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Gender (in)equality within the Swedish Armed Forces

Resistance and Functional Disinclination

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2023

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Linehagen, F. (2023). *Gender (in)equality within the Swedish Armed Forces: Resistance and Functional Disinclination*. [Doctoral Thesis (compilation), Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety]. Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety, Faculty of Engineering, Lund University.

Total number of authors:

1

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The background image shows a group of people in a rowing boat on a body of water. A large Swedish flag (blue and yellow) is visible in the foreground on the left. The sky is blue with some clouds. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular area in the upper right.

Gender (in)equality within the Swedish Armed Forces

Resistance and Functional Disinclination

FRIDA LINEHAGEN

RISK MANAGEMENT AND SOCIETAL SAFETY | LUND UNIVERSITY



Gender (in)equality within the Swedish Armed Forces

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Resistance and Functional Disinclination

Frida Linehagen



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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the Faculty of Engineering, Lund University.

To be defended at lecture hall V:A, LTH

13 October 2023, at 09.00 hr

Faculty opponent

Fia Sundevall, Stockholm University

Organization:

Lund University, Faculty of Engineering, Division of Risk Management and Societal Safety

Document name: Doctorial dissertation**Date of issue** 13 October 2023**Author:** Frida Linehagen**Sponsoring organization:** Swedish Defence University**Title and subtitle:** Gender (in)equality within the Swedish Armed Forces: Resistance and functional disinclination**Abstract:**

Historically and traditionally, military work has been closely associated with men. However, the post-Cold War normalization process has brought about a transformation in both the Swedish Armed Forces themselves and the perception of the organization. Normative concerns, including gender equality, have gained significant prominence, compelling the armed forces to embark on various initiatives aimed at achieving a more gender-balanced structure. Despite the extensive profiling and efforts made by the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) over the past decades, women currently make up only 11.9% of the military personnel.

This dissertation examines how (in)equality manifests itself in the military profession today, in view of the substantial changes that have occurred. The dissertation encompasses both the experiences of personnel and the actions of the organisation. By doing so, it sheds light on the gradual advancement of gender equality within the SAF, attributing this delay to resistance against change that becomes evident at the structural, organizational, and professional levels. This resistance is further explained through the concept of "functional disinclination," which emerges from the empirical studies presented in this dissertation.

Utilizing a range of data and methodologies, the dissertation collectively highlights an organizational incapacity to align with the normative demands set forth. The barriers to achieving gender equality are not merely reflective of resistance; they also form a recurring pattern that impedes the implementation of normative changes

Key words: gender equality, military, Swedish Armed Forces, resistance, military profession**Language:** English**ISBN:** 978-91-8039-793-3 (print), 978-91-8039-794-0 (pdf)

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Gender (in)equality within the Swedish Armed Forces

Resistance and Functional Disinclination

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Coverphoto by Sofia Löveborn, Swedish Armed Forces

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ISBN 978-91-8039-793-3 (print)

ISBN 978-91-8039-794-0 (pdf)

Printed in Sweden by Media-Tryck, Lund University

Lund 2023



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To Elise & Tilia

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Summary

Military work has historically and traditionally been associated with men. In the Swedish context, women have been involved in voluntary organisations linked to the armed forces for a long time, but it was not until 1980 that the first women were allowed to enrol through military conscription. It took another nine years before all positions were opened for applications from women. Today, the perception of the military profession is partly different. The normalisation process that followed the Cold War has transformed both the armed forces and the perception of the organisation. Normative issues, where gender equality is one component, have gained greater prominence, and the armed forces have engaged in numerous efforts towards a more gender-balanced organisation. Despite the organisation's profiling and work in this area over the past decades, women currently constitute only 11.9% of the military personnel of the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF). This dissertation investigates the reasons behind this slow progress.

Previous research has shown that social development, technological innovation, and a changing security policy environment have been crucial factors driving significant organisational change within the armed forces. At the same time, personnel constitute the organisation's most vital resource, and men overwhelmingly dominate in this regard. Thus, there is value in examining the conditions experienced by both women and men within an organisation that plays a central role in society's security work. Research also indicates that the relationship between gender and the military is complex. While the connection may appear clear-cut, it is influenced by numerous social processes, contexts, activities, individuals, and traditions. This dissertation examines the knowledge gap concerning how (in)equality manifests itself in the military profession today, in view of the substantial changes that have occurred. The dissertation encompasses both the experiences of personnel and the actions of the organisation.

The dissertation sheds light on the slow progress of gender equality within the SAF and attributes this to resistance to change, observable at the structural, organisational, and professional levels. This resistance is further explained through the concept of "functional disinclination", generated from the empirical studies presented in the dissertation. These studies, employing various data and methods, all indicate an organisational inability to align with the normative demands placed upon the organisation. The barriers to gender equality should not only be viewed as resistance but also as a recurring process that inhibits the implementation of changes to normative issues. The military

profession rests on a monopoly of violence, and efforts towards gender equality could functionally be interpreted as a way of undermining its combat capability. The resistance to gender equality within the organisation is rooted in perceptions of both what a military person should be and the role of the military organisation. Further research is needed regarding barriers to gender equality across different organisational levels, other gender equality initiatives and their outcomes, as well as the gender-neutral conscription system that enables the study of a rapidly evolving profession.

Sammanfattning

Militärt arbete har både historiskt och traditionellt förknippats med män. I Sverige har kvinnor funnits inom frivilligrörelsen under lång tid, men först 1980 fick de första kvinnorna göra värnplikt. Det dröjde ytterligare nio år innan samtliga befattningar öppnades upp för kvinnor att söka. Idag är synen på den militära professionen delvis en annan. Den normaliseringsprocess som följde det kalla kriget har förändrat både Försvarsmakten och synen på organisationen. Normativa frågor, där jämställdhet är en del, har fått ta en allt större plats och Försvarsmakten har gjort och gör många insatser för en mer jämställd organisation. Trots organisationens profilering och arbete inom området de senaste decennierna uppgår antalet kvinnor idag till endast 11,9 % av Försvarsmaktens militärt anställda personal. Denna avhandling utforskar anledningarna bakom den långsamma utvecklingen.

Social utveckling, teknisk innovation och en föränderlig säkerhetspolitisk miljö har genom tidigare forskning visats vara viktiga faktorer som drivit fram stora organisatoriska förändringar inom Försvarsmakten. Samtidigt är personalen organisationens viktigaste resurs och män är i överväldigande majoritet. Det finns därför ett värde i att undersöka omständigheterna för både kvinnor och män inom en organisation som har en central roll i samhällets säkerhetsarbete. Forskning visar även på att relationen mellan kön och militären är komplex. Även om sambandet kan verka tydligt och enkelt, påverkas det av många sociala processer, sammanhang, aktiviteter, individer och traditioner. Den här avhandlingen undersöker kunskapsluckan kring hur (o)jämställdhet tar sig i uttryck i militärprofessionen idag, med tanke på de betydande förändringar som skett. Avhandlingen omfattar både personalens erfarenheter och organisationens agerande.

Avhandlingen belyser den långsamma utvecklingen av jämställdhet inom Försvarsmakten, och hänför detta till motstånd mot förändring, som kan observeras på strukturell, organisatorisk och professionell nivå. Vidare förklaras detta motstånd med begreppet *functional disinclination*, eller funktionell ovilja, som genererats från de genomförda empiriska studierna i avhandlingen, som alla, med användning av olika data och metoder, indikerar en organisatorisk oförmåga att anpassa sig till de normativa krav som ställs på organisationen. Hindren för jämställdhet bör inte enbart ses som motstånd utan också som en återkommande process som hämmar implementeringen av normativa frågor. Den militära professionen vilar på ett våldsmonopol och insatser för jämställdhet kan funktionellt tolkas som ett sätt att undergräva dess stridsförmåga. Motståndet mot jämställdhet i organisationen grundar sig i

föreställningar om dels hur en militär bör vara, dels den militära organisationens roll. Vidare forskning behövs kring barriärerna för jämställdhet över olika organisationsnivåer, fler jämställdhetsinitiativ och deras utfall samt kring det könsneutrala värnplikssystemet som möjliggör studier av en profession i snabb utveckling.

Acknowledgements

It has been an interesting, enjoyable, and challenging process to write this thesis. Emotions about the work have swung between hopefulness and hopelessness. Often, I have felt inspired, motivated, and free; at times, I have felt angry and scared. Many hours have been spent sitting writing on a train chugging through beautiful landscapes, with that comforting sound that lulls the body. Even though this thesis has taken me on many journeys, through Sweden's forests, Lisbon's streets, and across the Atlantic to the grandeur of Washington, the inner journey it has provided me has surpassed everything else. I am so grateful for that!

The group of supervisors who have supported, helped, inspired, irritated, and coached me through these years deserve the biggest thank you in the world! From three different universities, with diverse backgrounds and areas of interest, you have collectively given me exactly what I needed, even if I didn't always see it that way at the time. Thank you to my main supervisor, Misse, for direct guidance, razor-sharp insight, and your way of making things sound so simple. Thank you, Aida, for your immense dedication, all the time you generously gave specifically to me, and for your patience in listening and trying to understand what I want to convey. Thank you, Magnus, for your calmness, your cleverness in often posing a counter-question instead of giving an answer, and for your rich supply of intricate words that I have often had to look up after our conversations. Thank you all, for always believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself.

Thank you to all the respondents who generously provided insights into your daily lives, thoughts, and experiences. Thank you to the department of the Swedish Defence University where I have worked, for allowing me to be a part of you, to feel a sense of belonging, and to contribute. Thank you for the opportunity to also exist among other military personnel, a community and a bond that is hard to find elsewhere. Thank you to the department at Lund University for the opportunity to do this. Thank you to all my friends who have been by my side in various ways during this process, which is a different world for many of you. Thank you for your curiosity, your understanding, and your patience with a friend like me, who sometimes can't respond to a text message for several days because I am so absorbed in my writing. Thank you for still being there. Thank you, grandma, Elina and mum. Thank you, Marie. I know that you are proud of me.

The final and greatest thank you goes to my immediate family, Peter, Elise, and Tilia. Thank you for all the uninterrupted time I've been given and for all the time I haven't. I hope you won't have any more nightmares about your mum going to a library and never coming back home. Thank you, Peter, for everything.

List of papers

Paper I

Linehagen, F. (2018). Conforming One's Conduct to Unwritten Rules: Experiences of Female Military Personnel in a Male-Dominated Organization. *Res Militaris*, 8(1), 1-25.

Paper II

Linehagen, F., & Wester, M. (2023). To stand in line and fit in—About military men's (un) reflected navigation in the armed forces. *Sociology Compass*, 17(3), e13056.

Paper III

Linehagen, F. (2022). Collective agreement as investment in women in the Swedish Armed Forces A critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(3), 364-376.

Paper IV

Linehagen, F., Persson, M. & Alvinus, A. (Submitted). The “making” of a gender-neutral military profession in turbulent times: Gender equality work in the Swedish Armed Forces from the end of the Cold War to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Author's contribution to the papers

Paper I

As a sole author, I was responsible for conceiving and founding the study's idea, for collecting all the data, as well as for shaping and designing the study. I also undertook the analysis independently and authored the manuscript.

Paper II

Being the primary author of this paper, I undertook the complete data collection process. I held the main responsibility for shaping the study's design, conducting the analysis, and composing the manuscript. I also managed all the revisions suggested by the reviewers.

Paper III

As the sole author, I held responsibility for originating and establishing the study's concept, gathering all the data, and structuring and formulating the study's plan. Additionally, I conducted the analysis autonomously and composed the manuscript.

Paper IV

In the capacity of the lead author for this paper, I assumed the role of gathering all the data. Furthermore, I shouldered the primary responsibility for formulating the study's design, conducting the analysis, and crafting the manuscript.

