Women at West Point: A Three-Year Perspective

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A longitudinal study of approximately 3,700 male and 300 female cadets investigated similarities and differences of these young adults during the first three years of coeducation at West Point. Both men and women were relatively homogeneous on comparisons of personality variables. Also, when personality characteristics were correlated with two psychological scales—the Personal Attributes Questionnaire and the Work and Family Orientation Scale—males and females appear more similar than different. Despite their similarities, female and male cadets were different in their attitudes towards the rights and roles of women in society, their leadership evaluation ratings, and their attitudes toward dating relationships. The implications of these findings in increasing our understanding of sex roles and sex stereotypes are discussed.

In July 1976, almost 1,500 cadets arrived at the United States Military Academy at West Point to begin military and academic training to become future regular Army commissioned officers. For the first time in the Academy’s 174-year history, 119 female cadets were part of the entering class. The women in the Class of 1980 were entering a highly masculine environment which had been steeped in tradition. To understand the integration of women into the Corps of Cadets at West Point, the
longitudinal research program Project Athena was initiated. Except for the research conducted intermittently by other federal service academies (Durning 1978; DeFleur, Gillman, & Marshak, 1978) and a pilot study of commitment among Reserve Officer Training Corps students (Card, 1975), there has been no systematic research on coeducational officer career preparation.

The concern about how well women can perform in nontraditional roles is a salient issue to the U.S. Army. As military planners and researchers began to prepare programs for the development of women as future Army leaders, little empirical research was available in academic resources from which they could draw. For example, Stogdill completed a comprehensive review of leadership research in 1974; however, sex-roles and leadership were not systematically addressed in Stogdill's treatise. Moreover, some studies prior to 1975 suggest that there appears to be a bias in psychology for researchers to study males rather than females or both genders (see Holmes & Jorgensen, 1971, Dan & Beekman, 1972). In short, academy officials recognized the importance of basing future policy decisions about gender on empirical research as opposed to lessons learned post hoc. The result of this decision led to Project Athena (Adams, 1979).

This article will focus on the integration process during the cadets' first three years at West Point. Specifically, it will examine personality characteristics of the men and women to determine if there are noticeable gender-related differences for candidates applying to West Point. Also, the leadership evaluation system at West Point will be described to determine if leadership ratings are influenced by the gender of the person being rated. Finally, many social aspects of the integration process at the end of three years will be discussed.

The data for this article were obtained from two sources: (a) academy records and (b) questionnaire data collected at entrance, at the end of summer training, and during the academic year. In most cases, the data included all of the cadets in the population. Thus, surveys of all four classes consisted of over 4,000 male and female respondents.

**PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS**

*Candidate Profile*

Historically, candidates admitted to West Point score well above the national average of college-bound seniors on verbal aptitude and mathematics aptitude and achievement as measured by the Scholastic