themselves as female and a pride in being female. That is, it is important that they do not simply see themselves as becoming male. One way of doing this is to give the females a sense of belonging to a tradition which is uniquely female by placing their current situation in a historical perspective. For example, there is a book called "Women in Khaki" by Ollif (1981) which tells the history, over the period of the Second World War, of the 26,000 members of the Australian Womens Army Service (AWAS). This book

chronicles some of the difficulties faced by women as they tried to have their volunteer efforts acknowledged in the early stages of the war and how this attitude changed as the war years continued. This book shows a war time recruiting poster inciting women to join the AWAS and train to be competent truck drivers and gain the "necessary mechanical knowledge to run a garage". The same book shows pictures of AWAS landing in PNG and performing various duties not normally seen as suitable for females. An article by Costigan (1981) titled, "40 Years of Battling for Equality" gives a brief history of the AWAS and WRAAC and shows pictures of AWAS doing war time electrical and wireless work. "Australian Women at War" by Adam-Smith (1984) gives a comprehensive account of women's participation in war time activities throughout Australia's history. Also, there is an American film called "Rosie The Riveter" which is a documentary of the role played by women in factories and industry in America during the war years. As well as presenting these sorts of images to foster cohesiveness and a sense of belonging to a female tradition which has historical roots, it is also intended to discourage any females who are inclined in a destructive sense to strive for the dubious merit of being the "first female" or "only female" to do such and such. It has all been done before, although the setting may have been slightly different. For the females concerned it is probably better to believe that there is nothing special about doing something which males have always done, the only problem is being allowed to do it, and to achieve that, they need the support of other females.

It is also desirable that the female apprentices have inspiring role models, persons they admire and aspire to be like. A female member of the instructing staff who had, as an incidental or additional duty, the provision of guidance and support to the female apprentices would satisfy this requirement.

Selection

There are some aspects of family background and personality which have been associated with successful women in male dominated work environments. Lemkau (1979) in her review of the personality and background characteristics of women in male dominated occupations found that "open encouragement, and support of achievement, education, and androgynous exploration of masculine as well as feminine endeavours, within a stable family situation ..." characterised the upbringings of these women. There are no hard and fast selection rules or "right types" but in a very general sense a girl who grows up apprenticed to a traditional mother who teaches her how to bake cakes and set tables would have more trouble adjusting to the AAS environment than a girl whose upbringing is more similar to a boy's. Such a girl may have spent a lot of time with her father, possibly even going to work with him and she will have learnt to feel comfortable handling machinery and tools. She will also have acquired some of the unspoken rules and customs which govern work behaviour. Some studies have found that females who are only children or the oldest child in a family are more likely to have had bestowed on them the sort of attention, encouragement, and

expectation of achievement and success which fathers normally reserve for their sons. Each case needs to be examined individually, but the ideas discussed in this paragraph might be usefully applied to selection. The selection board situation however, is not the best place to delve into family dynamics which should more appropriately be explored in the interview by the psychologist prior to the selection board.

Concluding Comments

The experience of being female in a male dominated environment has been studied quite extensively and there is a much greater understanding of the behavioural dynamics which operate in this situation. Additionally, a lot of research has been conducted on the process of integration in military institutions. This report does not attempt to cover all of the issues which have been identified as significant in relation to the successful introduction of integrated training, nor does it specifically refer to the research. A second paper, to be published, contains more detailed discussion of the issues and describes research. This current paper reports on issues which emerged as significant from talking with apprentices, instructors and staff at AAS, and discusses them within the explanatory contexts of 'tokenism' and 'sex role theory'.

The process of integrating females into AAS appears to be following a pattern predicted in the research literature and the well documented experiences of the Armed Forces of Canada and the United States. It is the pattern of adjustment which follows when an established tradition bound group is forced to redefine itself by the introduction of new members who do not share all the characteristics of the original group. This process which has been called tokenism has three elements; visibility, contrast and assimilation or stereotyping. These have been described in this paper and appear to have been manifested at AAS. Leadership and management practices which are designed specifically to counter the effects of tokenism will contribute to easing the process of integration.

The second body of research literature referred to in this paper related to sex role theory and the distinction between cultural and psychological femininity. Recent sex role research has concentrated on defining the androgynous personality as opposed to the sex typed male and female. The androgynous person is capable of responding appropriately to situational demands rather than behaving in a gender stereotyped fashion. The attitudinal shift away from defining behaviour as appropriate or otherwise for girls, to looking at behaviour in terms of its appropriateness for an apprentice, boy or girl, in a given situation will cause confusion for both staff and apprentices.

One way of dealing with the issues raised in this paper would be to conduct training which specifically addressed these issues. An understanding of the tokenism process by staff/instructors would alert them to its effects and provide some guidelines for countering the effects. Similarly

staff/instructor training in the form of discussion about sex role attitudes and their impact on effective leadership, management and training may clarify some of the uncertainties inherent in the situation of change and provide direction for appropriate change. For the female apprentices, training to develop coping skills and group survival or team concepts would be useful.

Perhaps one of the most important lessons is that the types of problems which arise in relation to integration are not caused by individuals, but are the result of group processes which need to be understood and managed in an informed manner.

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