Introduction, purpose and research questions

Military work has historically and traditionally been considered a male profession (Kronsell, 2012). In Sweden, women have been involved in voluntary military organisations for a long time, but it was not until 1980 that the first women were admitted to formal military service. It took another nine years before all branches of the military profession were open to women (Egnell et al., 2014). Sundevall (2011) called it the last male professional monopoly. Today, the perception of the military profession is partly different. Since the end of the Cold War, the European defence sector has undergone a process of “normalisation”, including reforms based on New Public Management principles, which have influenced military organisations and shaped their current form (Norheim-Martinsen, 2016). Today the SAF strongly profiles itself with award-winning advertising campaigns in which women often appear prominently, and the organisation claims that gender equality has a high priority among its personnel policy goals (Swedish Armed Forces, 2015). However, despite efforts towards a more gender equal SAF over the years, women make up only about 11,9% of military personnel, compared with 39% of civilian personnel, in the armed forces (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023b). The development has been complex and ambiguous. Even though efforts have been made and changes can be traced, the image of a soldier is still predominantly that of a man (Kronsell, 2012). Perceptions of the typical soldier are strongly coded as masculine, incorporating physical strength, plain speaking and authority. In that narrative, women are still the exception, and increased gender equality is a non-issue (see e.g. Sasson-Levy, 2003; 2011). The process of integrating women into the military organization could be characterized as slow. This is apparent in the internal objectives and efforts of the Swedish Armed Forces concerning this matter, along with the slight increase in women holding military positions. This thesis examines the dynamics operating within a traditionally male-dominated organisation and profession such as the military, here exemplified by the SAF, during the process of “gender equalisation”.

The purpose is to investigate the reasons behind the slow progress towards gender equality in this context, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of how gender equality is perceived and practised within the military organisation and profession.

The following research questions have guided this study:

- How does the SAF and its employees relate and navigate to gender equality within the military organisation?
- How is the military profession and organisation challenged from a gender equality perspective due to societal, political, and security-related changes?

Outline

The introductory section of the thesis defines the problem area and introduces the purpose and the research questions. The next chapter presents the empirical context and its limitations. This is followed by an overview of previous research, divided into four subsections: Challenges for women in the armed forces; About masculinity in the armed forces; Decisions and policy for gender equality; and Challenges for the military profession. Next is a chapter on theory, which forms the conceptual basis for understanding gender equality in the military, followed by a chapter describing the methodology of the study, including materials, selection, analytical methods and other methodological approaches, as well as reflexivity and research ethics. After summaries of the four papers that form part of the thesis and their empirical contributions, the thesis concludes with a discussion of identified themes and suggestions for further research and practical implications.

Empirical context of the study

Today, the SAF is one of Sweden's largest government agencies, with nearly 24,000 people in continuous employment. In addition to these, a similar number are engaged in intermittent roles, principally in the Home Guard (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023b). The mission of the SAF is to defend the country's freedom and to contribute to the creation of peace and security in the world. Its resources can be quickly deployed in combat and crisis situations,

both nationally and internationally. This may involve preventing and managing conflicts and wars inside and outside the Swedish borders, and defending Sweden against armed attack, but also assisting other authorities in various crisis situations, such as forest fires, floods, major storms, or in the search for missing persons (Ågren & Sataoen, 2022). The SAF plays a central role in many aspects of security in society, but this thesis focuses on its national role and on those of its employees who are in continuous, long-term military service.

The SAF is politically governed and receives its mission and resources via the parliament and government in the form of five-year defence acts and annual letters of appropriation. It has been tasked by the government to increase the number of women in the organisation (Swedish Armed Forces, 2021) and to contribute to the fulfilment of gender equality policy goals (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023a). The armed forces have also been included in the government's special investment in gender equality mainstreaming, which has been expanded in stages since its launch in 2013 (Swedish Gender Equality Agency, 2018). During the four decades when women have been members of the SAF, gender equality principles have been adopted in Swedish society, which has in many respects become more equal: politically, within families, and in various institutions and workplaces. Sweden is also known as a pioneer in operationalising UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (on women, peace and security), primarily in the country's international operations (Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2019). Nationally, the SAF has implemented several measures in the interest of a more gender-equal organisation. Its annual report for 2022 (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023a) states that the biggest training effort has addressed gender mainstreaming for senior leaders and that additional training needs have been identified. The SAF has also, among other things, updated the process for materials procurement from a gender equality perspective.

Today, the SAF is moving towards a more gender-equal organisation, in terms of numbers as well as changing perceptions and norms about gender and the military (Swedish Armed Forces, 2021). Gender equality is important to the SAF from several perspectives – from respecting basic human rights and values to achieving operational goals and creating an inclusive workplace. However, the commitment to gender equality and integration within the armed forces is not entirely voluntary. Politics and legislation impose requirements on the institution as an employer. Thus, gender equality is the normative and political goal of women and men having equal power to shape society and their own lives (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2016). The purpose of the

Discrimination Act (2008) is to counteract discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities, and compliance with applicable legislation is a minimum requirement for employers. However, measures beyond what the law requires in order to achieve a more gender-equal organisation are at the discretion of each institution and can therefore look different.

Today, women make up 11,9% of military personnel in continuous employment in the SAF (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023b). The addition of civilian women employees to the figures brings the overall proportion of women in the organisation up to 23%, but this gives a somewhat misleading picture of the quantitative progress of gender equality work in the SAF, since civilian women employees do not face that same challenges as the women in military roles.

Since women were allowed to take up military roles in 1980, the number of female military personnel has gradually increased. In the first year, 28 women completed the voluntary basic training in the SAF. From 1989, women were allowed to apply for all military roles, but until 1994 it was only women who intended a career as an officer who were eligible for military service. The annual report for 2001 stated that the organisation had managed to recruit 18% more female officers than the year before. Although the percentage increase seems large, it only amounted to six additional individuals in the entire organisation (Swedish Armed Forces, 2002). Ten years later, the annual reports look different, and it is evident that the recruitment of women is more important to the organisation. At that time, the number of women employed in military roles was just over 6% (Swedish Armed Forces, 2012), while the latest published figure is just under 12% (Swedish Armed Forces, 2023b). The proportion of women in the armed forces is increasing, and so is interest in gender equality, which today is on the agenda of both politicians and the SAF and is described as an important issue for the organisation in both its internal and external communications.

The main concern of the present study is to enhance our understanding of (in)equality within male-dominated governmental institutions. While the SAF is presented as a gender-equal organisation, and is recognised for its role in safeguarding Sweden and its interests, the extent of gender (in)equality within the institution and the underlying causes of this remain a relatively underexplored area of research. This study seeks to contribute to our knowledge by examining the reasons behind the slow progress concerning gender equality within this particular context. The objective is to gain a deeper comprehension of how the perception and practice of gender equality manifest within the military organization and profession.

Previous research

In this chapter, the focus is on research conducted at both international and national levels, exploring the various challenges faced by individuals within the military organisation. The examination focuses on the conditions, challenges, and experiences of both women and men, as gender issues affect both genders. In addition, the chapter discusses studies pertaining to decision-making processes and policies that aim to enhance gender equality and improve the position of women within the military organisation. Finally, research is presented concerning the challenges faced by the military profession today in relation to gender (in)equality.

Challenges for women in the armed forces

In recent decades, many armed forces worldwide have been working towards greater gender integration and equality. This involves ensuring that men and women have equal opportunities to serve in all military roles, including combat positions (Moore, 2020; Segal, 1995). However, various justifications have also been provided to rationalise the exclusion of women from combat positions. A significant reason for this exclusion is the belief that women disrupt the male bonding that is considered crucial for achieving optimal combat effectiveness (Firestone & Harris, 2003). The idea of women as warriors has always been inherently disruptive, as it challenges the prevailing social order, which upholds the division between males and females (Gherardi, 1994).

In Sweden (Sundevall, 2011) and in other western countries such as the US, Canada, France and Germany (Carreiras, 2006), women had in several ways tried to make inroads into the military organisation, in military work but also in carrying out typically feminine tasks such as sewing uniforms and cooking. Then, around the beginning of the 20th century, women's engagement with defence was questioned, and they were accused of only wanting to be in the armed forces to find themselves a handsome man in uniform (Sundevall,

2011). Moreover, there was the notion that women were seen as the objects of protection, with men as the protectors (Enloe, 2004). Gradually, however, war nurses were accepted, and as time passed, the armed forces opened up more to women, albeit with resistance (Barry, 2013). During the Second World War, with Sweden in a state of military preparedness, there was a shortage of personnel, which led to women being given access to a wider variety of roles, albeit non-combat. Some concessions were gradually given, but temporarily and reluctantly. These were either withdrawn after a while or involved special conditions, such as women being allowed to drive military vehicles, but if men were present, they would drive. Nevertheless, during this time Sweden was unique in having female air traffic controllers who were armed. After the war, the resistance to women eased somewhat as people got used to the idea that women worked in certain parts of the armed forces, not least in the voluntary organisations. With an increasingly equal society, women gained access to military service conscription and military service employment in 1980. Initially, there were still restrictions, but in 1989, Sweden became the first country in the world where all military service positions were open to women (Sundevall, 2011).

There has been previous research on gender equality in military organisations, about Sweden as well as other Western countries. Research on gender bias indicates that women may experience bias or preconceived notions that may undermine their credibility, skills, and chances of progress. Additionally, women may encounter restricted opportunities in terms of accessing specific positions or roles within the military, such as combat roles or leadership positions, due to the various barriers that they face (Alvinus et al., 2016; Dewanto et al., 2023). Studies also indicate that social identity is strong within the military organisation. This can, in turn, contribute to conflicts with partners and close family members, who are not able to share the same emotional bonds and experiences. This social identity is reinforced by the occasionally negative attitude displayed by the public towards the armed forces, which enhances the significance of belonging to it (Kylin, 2012). At the same time, it is not automatic for women to be included as part of the group, and they are often measured against a different standard than men. Their physical and mental achievements do not appear to be sufficient, making it crucial for them to adopt the prevailing culture, such as the use of coarse language, to gain acceptance (Carver, 2007).

Women often also have additional responsibilities tied to roles beyond their profession, such as being a wife and mother, which creates another challenge for women in the military (Ivarsson, 2001). Studies from various countries and

organisations also demonstrate that informal support from their partners becomes particularly crucial for women in the face of organisational challenges. This can be explained by the observation that the shift in family life is often particularly significant when it is the woman who advances in her career (Iskra, 2007; Ivarsson, 2001). Finally, women in the military organisation are challenged by their constant minority status and the absence of significant numbers of female role models (Smith & Rosenstein, 2017). Thus it can be seen that previous research on women in the military provides a background that can be helpful in understanding how gender equality is perceived and practised within the military organisation and profession.

About masculinity in the armed forces

The armed forces and military work have a significant history of being regarded as work for and by men (Carreiras, 2006). It was a field exclusively for men, and women had no business being there. Given the historically male dominance of the military profession, it is fundamentally male-coded, and this has created a space for male ideals (Ericson, 2020a). In fact, not only the armed forces but also society's other security actors with missions to protect and manage threats and risks are often noticeably male-dominated (Danielsson & Eriksson, 2022; Ericson, 2011; Persson, 2010). This is not specific to Sweden but is the case in most countries in the world (Iskra, 2007; Sasson-Levey, 2003). The military organisation is not only quantitatively male-dominated but also strongly linked to norms and ideals of masculinity, which permit male ideals to be maintained (Sasson-Levy, 2003; 2011) and reproduced through routine maintenance of institutions (Ben-Shalom, 2019; Kronsell, 2005). Here, society's gender order is both confirmed and manifested (Acker, 1990). Ericson (2020b) explains that the emergence of gender segregation becomes a materialisation of cultural notions of gender and a structure that contributes to inertia when it comes to changing an unequal gender order.

Another recurring description of dominant ideals in the military is that of hegemonic masculinity. Within the military, as well as in other male-dominated organisations such as the mining industry (Bergman, 2010), the construction industry (Denissen, 2010), and the fire service (Ericson, 2014), masculinity norms have become institutions of hegemonic masculinity (Herbert, 1995). This type of masculinity is characterised by traits that are largely related to the physical body, such as physical strength, ability to work under demanding conditions, and practical knowledge. Hegemonic

masculinity also guarantees men's dominant position and women's subordination (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), thus creating space for men to practise their dominance. In this way, the military organisation provides resources for and enables hegemonic masculinity (Hinojosa, 2010).

The military organisation is often described as a place where cohesion is strong (Hale, 2012; Kylin, 2012), which makes it interesting to study male homosociality in this strongly male-dominated organisation. Male homosociality describes how men seek the – nonsexual – company of other men (Lipman-Blumen, 1976), and the male dominance in the military organisation contributes to the prominence of homosocial socialisation (Holgersson, 2013). This creates a boundary effect against outsiders, such as women, who are perceived as threatening the brotherhood of the military organisation (Woodward & Winter, 2006). Research shows that women need to work hard to be accepted in this male community (Cettner, 2008; Sasson-Levey, 2003; Lindgren 1985). Overall, previous studies show that male homosociality and hegemonic masculinity are deeply rooted and largely seen as normal in the military organisation (Danielsson & Eriksson, 2022; Holgersson, 2013; Woodward & Winter, 2006). At the same time, this norm is increasingly being questioned and weakened (Duncanson, 2015). Previous research on how men navigate the military organisation and profession presents a background that can be helpful for understanding the reasons behind the slow progress of gender equality in the armed forces, in particular the SAF, and gain a deeper understanding of how gender equality is perceived and practised.

Decisions and policies in support of gender equality

The military organisation is essentially bureaucratic with a clear hierarchical structure marked by strict discipline (Alvinus, 2013; Bonnes, 2017) and a culture rooted in masculinity (Eichler, 2022; Kronsell, 2012). The armed forces are often described as meritocratic, with their emphasis on rank, grade, and competence, as well as having strong social cohesion (Castilla & Benard, 2010). The organisation imposes explicit expectations on its members, who are often required to be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice of their own lives (Coser, 1974; Ydén, 2008). Throughout history, these characteristics have played a significant role in shaping the gender dynamics within the armed forces.

The traditionally masculine meritocratic nature of the armed forces has meant that men have been able to advance to higher positions. This indicates that with more women in the military organisation, a reassessment is required if they are to have equal opportunities. A pattern of military gender integration can be discerned in international policy development, where discourses and practices in recent decades have given rise to a number of new political initiatives and policies in this area (Stachowitsch, 2012). For example, the fifth of the United Nations' global goals for sustainable development is about gender equality and is described as a prerequisite for sustainable and peaceful development in the world (Global Goals, 2023).-Since the 1970s, there has been a notable shift in Western military organisations as they began to allow women to join, signifying a departure from traditional norms. Interestingly, this change occurred in peacetime rather than during periods of conflict, in contrast to historical patterns. By the onset of the 21st century, all NATO member states had actively worked to augment the representation of women within their armed forces (Carreiras, 2006). The following paragraph elaborates further on this matter, with a focus on the challenges encountered within the military profession.

A number of nations have adopted diversity policies and strategies to tackle gender inequalities within their respective armed forces. For example, mentoring is used to address the career and psychosocial development needs of both men and women within the military organisation in countries like the US, Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. However, mentoring is particularly used as a means of supporting women (Tam-Seto & Imre-Millei, 2022). Another crucial aspect of the struggle to reduce gender inequality is the development of strategies to mitigate instances of unwelcome behaviour, such as sexual harassment, which is one of the most prevalent forms of workplace misbehaviour. Efforts have been made to address this issue through managerial training programmes, awareness campaigns regarding reporting procedures, and the establishment of policies (Buchanan et al., 2014). However, the worldwide #MeToo movement of 2017 has further highlighted the need for continued efforts in this regard (Alvinus & Holmberg, 2019). In a Nordic context, Norway has experimented with having platoons consisting solely of women in order to avoid competition between women and men. This was done because of a belief that the integration of women into the armed forces had been unsuccessful but that women's competence was particularly valuable and should be utilised (Rones & Steder, 2017). Sweden has also taken steps towards more gender-equal armed forces. One example is the attempt to equalise salaries between women and men through collective bargaining agreements (Swedish Armed Forces, 2016).

Challenges facing the military profession

The military profession is changeable in nature and has evolved in various ways over the years, depending on developments in society and the level of threat in the surrounding area. When the security climate in the vicinity is stable and the military threat level is low, the military largely adheres to societal norms (Feaver, 1996). Moskos et al. (2000) refer to this as the postmodern military and describe it as an organisation questioning its exclusivity and instead striving to mirror society at large. It is therefore particularly interesting to study civil-military relations at times of changing international security levels, as argued by Desch (2001), who examined the United States during, at the end of, and after the Cold War. Depending on the threat level and the security situation, the extent to which the civil leadership, in the form of elected representatives and government, influence and control a country's military capability. Norheim-Martinsen (2016) also highlights the military's new role, with its different tasks blurring the boundaries between civilian and military domains. One example of such increased civilian influence over the military is the greater emphasis on normative issues such as gender equality. Carreira (2006) suggests that these changes are driven by global trends affecting many Western countries, albeit at different rates and to a different extent. Together with an increased pressure for gender equality there are changes in the military profession towards a more professional organisation. In this context, growing numbers of women are assuming increasingly diverse military roles, which is a way of demonstrating the changing nature of a country's military. Research also shows that a more gender-equal profession is more attractive to women (Graf & Kümmel, 2022). In the United States, combat positions were opened up to women in 2016, allowing them to apply for roles that were previously reserved for men. This groundbreaking decision was politically motivated (Fitriani & Matthews, 2016).

The core characteristics of the military organisation have persisted also in Sweden, but the focus of the armed forces has shifted over time depending on prevailing social developments and the security situation in the outside world. While the Cold War lasted, the armed forces were dimensioned to meet a powerful adversary. The defence of that time required both independence and endurance, which contributed to the largely unquestioned acceptance of defence appropriations (see e.g. Axelsson et al., 2016). Historically, the periodically increased threat arising from Sweden's security policy position and the Cold War was handled by a military profession defined by male-coded

characteristics that largely excluded women, such as universal male conscription.

When the Soviet Union dissolved and the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, the SAF faced new organisational as well as financial challenges, and large-scale disarmament followed (Ministry of Defence, 1992; 1995; 1999). This involved measures such as the closure of a number of military units and the emptying of local mobilisation depots, but it also entailed increased state control over the armed forces. For two decades the organisation became the subject of increasing demands for reports, audits, and government inquiries within the framework of New Public Management (see e.g. Ledberg, 2019). The armed forces were reoriented towards other military tasks, with an emphasis on international peacekeeping missions, and in the 2004 Defence Act, the main task of the SAF was changed to participating in international crisis management (Ministry of Defence, 2004). Defending the country against armed attack, which had long been its primary task, was relegated to third place, and a direct armed attack against Sweden was not seen as a reasonable prediction. The idea of total defence had been completely dismantled (Ring, 2022).

Officer training became a university education and in 2008 a new three-level officer system was introduced in the SAF, with different types of education for officers and specialist officers (Swedish Defence University, n.d). However, this system was not fully implemented until 2023. Decades of organisational and financial decline also meant that general male conscription was abandoned in 2010 and Sweden transitioned to a professional SAF (Agrell, 2016).

The security-political stance that a national defence was unnecessary proved to be temporary. Vladimir Putin became the president of Russia in 2000 and a Russian military build-up followed, which changed the security situation in Europe. In 2008, it was further changed with the war in Georgia and then Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The effect of these developments was that Sweden's new government made a fresh interpretation of the security situation in the neighbouring areas which altered the direction of defence policy (Agrell, 2016). Eventually, the focus on national defence was reinstated and financial resources were allocated to the SAF for rearmament to take place. In 2017, conscription was reintroduced, this time gender neutral. The security situation took a new drastic turn when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Suddenly, Sweden faced a new situation, and the hope of preserving the country's freedom of action and non-alignment in the Baltic Sea was abandoned. Processes for applying for NATO membership were initiated urgently and a more traditional approach to the SAF and its role in security

policy now prevailed, something that became a priority issue in the 2022 election (Government, 2023). The potential NATO membership could impact the military profession in several ways, ranging from increased demands and administration to organisational growth and new career opportunities both in Sweden and in other countries.

Alongside the organisational development that the SAF underwent in response to the security situation, time and societal developments have brought accelerating technological changes that have not gone unnoticed by the SAF. On the contrary, defence and security have been strongly influenced by these changes, which have over time, among other things, provided unmanned and computerised systems, new communications equipment, and better sensors. Increasingly advanced methods and weapons systems, as well as a digitalised world, constantly pose new challenges for the armed forces as they adapt tomorrow's defence to tomorrow's threats. The future operating environment is predicted to be greatly affected and changed, and in the long-term perspective future innovations are expected to contribute to both effectiveness and security (Kindvall & Lindberg, 2020).

To sum up, the previous research reviewed in this chapter indicates that social development, technological innovation, and a changing security-political environment have been significant factors driving major organisational changes in the SAF, an organisation whose most important resource is its personnel, and one where men are in the overwhelming majority. Hence, there is value in examining the conditions faced by women and by men within an organisation that plays such a pivotal role in society's security efforts. As Woodward and Duncanson (2017) assert, the relationship between gender and the military is complex. While the issues may sometimes appear clear and straightforward, they are influenced by numerous social processes, contexts, activities, individuals, and traditions. This dissertation adopts an approach that to an extent is different from previous studies and examines the knowledge gap that exists about how gender (in)equality is manifested in the military profession within today's SAF, in view of the significant changes that have taken place. This investigation encompasses both the experiences of personnel and the actions of the organisation.

Theoretical framework

This dissertation in the field of risk and societal security adopts a perspective aligned with sociology, wherein human behavior is influenced by both social constructs and individual choices. The focus is centered on the intersection of these two elements within a military context.

This chapter provides a background to the specific aspect of social structure that involves gender (in)equality, divided into the two primary perspectives explored in this thesis. The first perspective, the structural perspective, focuses on the gender structures manifested among female and male military personnel. The second perspective, the organisational and professional perspective, sheds light on the characteristics of the organisation and the challenges faced within the military profession, with particular reference to gender equality. It is important to emphasise that these two perspectives are closely interconnected and mutually influence each other. They cannot be seen in isolation but rather as conditions and impediments to each other's existence. Individual behaviours, thoughts, and emotions impact the organisation and its structure, which, in turn, influences individuals. A gender equality perspective is adopted to understand the reasons behind the slow progress of gender equality in the military organisation and profession and how gender equality is perceived and practised. It is through the prism of this relationship that the present chapter is written. The structural perspective of the thesis primarily draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theories, while the professional and organisational perspective predominantly relies on Joan Acker's work. These perspectives are complemented by insights from other theorists who have examined aspects of structure, organisation, profession, and gender, in order to understand the reasons behind the slow progress of gender equality in the military organisation and profession.

Gender equality from the structural perspective

A structural gender equality perspective has been essential in this thesis and is based on experiences from women and men working in the SAF. Bourdieu's sociological concepts of fields, capital, habitus, and symbolic violence have been useful for understanding women's and men's experiences of the military profession (Bourdieu, 1977; 1999a). Bourdieu's theoretical concepts have been widely used in social sciences and sociology, where, for example, they have provided a framework for examining class structures in society (Broady, 1991). Carlhed (2011) suggests that the theory can be used to study power, legitimacy, and inequality within and between professions, while Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) use Bourdieu's concepts in masculinity research to examine how male privilege is maintained. Thus, Bourdieu's texts can be read from various perspectives, and in this thesis, they are primarily used to analyse the structural perspective on gender in the military profession, as they consider both class and gender. One criticism of Bourdieu's theory of capital is that it is too general and does not consider specific contexts (Reay, 2004). However, in this thesis, the context is given: the military organisation and profession, a male-dominated arena where Bourdieu's concepts can be seen as particularly useful.

The symbolic capital highlighted in this dissertation shows that the male norm is identified and recognised as worthy of respect according to the beliefs of both men and women. It can be defined as a type of respect-worthiness and prestige that a certain person possesses and can take various forms, such as a position of power that helps maintain social hierarchies (Broady, 1991). In a military context, this may involve specific skills and military ranks, which place soldiers in different positions in the social field. An important aspect of this dissertation is its use of Bourdieu's (1996) concept of social capital, which is understood as different resources and values that field members have at their disposal through their social network and its relationships. It is about inseparable bonds and relationships with classmates and other friendships that can provide benefits to all group members, such as information, support, and influence (Broady, 1991). Lipman-Blumen (1976) uses the term male homosociality when men seek companionship with other men, which occurs in workplaces, associations, and organisations. This process affects male attachment in ordinary life and has consequences in the formal institutions (Flood, 2008). Bourdieu (1996), in turn, argues that gender identity also belongs to social capital since it governs power relations in the professional

field. In the military organisation with its male dominance, homosocial socialisation becomes prominent (Holgersson, 2013). This dissertation will use the concepts of social capital and male homosociality to understand how both women and men seek to acquire power and navigate the military organisation. Since women historically have had very limited access to social networks and relationships within the male-dominated organisation (Enloe, 2004), it also provides an opportunity to study whether female soldiers can use specific female social capital and what effects it might have.

The military organisation and profession is highly gender-segregated, leading to the creation and maintenance of male ideals (Barrett, 1996; Connell, 1992; Sasson-Levy, 2003; 2011). Social fields and doxa can provide an understanding of what happens when women and men navigate the military profession. Bourdieu argues that the temporal nature of empirical reality is of great importance for understanding the social world because it is only then that it is comparable to something else (Bourdieu, 1999b). The military professional field constitutes a social field because it consists of a delimited group of people who are fighting for something in common and where a particular symbolic capital is required. Within the social field, there is a certain order called doxa, which is a belief in the perceived natural order. This may involve the dominance of the male norm, and when a social field has a long history it tends to be difficult to question it (Bourdieu, 1977). Crucial to soldiers' position in the military professional field is, therefore, their amount of social capital, which contributes to power struggle and competition in the organisation. Bourdieu (1998) argues that there are several forces within a field, such as an urge to preserve the system and the traditional while other forces aim to change it based on the demands of the environment. In this dissertation, Bourdieu's field concept can be used to understand how female and male soldiers operate based on the prevailing doxa in the military professional field, but also to identify where they are in the field and how doxa affects their navigation.

The concept of habitus can be described as a system of enduring social dispositions or habits that determine the difference between good and bad, right and wrong, and become an embodied social law for the individual (Bourdieu, 1977). It is a kind of socialisation process with other individuals in social contexts, such as upbringing and education. The system of actions and thoughts that habitus constitutes shapes the individual's actions and, ultimately, the character of the organisation and institution to which the individual belongs, which ensures its reproduction over time (Bourdieu, 1999b). In this thesis, habitus can be helpful in understanding how military

personnel react, navigate, and develop strategies for their place in the military organisation and profession.

A theme in previous research from a structural perspective in a military context is male dominance (Connell, 1992; Carreiras, 2006; Sasson-Levy, 2011). Bourdieu (1999a) is amazed that the secular order with its unequal conditions is respected and maintained, and believes that male dominance is the most enduring and unchanging form of dominance. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe it as hegemonic masculinity, that is, men's domination and women's subordination. Male dominance is embodied by symbolic violence, a mild invisible violence that female military personnel do not see because it is exercised symbolically in the form of affirmation and devaluation (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1999a). The subordination experienced by women means that they face challenges when they break expected norms, which they do simply by choosing the military profession. Kanter (1977) believes that women are often disadvantaged and discriminated against when they challenge gender roles, making it difficult for them to succeed. These are factors that contribute to stress and exclusion, and often give rise to a fear of criticism from the majority group. According to Kanter's theory, women who are such a small minority in the armed forces are so-called "tokens" and therefore prefer to adapt to the majority rather than stand up for themselves. That the former is deemed to have more advantages might be an outcome of symbolic violence. Persson (2011) also believes that women are often expected to adapt to rules set by men. Symbolic violence is recognised by both women and men and requires contributions from those who are subjected to it in order to be carried out and continue. Over time, the norms of masculinity have become institutions for hegemonic masculinity, and its masculine norms are reproduced routinely in the institutions (Herbert, 1995; Kronsell, 2005). This means that the military organisation itself offers resources for, and makes it possible to construct, hegemonic masculinity (Hinojosa, 2010). Men can also be the target of the dominant notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1992). Relational properties are formed in parallel, both in front of and for other men and towards the female, and according to Bourdieu (1999a) this is about a fear of the female, primarily in oneself. The relationships create a kind of functional cohesion between men, which in turn has the effect of a demarcation against women who are perceived as threatening the brotherhood in the military organisation (Woodward & Winter, 2006). The number of men who actually enjoy the benefits of the exercise of hegemonic masculinity may be relatively small, but taken together they uphold the hegemonic order (Bulmer & Eichler, 2017; Connell, 2005). Duncanson (2015) shows, for example, that hegemonic masculinity can be reshaped to create new mechanisms for keeping certain men

in power over others. Since the male thought structure prevails in the military context, women are unconsciously required to follow it, which means that the male order does not need to be legitimised and thus male dominance can be exercised unrestricted. In this thesis, the concept of symbolic violence is used to understand organisational inertia and how prevailing social and cultural dominance relations affect women and men in the military profession field.

In summary, the theoretical framework of the structural perspective provides a basis for understanding the experiences of military women and men in navigating the male-dominated organisation. This is done by focusing on the social arenas where women and men compete for capital, positions, continuity, and power relations.

Gender equality from an organisational and professional perspective

Acker (1990) argues that organisational structure cannot be understood as gender-neutral, an observation that might be useful for understanding the military organisation's processes in relation to gender equality issues. Acker's (2006) concept of inequality regimes is defined as maintainers of inequality based on class, gender, and race with the effect that not everyone has the same opportunity to control the organisation's resources and goals. It is through various processes and actions that a privileged group gains power over another group, thus creating asymmetric relationships that perpetuate gender inequality as well as other forms of inequality. Minority groups are affected by the regime of inequality, which reproduces itself over time. Unwritten rules about how people should be, look and communicate can influence decision-making processes and, consequently, reproduce inequality regimes (Acker, 2006).

All organisations are built around structures and patterns based on ideas about differences between women and men (Acker, 2006). By applying the concept of inequality regimes, it is possible to analyse whether the SAF actually maintains gender inequality. This can provide a deeper understanding of why gender equality initiatives often tend to fail or do not have enough power to be implemented (Acker, 1990). To maintain power relations within an organisation that on the surface lays claim to equality, inequality must be hidden or kept invisible. Those who have privileges, in this case male military personnel, often do not realise this, which in itself is an important factor in maintaining inequality regimes (Acker, 2006; Kimmel, 2018). Studies such as

those done by Amundsdotter et al. (2015) show that men rarely realise their privileges, confirming Acker's theory of inequality regimes. In addition, the authors argue that men sometimes oppose gender equality because its consequences could mean a power shift and sharing of influence, status, and resources.

Research on gender equality from an organisational perspective shows that employers often feel uncertain about what is expected of them because legal statements on the subject can be perceived as vague (Edelman et al., 2011). Therefore, organisations often focus solely on quantitative gender equality, which largely consists of gender distribution across positions, as it is easy to define, monitor and measure (Fredman, 2016; Wahl et al., 2018). Instead, it is argued, organisations need to work mainly on qualitative gender equality, which is a continuous process in the daily life of organisations and relates to norm values such as a good working environment and good leadership. However, there is a risk that organisations only aim for the minimum legal requirements, such as focusing intensively on producing well-formulated documents (Ahmed, 2007). The bureaucratic organisation of the military is used to handling and producing documentation in respect of various commitments, and the gender equality area is no exception. The documents are necessary and meet political requirements, but are rarely sufficient in themselves and must also be implemented in the organisation. Hart et al. (2018) argues that a balance between quantitative and qualitative gender equality is necessary for achieving gender equality in organisations. However, the goals, especially those of a normative nature, need to be specific and measurable in order for effectiveness to be achieved.

It takes a long time to achieve change in large organisations and Alvinus and Holmberg (2019) argue that the most difficult type of change is norm change. Although, in the military, people are used to obeying orders and directives, Larsson et al (2005) argue that the will and intentions of different leaders affect the outcome because decisions from higher authorities tend to be filtered. It is believed that politicians prioritise gender equality and personnel policies equally with the armed capability of the military (Persson, 2010; Ydén, 2008). At the same time, Goffman (1961) describes institutions as a kind of gathering place cut off from the rest of society, which results in individuals being limited in their scope of action. Acker (2006) argues that in hierarchical organisations, there is often a rhetoric of gender equality and inclusion, but that the actual structures and norms in the organisation can still be strongly unequal. The military organisation has over time developed narcissistic, self-regarding attributes, which are illustrated by its ability to endorse certain actions and yet

remain unable to act (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019). Several researchers also point out that efforts to strengthen gender equality are not usually seen as meaningful in male-dominated organisations (Andersson et al., 2018; Ringblom & Johansson, 2020). Immaterial issues such as gender equality can seem challenging for the structural organisation. This is evident in the persistence of gender inequality despite a focus on gender equality, with men still maintaining a stronger position in the labour market, in both general and male-dominated organisations (Popay et al., 1998; Powell, 2018). Acker (2006) argues that organisations are often constructed in a way that favours men and creates obstacles for women. Therefore, conscious efforts are needed to counteract these inequality regimes in order to create gender equality.

Ledberg (2019) argues that previous research from a professional theoretical perspective in a military context has been relatively static over time as it has continued to rely on Huntington's (1957) theories. As a result, several important and particularly more modern perspectives may be missed out, as general professional research has developed in other directions. This dissertation takes more of its starting point in Brante's (2014) phenomenon of social closure. This is a development of Weber's (1983) argument about closure, or how professional groups develop strategies to protect their work from others who try to access the tasks on which they have a monopoly. Brante (2014) has developed Weber's concept, based on contemporary research and social changes, and it is Brante's development of the concept that is used in this thesis. The holistic approach emphasised by the neo-Weberian perspective focuses on society's institutionalised structures and power relations and how they are decisive for people's room for action. Brante (2014) argues that it is through these social structures and power relations that individuals' actions are influenced and determined, and that they cannot be understood based on such individuals' own intentions and choices. Larson (1977) emphasises that formal closure strategies may involve requirements concerning education and experience, while less formal strategies may involve referring to certain types of tasks as requiring people with special physical or mental characteristics. In this dissertation, Brante's neo-Weberian perspective on social closure can be used to understand how conflicts arise when the traditional military profession defends its position and social status against change. Norms and values also affect people's identities and actions, and these cultural factors should be seen as integrated into the structure and power relations of society, the organisation, and the profession (Brante, 2014).

Historically, military expertise has largely consisted of the use of large-scale violence. This involves organising and equipping military forces, planning

military operations, and leading and executing military missions. Essentially, war is a political instrument and Huntington (1957) points out that the military is subordinate to the state, which means that civilian control over the military is vital for the military profession. It is not only the military personnel and their leaders at various levels who drive the profession forward, and it is therefore important to ask who creates and drives the discourse in the military context and whose interest this favours (Evetts, 2003; Huntington, 1957). For example, Ledberg (2019) highlights that there have been significant reductions in the size of the military, citing that this increases the professionalism of the officer corps by making it smaller and better. However, several others have challenged Huntington's view of the military profession, including Burk (2002), who provides a more modern interpretation and argues that military expertise is changing, which requires a different type of education. The military organisation has changed in character and focus over time, and this has had an impact on its profession. Today, the field of activity of the military profession has broadened, and other actors can perform some of its tasks (Berndtsson, 2019). This makes the jurisdiction less clearcut and easier to question. When large-scale violence as an area of expertise is no longer the central focus of the military this poses a challenge to the military profession's authority and it becomes difficult to maintain a professional ethos (Bolin, 2008; Burk, 2002). As society develops and reforms, its professions also change (Brante, 2011). Technological development provides both challenges and opportunities for almost all professions today. It demands acquiring new knowledge and requires individuals within the profession to continuously evolve alongside these advancements. Susskind and Susskind (2015) even argue that this transformation is not only essential for the profession's growth but also for its continued existence.

Today, the military task is strongly male-coded (Ericson, 2014), and the thoughts and beliefs of its personnel evolve in relation to this. Ulfsdotter Eriksson (2012) explains that in this way, the personnel are forced into the prevailing system and values. Hirdman's (2001) theory of the gender system shows that what men do is often attributed higher value, which means that inequality in the military profession is upheld by the logic of the male norm. This can lead to internal segregation within the military profession, in the way that professions have traditionally been characterised by injustice and exclusion, of which inequality is a part (Ulfsdotter Eriksson, 2012).

The military profession is interesting in that organisation and profession are closely interconnected and support each other. Without military personnel, there is no need for a military organisation, and at the same time, a military

person can only work within the military organisation. A military person working somewhere else, possibly due to their military expertise, is a former military person. This is tied to the male-coded tasks in a traditionally male-dominated organisation where men are the norm and where social exclusion for women was total until 1989. In summary, the theoretical framework of the organisational and professional perspective provides a basis for understanding the processes related to gender equality in the military organisation and profession. By applying the concepts of inequality regimes and social exclusion strategies, it is possible to analyse whether the armed forces maintain inequality and, if they do, to understand why.

Bourdieu (1977; 1996; 1998; 1999a; 1999b) studies structures in practice, while Acker (1990; 2006) introduces an asymmetrical gender relation to a structure. Together, their theories constitute the main conceptual framework for this dissertation. While these theories are effective individually, in this study they are combined with the aim of gaining further insights. This means adopting a gender perspective on the conceptual apparatus and combining this with Brante's social closure concept to comprehend the role of the military profession in this context. Together, Bourdieu, Acker, and Brante contribute to this approach, aiding in the comprehension of the gradual nature of the advancement of gender equality within the SAF and its military profession.

Method

The dissertation analyses the individual experiences of women and men in the SAF, as well as documents, from a gender perspective, which can be seen as constructed and constantly negotiated, and in such contexts qualitative methods have been shown to be most suitable (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The qualitative methods allow for a necessary flexibility in research about matters concerning gender equality. In such cases, inquiries can be adjusted according to participants' responses and requirements. They are particularly useful for creating a detailed understanding and identifying patterns in empirical data that partly describe people's reality (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). Qualitative methods have also created space to illuminate representations and underlying assumptions in the collected empirical data (Bacchi, 2009).

This dissertation has its primary empirical focus on the SAF and the military profession. Military personnel, both women and men (a total of 24 respondents), have been interviewed, documents on gender equality from the SAF have been analysed, and finally, the future of the military profession has been reflected upon and analysed in the light of societal developments and the impact of gender equality. The dissertation is based on composite materials from different levels: structural perspectives in Paper I and Paper II, and organisational and professional perspectives in Paper III and Paper IV. Data collection took place during 2017–2022.

Table 1. Methods and materials

	METHOD	MATERIAL
Paper I	Qualitative content analysis	9 qualitative interviews with military women
Paper II	Thematic analysis	15 interviews with military men
Paper III	WPR discourse analysis	Collective agreement
Paper IV	Thematic analysis	Documents concerning political & organisational events, reforms, and changes related to gender work within the SAF

Interview as a method

The purpose of choosing the interview as a method for Paper I and Paper II was to gain an understanding of the respondents' experiences and perceptions. This is best done through one-to-one conversations where both respondent and interviewer feel comfortable (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The respondents rank ranging from the lowest to the highest military rank, i.e. from soldier/sailor to general/admiral. This provided a breadth of experience, and as military rank is somewhat correlated with age, the younger respondents tended also to have lower military rank and vice versa. To protect the respondents, military rank or specific unit, was not included in the study. The active decision not to do so was made partly because the information was deemed unnecessary for the purpose of the study and partly because some respondents, especially those of higher military rank, could be identified. The type of selection can be described as strategic, which Trost (1997) argues is preferable when there are several criteria that have theoretical importance for the study. A semi-structured interview approach was chosen where the respondents were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences and thoughts based on the questions, but were not interrupted if they touched on areas that were not explicitly covered in the interview guide. In accordance with Bryman (2001), the interviewer could also ask other questions than those in the interview guide when appropriate. Several questions emerged during the interviews and were based on the respondents' stories about their experiences. Follow-up questions were also used to reflect and deepen the respondents' reflections on their experiences.

In alignment with Kvale and Brinkman (2014), I perceive research interviews as a type of social practice wherein the interaction is constructed upon its contextual backdrop and relational dynamics. Both interviewer and respondent enter the interview situation with specific expectations, such as the existence of an interview guide and that the interviewer to some extent steers the conversation, while the respondent is expected to answer, preferably honestly and in depth. Conducting the interviews at the respondents' workplaces not only created a sense of comfort and security, but also meant that respondents to some extent could be seen as representing the armed forces, not just themselves. The conversations began with an informal chat to open up a dialogue and to help the respondent feel able to speak freely. The researcher is driven by curiosity and a genuine interest in what the respondent has to say, which is likely to contribute to a good conversation. In the present case, the

conversations appear to have been open and honest, and the respondents felt able to express criticism of their organisation and profession. As Alvesson (2003) says, the interviewer has an impact on what the respondent tells and what they do not tell. The respondent adapts their answers based on who the interviewer is and how perceived, including aspects such as appearance, gender, age, what the respondent knows or has heard about the interviewer beforehand, and what they read into it. Further reflections on this can be found under the heading of reflexivity.

By employing a semi-structured interview methodology, participants were encouraged to transcend surface-level discussions and engage in more candid conversations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this manner, it was perceived as a means to navigate the constraints of political correctness often associated with inquiries about gender equality. Some of the interview questions were perceived as more neutral, such as discussing job tasks, while others were marked as more sensitive, such as questions about gender and equality. This was the case for virtually all interviews, regardless of gender. However, there was a difference between interviewing women and men. The interviews with women were easier in the sense that they generally had more developed answers and a lot they wanted to share. It was possible to ask a question about when they felt in the minority at their workplace and how this was expressed.

Most women could quickly tell a lot, give examples of situations, and provide detailed and extensive explanations. When similar questions were asked of men, about what it was like to belong to a majority and how it was expressed, there was often a longer silence, and it was clear that many did not know how to answer. Even when the question was rephrased in various ways to gain a different understanding, the answers often remained short and forced.

As described above, the reason for choosing personal interviews as a method for Paper I and Paper II was that it was considered the most suitable method for the purpose of the papers, but there are also disadvantages. The collected material can quickly become too extensive and contribute to the analysis being too superficial (Holton & Walsh, 2016). This was addressed by broad adherence to the interview guide and also by repeated reading of parts of the transcribed material. A further development of this reasoning is discussed under the heading Analysis methods.

Document analysis as a method

Papers III and IV feature document analysis as a method. Paper III focuses on an example of how the organisation formally deals with gender equality issues, while Paper IV centres on how gender-related reforms have affected the operations of the SAF and the challenges of gender integration in a changing security situation. For these issues, document analysis was chosen in order to ensure traceability and avoid individual experiences from influencing the analysis. Bryman et al. (2022) emphasise, among other things, clarity and comprehensibility as criteria for assessing the quality of official documents. For the analysis in Paper III, a collective agreement on salaries was chosen as the basis, partly because it had a clear focus on gender equality and partly because it had a high degree of sanction within the organisation. The analysed collective agreement spanned two years, affected all the approximately 20,000 employees of the armed forces, and was accepted by both the trade union and the employer organisation. According to Lundahl (1997), it can also be considered to have a high degree of representativeness, as the document is seen to reflect the organisation's positions. The agreement was also chosen because it was the first of its kind after the first wage survey in the SAF for several years. A critical examination of the selected collective agreement is well suited to this method since such a document affects and regulates many individuals.

For the analysis in Paper IV, various types of document were selected, primarily documentation from the SAF addressing gender-related issues within the military. These documents can be considered highly representative, following Lundahl's (1997) argument. The selected documents were generated between 1991 and 2023, and motivated by the paradigmatic fluctuations in the organisational structure of the military profession. Consequently, Paper IV has a historical-sociological dimension, as current social processes cannot be separated from the historical context in which they are rooted, as argued by Abrams (1982). In addition to the documentation provided by the SAF, political decision-making materials, news articles, and scholarly publications have been utilised to supplement information concerning the issues explored in the military's own documentation. Examining selected documents directly influencing gender and women's conditions in the SAF is highly suitable for this method, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the specific factors shaping gender dynamics within the military and their impact on numerous individuals.

Overall, it is a strength of the dissertation that several qualitative methods have been used for its sub-studies, Paper I, Paper II, Paper III and Paper IV (see e.g. Patton, 1990). Qualitative analyses are complex and multifaceted, and Clarke and Braun (2013) describe them as being able to “zoom in with the camera lens” and work closely with the collected material, in this case mainly during the analysis of the interview data. In the document analysis, the “camera lens was zoomed out” to see overall patterns and connections. All the qualitative analyses aimed to identify patterns in the collected empirical data. The different methods have also provided different perspectives. On the one hand, they have given an actor perspective based on primary data, where people working in the SAF were interviewed about their experiences of an organisation with a male tradition and dominance. On the other hand, they have given a structural perspective based on the examination of secondary data in the form of documents on gender equality in the SAF. Together, the utilization of qualitative methods has yielded a more comprehensive perspective, thereby aiding in addressing the research inquiries posed by the dissertation.

Analysis methods

Three different analysis methods have been used in the dissertation: content analysis in Paper I, thematic analysis in Papers II and IV, and WPR analysis in Paper III. The methods were chosen because they fit the purpose and empirical data of each paper, and together provide a better understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Both descriptive and discursive methods have been used, which means that the dissertation both describes problems and critically problematises different phenomena (Bacchi, 2009). In Paper I, on women in the armed forces, the analysis is based on a content analysis of the interview material, originally carried out according to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), but modified somewhat to fit the purpose of the study. This analysis method was considered suitable because it describes similarities and differences in collected empirical data and seeks variations that are then used to form categories. The collected interview material in Paper II, about men in the armed forces, was analysed using thematic analysis as described by Clarke and Braun (2013). Paper IV is also in part based on thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is also about identifying, categorising, analysing, and describing patterns or themes based on generated data. The resulting themes are then interpreted and analysed with the help of theories and previous research. Both

content analysis and thematic analysis require that the analysis is structured and carried out in different steps.

In Paper III, which examined a gender equality initiative in the SAF, critical discourse analysis was used in the form of Bacchi's (2009) WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be) tool. This was a document analysis that relied on secondary data, and the WPR method helped to explore how the problem was constructed in the studied document. Using Bacchi's analysis, the collective agreement that was examined was created based on an intention to address an expressed problem, while the problem itself constructs its representations, which are the underlying ideas about what is problematic. These are in themselves a product of society's dominant discourse and have consequences for the target group, the women in the SAF.

The publication of the first three studies, Paper I, Paper II and Paper III, revealed a knowledge gap and a desire to understand the challenges faced by the military profession from a gender perspective on a broader scale. This was the background to Paper IV, which aims to provide more insights through a historical-sociological description of the profession's challenges over time. For the analysis in Paper IV, which explores the historical development of the military profession in relation to gender equality work, inspiration was, as mentioned above, drawn from thematic analysis, but utilising official documents (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Documents pertaining to political and organisational events, reforms, and changes related to gender work within the SAF were sorted and analysed. This was done to identify key themes, trends, and patterns that illuminate the complex gender dynamics and their implications for the military profession. Through an iterative process, additional sources and perspectives were explored, leading to the emergence of new questions and the search for further sources until the main thematic areas emerged inductively.

Methodological reflection

All studies included in the dissertation are inductive and interpretive in nature, which means that the researcher might influence the analysis without being aware of it, something that requires ongoing reflection. In Paper III, the inductive nature means that the researcher might also be limited by personal ideas about what is possible to investigate, and must be aware of this. The WPR method (Bacchi, 2009) was different from many other methods used by the

present writer, and it was unorthodox in character, requiring repeated reflection on ideas about what was possible to investigate, something that was both challenging and developing. While the WPR analysis seeks underlying patterns in the text, the content analysis in Paper I seeks the visible and obvious, making the analysis methods complement each other well.

Analysing the dissertation's empirical material has been an iterative process, with the researcher moving back and forth between empirical and theoretical perspectives. The empirical material has been read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content, but also to understand selected parts on a deeper level. Since Paper II and Paper IV are co-authored with other researchers, the opportunity was provided to engage in discussions and comparisons of diverse interpretations pertaining to both interviews and documents. All interviews have been read both as a whole and by each question separately. During the reading, questions arose about the text, about what is said and not said, what stands out, and what is contradictory or agreed. In this way, knowledge about the material deepened, and patterns emerged.

One advantage of qualitative methods in general is that phenomena can be studied in depth, which is the aim of this dissertation. The disadvantage is that collected data can become too extensive and difficult to work with (Holton & Walsh, 2016). Therefore, it has been important to approach the material in a structured way, which is why both content analysis and thematic analysis have been helpful. The methods have permitted empirical work, which has helped to stay on course with what has been relevant and pertinent. The advantage of using WPR as an analysis method made it possible to uncover things in the text that were not obvious, which was very helpful for understanding how discourses affect the issue at hand. There are also risks associated with using the method, such as certain aspects being highlighted while others are not, and therefore falling outside the scope (Bacchi, 2009). To counteract this, it has been important to remain aware that the method does not provide a complete picture of the issue and therefore to be careful to illuminate each problem from various possible perspectives. In summary, it is argued that the different analysis methods have been helpful for the dissertation as the combination provides a comprehensive perspective on the studied phenomenon.

Reflexivity

This section provides an opportunity for critical reflection on the author's personal influence on the results of the dissertation. According to Larson (1994), qualitative data must undergo critical scrutiny to establish validity. In his terminology, perspective awareness is paramount. For me, there is a rationale to critically reflect on my influence on the outcomes of the dissertation, given my close association with the studied domain. I am closely connected to the field being studied, fundamentally a part of the SAF myself, and I am both a woman and a military officer. My pre-understanding may have influenced me in the process of collection, sorting and processing of materials in a way that may have caused me to miss important aspects when analysing the empirical data, including interview material, documents, and historical sources. In this dissertation, I adopt an elevated viewpoint to examine others' experiences, situating them within a scientific context by creating a separation from my own experiences. The intention is to contribute knowledge based on empirical evidence and theory. In doing so, I aim to enhance our understanding of the purpose of the thesis and make a meaningful contribution to knowledge.

Jacobsen (2017) distinguishes between general reflexivity and profession-based reflexivity. In the following section, my reflections on my field-based position and on how I have handled it will be discussed. General reflexivity concerns how I, as a person, may have influenced data collection, interpretation, and analysis, while profession-based reflexivity is more focused on the effects of studying one's own organisation (Jacobsen, 2017). I believe that these two aspects, in my case, merge to such an extent that they can hardly be separated. As a woman and an officer in the SAF, with over 20 years of experience in the officer profession, my background, gender, and type of education are of great importance for profession-based reflexivity, both in how I may have influenced the results and in how respondents may have adapted their answers based on who I am. I believe that my pre-understanding, based on my field-based position, has helped shape the structure and development of the dissertation. This includes both delimiting the research area and gaining access to the partly strategic selection of interviewees and finding documents and sources for analysis. Without my field-based position, I would not have been able to ask the questions that the interview guides are based on, and a consequence of this would have been a lack of access to the rich material of empirical data that they provided.

However, it can be difficult to be critical towards one's own organisation, and this is an aspect I have devoted a lot of time and reflection to during the writing of the dissertation. Nevertheless, I have noticed traces of this difficulty in the interviews that the dissertation is based on, as respondents were also hesitant to be perceived as critical of the organisation. This reflection has been a part of the analysis work. At the same time, it is my task as a researcher actually to be able to highlight what the analysis shows, without rewriting or adapting it. Another aspect that may have influenced me in my writing is the fact that I expect to return to the same organisation after the dissertation is completed. To avoid censoring my analysis and presentation of the research results, I have let co-authors and supervisors read selected parts and listened to their analysis of the same phenomenon. Together, we have discussed reasonable interpretations and analysis. In this way, I have avoided censoring myself.

My close field position may have contributed to others perceiving me as biased and thus missing out on important information. During my years in the armed forces, I have mostly been engaged on gender equality issues, both locally in the units where I have worked, and centrally in the SAF. My research in the field has been included as literature in, among other things, military education programmes and gender coach programmes. The fact that I was one of the spokespersons in the SAF's #MeToo campaign means that I am not entirely unknown to most people. In many ways, my position in the field and the fact that I am a woman have benefitted me, especially in interview situations. My pre-understanding has given me the opportunity to understand the respondents on a deeper level and to ask follow-up questions that have provided answers of a very informative character. I believe that without my close field position and deep understanding, I would not have been skilled enough to ask these questions.

The fact that I am a woman, and a military officer, has affected me in my role as a researcher, as I myself have had many experiences of what it means to have a minority perspective in the armed forces. Awareness of this has made me careful to leave my own experiences out of both the interview situation and the analysis and thus avoid what Persson (2016) refers to as spontaneous sociology. Instead, I have devoted myself to the scientific approach. Therefore, I have regularly shared results and interpretations with co-authors and supervisors, then let it rest for a while and return to the text later. In interviews with female military personnel, I felt that the fact that I myself am a female military officer helped in building trust and generating stories from the respondents about situations which an outsider would not have been able to reach without much more study. This was evident, among other things, in that

after the recording equipment was turned off, stories of a more relaxed but eminently significant character emerged, which I was allowed to use in the study. In several cases, the men apologised, sometimes after a week's delay, for not being able to answer saying that they had not previously reflected on such questions. However, the interview had given them new perspectives and prompted reflection on their position, for which they were grateful.

At the same time, I am aware that my background in gender equality activism and the fact that I am a female military officer may also have had a negative influence on the results. Just as it was perceived as an advantage in interviews with women, it may have been a disadvantage in interviews with men. There is a risk that, as a woman with my knowledge advantage and as an outspoken advocate of gender equality in the SAF, I may have influenced men's responses and their willingness to open up. This might have been to the extent that I, as a person, could have been an obstacle to frankness for some of the men. To address this, I have been careful to be open about my curiosity and the purpose of the study. I want to learn from their experiences, and there are no right or wrong answers to my questions. There is a risk that men in a male-dominated organisation may be less outspoken when discussing gender equality with a woman. If they have controversial opinions about gender equality, there is uncertainty about how to express them, or whether to do so at all, especially to a gender equality advocate like myself. This risk always exists in an organisation like the SAF, whose values must be followed, and is not confined to issues related to gender equality. Nevertheless, I felt that I had many confidential conversations with the men in the study. To overcome the problem of the somewhat loaded gender equality focus, I also asked questions about their personal lives. These opened up a deeper dialogue that had a synergistic effect on questions about their experiences as men in a male-dominated organisation.

Ethical aspects

Both when new research is to be initiated and when already established knowledge is to be used, ethical considerations must be taken into account. For the researcher, it is highly relevant to reflect on personal values related to the utilisation of knowledge and the development of new knowledge, as there is a constant balance between protecting individuals and the value of developing new knowledge. The interview data has been collected in accordance with the

regulations in effect during its acquisition, from 2017 to 2019. The study adheres to the principles of research ethics set forth by the Swedish Research Council (2017). The following discussion covers those ethical research issues believed to have had the greatest impact on the dissertation.

All respondents in the interviews were informed about the study before answering the invitation to potential participation. In the first sub-study, a couple of respondents declined to participate. There may be various explanations for this, but it cannot be ruled out that the sensitive subject matter itself, namely gender equality from a minority perspective in a male-dominated organisation, could have been an explanation of some individuals' reluctance to participate. A document describing the study accompanied the interview request, and the individuals were able to decide whether or not they wanted to participate. The document also included a few lines about consent, emphasising that participation was entirely voluntary. When interview dates were booked, respondents were given the opportunity to ask additional questions about the study and the interview situation, which several respondents chose to do. The intention was to be as transparent and open about the study as possible, so that respondents would feel comfortable participating. I reminded them of the purpose of the study, why I was there, and that participation was entirely voluntary and could be terminated at any time. I also reminded them of the voluntary nature of the questions and that they could choose not to answer specific questions if they wished, which also happened once. Furthermore, I informed them about confidentiality aspects, such as that what is said during the interview cannot be traced back to the respondent. It is important to keep in mind that individuals or groups may be affected by the interpretations and conclusions that I make. When the interview was over, I asked the respondents to contact me if any questions or uncertainties arose. Although the SAF is one of the country's largest state agencies, the number of units is not particularly large, and the number of women employed in military roles is small. I have taken this into consideration and anonymised to the greatest extent possible. The collected data was solely utilized for research purposes, of which the respondents were aware.

Summaries of the sub-studies and their empirical contribution

In the following section, I present a brief overview of the four sub-studies and their empirical contributions, arranged not chronologically but in a conceptual sequence that is consistent with this dissertation.

Paper I

Linehagen, F. (2018). Conforming one's conduct to unwritten rules: Experiences of female military personnel in a male-dominated organisation. *Res militaris*, 8(1), 1–25.

Paper I examines the experiences of female military personnel in a historically and culturally male-dominated organisation. Despite the efforts of development and policy making, the SAF has not been successful at integrating women to any great extent. The study aims to create an understanding of the experiences of female military personnel in a male-dominated organisation. The empirical material consists of nine interviews with military women at different levels in the organisation, from soldier/sailor to general/admiral, and is analysed using qualitative content analysis. The experiences of female military personnel can best be described as being in a state of conditional professional belonging, characterised by individual and organisational paradoxes. To participate and advance in the organisation, women develop strategies necessary for navigating one of Sweden's most gender-segregated and male-dominated workplaces. The interviews show these strategies as revolving around four themes: adaptation to the conditions of the profession; creation of a professional identity; adherence to unwritten rules; and efforts to be "a legitimate woman". Navigating in a male-dominated organisation requires adaptation to the demands of the organisation and to the demands

women place on themselves and other women. Women experience their profession from a minority perspective, balancing a careful amount of femininity with the masculine norm, and face difficulties in advancing in a system, where adapting to the collective is a prerequisite to being part of it.

The study shows that despite almost forty years of women in military occupations, a well-researched area, and a society that demands increased gender equality within the organisation, research on the subject still yields roughly the same results. What sets this study apart from most others is that it indicates that women at lower levels within the organisation are quick to identify themselves as women and, at first glance, appear willing to support other women. Women at higher levels are pioneers: it has taken them a long time, but they are now able to reconcile themselves to being women, and bring in the personal in their actions. The greater freedom of action that comes with high rank has not gone unnoticed among younger female service members, which – when it comes to gender relations – can have an impact on those who want to follow in their footsteps and reach their level at a faster pace.

Paper II

Linehagen, F. & Wester, M. (2023). To stand in line and fit in: About military men's (un)reflected navigation in the armed forces. *Sociology compass*, 17(3), e13056.

Paper II is co-authored with Misse Wester and also takes its starting point in the historically male-dominated organisation, but this time with men in focus. As Paper I shows, women constantly negotiate their role in the military, in relation to men, to the organisation, and to themselves. This raised an interest in investigating how, or if, men use similar strategies to negotiate their position in the military organisation. The focus is on how men perceive their own role in an organisation where they are the norm, while also being expected to try to create a work environment that is inclusive and diverse. The study aims to investigate how men navigate and create/recreate the male discourse in a male-dominated environment. The empirical material consists of fifteen interviews with male military personnel at different levels in the SAF, from soldier/sailor to general/admiral. Through a thematic analysis, three dominant and intimately related patterns are identified, which describe men's navigation of the organisation: maintenance of masculinity and avoidance of vulnerability; a

formal and informal structure of male collectivism and exclusion of deviant phenomena; and reproduction of inequality and invisible resistance to gender equality.

The results show that the ideal military person has predominantly masculine characteristics, and military men identify with these characteristics, albeit these days in an updated version. The goal of the SAF is to produce a specific type of military person. This means that the image of the military person is (still) produced according to the male norm, despite the official rhetoric of being an inclusive and gender-equal organisation. This position is reproduced through an uncritical attitude towards the values and ideals created by this image. However, our results indicate that not all men are comfortable trying to fit into this mould, but few take an active stand against it. The habit of not seeing or acknowledging the male dominance in the SAF was also evident in relation to gender equality and career opportunities. Most men in our study relied heavily on their families to take care of the home and children so that they could have a career. Many men seemed passive towards their careers, just happening to be in the right place at the right time. This type of career advice was not given and could not be given to women. Rather, women must be encouraged to be more aggressive and assertive if they are to have a career – again in accordance with a male ideal. This suggests that despite several attempts to gender-equalise the SAF the invisible male norm continues to be the prevailing reality that military personnel navigate.

The SAF's gender equality work seems to be based on an agreement among the highest-ranking officers that gender equality is important. However, it meets resistance further down in the organisation because the work on gender equality is reduced to a shadow task without the involvement of committed men. Preserving the country's freedom and protecting our right to choose how to live is honourable, but also exclusive and usually associated with traditionally male tasks. This contributes to gender equality not being high on the agenda among the organisation's employees. It appears ironic that an organisation tasked with safeguarding Swedish society – where gender equality is a central norm – fails to reflect on or promote gender equality within its own organisation.

From this study, it can be seen that men are busy interpreting competing norms: what a military person should be, how to navigate the organisation, and how to be a gender-conscious military person. This means that working in a male-dominated environment is equally as challenging for men as it is for women, but the navigation is different. For women, the daily challenge is to fit in, but for men, most of the daily navigation is unreflective and unproblematic.

Women are encouraged to fit in and adopt masculine traits, but men just exist and play by the same rules as always. There is no incentive for change – which is a challenge for all organisations that try to adopt gender-inclusive methods.

Paper III

Linehagen, F. (2022). Collective agreement as investment in women in the Swedish Armed Forces: A critical discourse analysis. *Journal of gender studies*, 31(3), 364–376.

Paper III is based on the actions of the military organisation. How organisations engage with gender equality is crucial for their ability to be perceived as fair and attractive employers. As recruitment and training of personnel are core functions for the military organisation, it is relevant to investigate this from a gender-critical perspective. The study aims to critically examine how a military organisation acts on gender-equal pay through a collective agreement, as an example of how the organisation tries to address inequality. The study is a document analysis where a collective agreement on salaries has been critically examined using WPR analysis.

The analysis focuses on how the actual issue is problematised and what is left as not problematised. The most important finding is that the work on achieving gender-equal pay within the SAF is counterproductive, and leads to deficiencies in the organisation's work on broader gender equality issues, despite political decisions and Sweden's overall high gender equality index. The reason is believed to be that the hidden resistance discourse is part of the power structure and thus has an interpretation advantage, as revealed by the study. The collective agreement has good intentions, but its goal of achieving average salary levels for women of a minimum of 95% of average male salaries is unambitious and has the opposite effect and instead reproduces acceptance of inequality and the same structure. The study shows that there is a structural reluctance and inability within the SAF to seriously engage in the organisation's gender equality issues. Previous studies on resistance to gender equality within organisations in general, and especially within the armed forces, have identified resistance as hidden and implicit. This study's strongest theoretical and empirical contribution to the argument is that such resistance can also be identified as explicit. Resistance to gender equality is encouraged through decisions. The collective agreement, which is a governing document,

is an undermining addition against women employed in the SAF, which has decided to continue to pay lower salaries to one employee demographic.

Despite the SAF's broad recruitment efforts aimed at attracting more women to the organisation, its well-formulated gender equality plans, the presence of influencers in the military units, and its well-established core values and code of conduct, those at the highest levels of the organisation are unwilling to create equal pay for women and men. This borders on hypocrisy. The odd, isolated effort on gender equality that this collective agreement represents will not be enough. Genuine and critical efforts for gender equality must permeate the entire organisation. A relevant issue to further develop would therefore be how to reach and maintain equal pay. What is needed here is a proper articulation of exactly how the development will take place – not just that it should be pursued. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure that women receive 100% pay.

Paper IV

Linehagen, F., Persson, M. & Alvinus, A. (Submitted). The “making” of a gender-neutral military profession in turbulent times: Gender equality work in the Swedish Armed Forces from the end of the Cold War to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Paper IV is written from a perspective with the profession in focus. It is co-authored with Magnus Persson and Aida Alvinus and has been submitted to the journal *Professions & Professionalism*. This paper is about the changing nature of the military profession over time in the light of current societal developments, starting from the Cold War era and moving through the organisation's downsizing and changed professional focus up to the present day. A future perspective is provided based on an extrapolation of how the military organisation and profession has changed over time and what implications this has for gender equality in the SAF. The study identifies a discrepancy between how the organisation outwardly signals its work on gender equality and how the organisation's representatives handle the same issue.

The military organisation is characterised by strong and unequal gender structures that influence the distribution of positions and tasks, career paths, and normative expressions within the profession. For instance, there is a

significant delay in developing and prioritising gender-equal physical equipment for the military profession. Despite the abolition of the male monopoly on active service in 1989, the continued absence of functional underwear, uniforms, and standardised weapon sizes for women in 2023 clearly indicates a persistent male-coded environment in professional military work. The profession's legal basis for social exclusion was removed with the formal end to male monopoly, but the study reveals several organisational, normative, and material resistance strategies that still uphold an actual male monopoly, restricting female representation in the profession. As a consequence, gender equality norms and policies have had limited effect. Nevertheless, the evolving security policy situation has challenged the military profession to reconsider gender equality, as its ability to fulfil defence tasks comes into question. The study shows that male-coded norms within the profession appear to be almost immune to active and intensive gender equality work at the policy level. The expressed integration ambition has not taken hold within the profession, whose handling of gender equality work can be seen as expressing a resistance to change.

The new, post-Ukraine invasion, national security situation reinforces the issue of the characteristics of the professional soldier tasked with protecting Sweden from the resurgent Russian threat. At the same time, there are indications that recruitment criteria for Swedish soldiers may be lowered as part of an effort to establish a numerically strong military organisation, a strategy that has never been used to increase the representation of women and achieve a more gender-balanced organisation. From this perspective, the instinctive protection of the profession's integrity remains intact, but does the new security situation admit of a profession that continues to practise closure strategies?

Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the reasons behind the slow progress towards gender equality in the SAF and to gain a deeper understanding of how gender equality is perceived and practised within the military organisation and profession. These are the research questions: How do the Armed Forces and its employees relate and navigate to gender equality within the military organization? Additionally, how is the military profession and organization challenged from a gender equality perspective due to societal, political, and security-related changes? The following discussion draws on the four sub-studies included in this thesis (Papers I-IV) and its findings are presented under three thematic headings in response to the purpose of the dissertation and its research questions, followed by a discussion of an overarching perspective identified from the empirical findings.

Women's and men's adaptation to the military male norm

The first findings, based on Paper I and Paper II, concern women's and men's adaptation to the military masculine norm. These address the research question about how the SAF and its employees relate and navigate to gender equality within the military organisation. Women strive to fit into the military and want to be on equal terms with their male colleagues. They adjust their behaviour patterns and find different strategies to navigate their workplace. Female soldiers experience their profession from the perspective of the minority they belong to, as a complex approach to the masculine norm. This is carefully balanced with a moderate amount of femininity, but despite this they struggle to advance in a system where collectivism is a prerequisite but being part of the collective is not a given (Paper I). As a male soldier, one has a self-evident place in the collective, whether one wishes to or not. Men navigate differently than women in the same organisation. They follow a kind of unreflective and

unproblematic navigation where the same rules apply as has always been the case, and show no incentive for change. Soldiers are produced according to the masculine norm, and men fit into it. Some men are uncomfortable with it, but at the same time they do not take a stand against it, which means that the masculine norm is reproduced (Paper II).

The structural adaptation to the military male norm that women and men exercise and relate to can be seen as an expression of resistance to change. Such resistance can be understood as the acceptance and pursuit of male dominance and hegemony, despite over forty years of women in military positions. For men, the daily navigation of the military appears unproblematic. Most men identify with the idealised image of a military person, which is built on predominantly masculine traits, despite the official rhetoric of the SAF being a gender-equal and inclusive organisation. In this situation, men fit in and reproduce an uncritical attitude towards underlying values and ideals (Paper II). Previous research has shown that in highly gender-segregated organisations, it is common for male ideals to be created and maintained (Barrett, 1996; Connell, 1992; Sasson-Levy, 2003; 2011). The results reported in Paper II are in line with previous research on the consequences of male dominance, but also show that there are other experiences of men in the military context, which involve not being entirely comfortable with fitting into the model. However, few take an active stand against it. Instead of reflecting on what this means and its long-term consequences, they choose to go with the flow, join the ranks, and without effort become part of the collective community that embodies the military profession. It is comfortable, easy, and expected. On the other hand, women have no given place in the collective community and must make an effort to gain a place. On the whole their desire is to be included on the same terms as their male colleagues and, therefore, they adjust their behaviour to fit the prevailing male norm (Paper I). Women are often expected to adapt to the rules set up by men in order to fit in (Persson, 2011). Bourdieu (1999a) helps us understand that such submission in the form of adaptation is the result of symbolic violence that arises from male dominance within the military. The complex relationship that women have with the male norm also involves a carefully balanced amount of femininity, all in order to be seen as being competent enough to be included in the collective community. In this way, women legitimise the symbolic violence and make its existence possible. I argue, in Paper I, that this legitimisation is also a form of resistance on the part of women, primarily directed against themselves and other women, whom they would prefer not to be associated with.

Many men seem able to remain passive in their careers and mostly end up being in the right place at the right time. This passive strategy appears to be successful for men, who generally have straight and wide career paths with desired advancement in the organisation (Paper II). The fact that women cannot use the same passive career strategy can be explained with Bourdieu (1996) as that their social capital is not strong enough in the military organisation, as they often lack the necessary resources obtained through social networks and relationships. Once again, women are advised according to the male norm as the framework and are encouraged to be more aggressive and assertive in their career planning (Paper I). Previous research confirms that the male homosociality that emerges here has consequences for the organisation (Flood, 2008; Holgersson, 2013; Lipman-Blumen, 1976), which is evident here as many women are not satisfied with their careers and advancement in the organisation. Fewer female military personnel are found in the higher ranks, and not everything can be explained by the fact that women have only been in the organisation for about forty years. While it is the case that today individual women are found in senior positions in the armed forces, it would seem that it took a relatively long time to get there (Paper I). Through Bourdieu (1977) it can be understood that a particular symbolic and social capital is required in the social field where female and male military personnel fight over common interests, such as career and advancement. The natural order of the social field, i.e., doxa, is governed by the prevailing male norm and contributes to power struggles and competition. Within the field, there are forces acting to preserve the system and its doxa while other forces challenge it by wanting to change according to the demands of the environment (Bourdieu, 1998). In the structural perspective of this dissertation, these different forces are clearly visible in that there seems to be an agreement among the top leaders of the SAF that gender equality is important, but at the same time it encounters resistance further down in the organisation where gender equality is minimised to a shadow task lacking commitment among the men (Paper I; Paper II).

Male soldiers thus exhibit resistance to gender equality by unreflectively reinforcing and reproducing traditional masculine norms in their daily work (Paper II). Female soldiers handle this resistance by developing strategies in the form of adapted attitudes, which in turn contribute to even more resistance to gender equality (Paper I). This can be understood as resistance arising from a lack of awareness regarding gender equality concerns within the SAF, primarily among men, and to a certain extent among women as well. This indifference, possibly mixed with defensiveness, creates resistance. Men, in particular, do not engage in gender equality issues, despite most of them wanting to be perceived as gender-aware men, because it is not considered

important to them, and other activities that are considered more important are prioritised instead (Paper II).

The organisation's lack of ability in gender equality processes

The second set of findings, primarily derived from Paper III, centre on the organisation's lack of ability to adequately confront gender equality concerns within the military. Here, the primary focus is on addressing the research question of how the military profession and organisation are challenged from the perspective of gender equality due to societal, political, and security-related shifts. To some extent, the research question about how the SAF and its personnel relate and navigate to gender equality within the military organisation is also addressed. The evidence is drawn from a gender equality initiative with good intentions, which despite efforts has the opposite effect. The misstep can be seen as both implicit and explicit resistance from an organisational perspective, where the stated goal of the gender equality initiative is in fact continued inequality, and the outcome becomes in itself resistance (Paper III).

The fact that individuals in the SAF handle gender equality issues with different forms of resistance may be due to the organisation's actions on the issue. The data show that there is a structural reluctance and inability to seriously engage in gender equality issues in the armed forces. The gender equality initiative highlighted in this paper as an example of this involves achieving equal pay between women and men in the organisation. However, in its design and implementation, the initiative has the opposite effect and becomes resistance to gender equality (Paper III). Previous research (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2023; Carreiras, 2012) shows that there is often implicit resistance to gender equality in male-dominated organisations, something that is confirmed by the results presented in this thesis. Paper III also shows that such resistance can be explicit and even encouraged, openly, by the organisation. Acker (2006) helps us understand that this is due to regimes that are prominent in the organisation and that maintain gender inequality. This is possible because men and women do not have the same opportunity to control the organisation's resources and goals. Acker argues that organisational structures cannot be understood as gender-neutral and that organisations are built around structures and patterns based on assumptions

about the differences between men and women. In the context of this thesis, inequality regimes manifest themselves by suggesting, at the highest levels of the organisation, that women are worth less pay than their male counterparts (Paper III). Inequality regimes allow us to understand that the SAF maintains gender inequality and thus fails in its organisational gender equality efforts.

Gender equality from an organisational perspective often focuses on quantitative values, such as the number of women and men in the organisation (Fredman, 2016; Wahl, et al., 2018), and the SAF is no exception (Paper I; Paper II; Paper III; Paper IV). There is also a risk that organisations only aim to meet the minimum requirements of legislation (Ahmed, 2007). The results presented in this paper show that the SAF is one of the organisations that only aim towards meeting the minimum requirements of the law, and in the specific case of salary mapping, not even that. Paper III argues that this is a clear expression of resistance to gender equality from an organisational perspective. In order for power relations to be maintained within an organisation, Acker (2006) argues that inequality must be hidden and kept invisible, which men's unawareness of their privileges helps maintain (Amundsdotter et al., 2015; Paper II; Paper III). However, the findings of the thesis also show that despite very overt gender inequality, existing power relations are maintained without major tremors (Paper I; Paper II; Paper III; Paper IV). This can be explained by Goffman's (1961) description of total institutions as being cut off from the rest of society and with the room for action by individuals limited. In the military organisation, excuses for the incomplete salary mapping are put forward, such as lack of time and resources, a sudden demand from the political sphere, and so on. The data show that the military organisation's historical separation from the rest of society has the effect of silencing the expected strong reactions from women (Paper II; Paper III; Paper IV). Women have a desire to fit in (Paper I) and in line with what was noted by Kanter (1977) they prefer to adapt to the majority rather than the opposite, as they judge that they lose the least from it.

Despite this, both women and men testify to the importance of gender equality initiatives being initiated by higher authorities if they are to gain traction and effectiveness in the organisation (Paper I; Paper II). Women emphasise that this is important for the sake of legitimacy and argue that primarily men may otherwise perceive it as being driven in an individual woman's own interest. In this way, the SAF also signals that gender equality is important in the organisation. However, Jacobsen (2017) shows that a large part of organisational change initiated from the top fails and that work on change must also come from below. The results presented in this thesis indicate that there is

scepticism regarding the time frame within which change efforts with a focus on gender equality could have an impact within a historically male-dominated organisation like the SAF. However, it cannot be emphasised strongly enough how crucial it is for the organisation's gender equality initiatives to be well planned and meticulously prepared. If they go wrong, it will be a double setback for gender equality in the organisation, which will mainly have a negative impact on the women in the organisation. The SAF must be serious about wanting to promote gender equality in the organisation, even though several studies have shown that such initiatives are not usually considered meaningful in male-dominated organisations (Andersson et al., 2018; Ringblom & Johansson, 2020). In cases where the organisation pursues gender equality initiatives without a solid foundation and strategy this can be understood as a further example of organisational resistance to gender equality. Moreover, it is deeply concerning that an organisation tasked with safeguarding Swedish society, where gender equality is a central aspect, fails to promote equality within its own organisation (Paper III).

Questioning and preserving male hegemony in the military profession

The third finding, mainly based on Paper IV, concerns the questioning and the preservation of male hegemony in the military profession. Here, the research question about how the military profession is challenged from a gender equality perspective as a result of societal, political, and security-related changes is addressed. It means that the profession partly develops based on demands for technical development, but at the same time is hindered by normative issues, such as gender (in)equality. The military makes many efforts at the policy level, but despite this effort, resistance still emerges (Paper IV). This can be explained by an established dynamic within the profession, where it adapts to such resistance over time.

So far, it has been said that resistance to gender equality exists at both the structural level, where it is based on the actions of men and women, and at the organisational level. A further question is how this impacts the military profession? Despite the fact that the SAF has made many efforts at the policy level, there is still resistance, and the results show this also within the military profession (Paper IV). The military profession's area of expertise has long been the use of large-scale violence, but societal and technological

developments have gradually weakened the profession's character and focus, resulting in challenges and questions about its area of expertise (Bolin, 2008; Burk, 2002). The neo-Weberian perspective of social closure (Brante, 2014) enables us to understand that the military profession has developed various strategies for exclusivity over time in order to safeguard its status. These strategies operate at a structural level and cannot be understood solely through individual intentions. Within the military profession, social exclusion was most pronounced until 1989 when all positions were opened for women applicants. The data reveal that these strategies of social closure persist, albeit in more subtle forms, but with the same function of upholding a male monopoly and a gender-based categorisation that restricts female presence within the military profession. This can be interpreted as a form of resistance to gender equality (Paper IV).

A clear example of this is the issue of uniforms where, over forty years after women were allowed to work in military roles in the SAF, functional underwear or uniforms developed for the female body still do not exist (Stawreberg, 2022; Strand et al., 2022). It is evident that the male norm is still very strong. The resistance that the uniform issue exemplifies strongly contributes to the perception that women and gender equality within the military organisation and profession are not prioritised. It sends a signal that reveals that women and gender equality are less important to the military profession (Paper IV). While the military profession has shown itself capable of embracing technological developments in the form of new systems that change the profession on several levels, it is not able to embrace new normative values (see e.g. Holmberg & Alvinus, 2019). The results presented in this thesis show that male-coded norms within the military profession appear almost immune to active and intensive gender equality work.

However, the effects of norms and policy making on gender equality have not been entirely prevented, but rather limited due to the resistance described above (Paper IV). The SAF's new direction and the changes in the military profession due to the new security situation (see e.g. Harig et al., 2022) in Sweden's vicinity shed a new light on the issue of gender equality, as the military profession's ability to address its defence task is scrutinised (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2023). Newly acquired international experiences, combined with increased technological advancements (Agrell, 2016), have reduced the military profession's traditional focus on physical strength, thus once again challenging the military profession (see e.g. Sundevall, 2011). The results indicate that male dominance and masculine norms in the military profession are slowly being eroded. The changing policies have contributed to

the erosion of male hegemony from within the profession, as evident in the renewed and expanded relevance of defence as an activity and the military as a profession (Paper IV). An example of this is the reintroduction of conscription, which is now gender-neutral (Österberg & Rydstedt, 2018) and is expected to increase the proportion of female soldiers, both conscripts and, in the long run, officers. The cultural revolution, which Puranen (2012) likens it to, that preceded today's security situation, is believed to have influenced the military profession. With women now having unrestricted access, the slow erosion of the image of the ideal soldier from the past, characterised by physical strength as the primary capability, has led to changes within the SAF as an organisation. The male norm can no longer withstand the pressure for change that comes with more women at the base of the organisation, thus reducing the resistance and leading to the military profession evolving accordingly (Paper IV).

Functional disinclination

The dissertation highlights the slow progress towards gender equality within the SAF and attributes this to resistance to change, which can be observed at the structural, organisational, and professional levels. The results suggest the presence of something that I will call “functional disinclination”. This section is intended to define and discuss the concept, as well as clarifying its role in the development of the dissertation.

Functional disinclination is a concept I have generated from the empirical studies that are the basis for this dissertation, all of which, although utilising different data and methods, indicate an organisational inability to conform to the normative demands placed on the organisation. In this dissertation, the focus is specifically on the ability to address gender equality within the SAF. “Functional” and “disinclination” may appear contradictory, but they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Together, they form a concept of great complexity aimed at supporting the purpose of the dissertation: to explain the reasons behind the slow progress of gender equality in the SAF and to gain a deeper understanding of how gender equality is perceived and practised within the military organisation and profession. It is important to note that functional disinclination can be seen to express an insider's perspective of the organization and does not necessarily imply that there is a conscious intention within the organisation actively to oppose gender equality. Instead, it may be a question of organisational priorities, cultural norms, and structures that

impede progress in gender equality efforts. By comprehending these functional aspects of resistance, it can be possible to better address and overcome the challenges that hinder gender equality promotion within the SAF.

Functional disinclination can be seen to revolve around the downplaying of the gender perspective, treating it as a specialised interest, and thereby leaving out the value of providing equal opportunities for all. Moreover, the organisation's inability to prioritise the gender perspective is functional in itself, as it preserves organisational characteristics over time, maintaining the military organisation as it has always been, predominantly male-dominated and with a primary role of wielding a monopoly on violence. Functional disinclination can occur to varying degrees both during peacetime and in crisis situations. The concept is also sufficiently generalisable to be tested in similar organisations, such as in research concerning police and rescue services.

Functional disinclination could help us understand that these barriers to gender equality should not only be viewed as resistance but also as a recurring process that hampers the implementation of change in respect of normative issues. Functional disinclination occurs in interactions between individuals as well as between individuals and the organisation. The concept has been generated from the four sub-studies in the dissertation and contributes to the analysis according to the different perspectives deployed in the dissertation: the structural perspective and the organisational and professional perspectives. In the structural perspective (Paper I; Paper II), functional disinclination aids in understanding how women and men embody resistance to gender equality, disrupting preconceived notions of what a military person should be. In the organisational and professional perspective (Paper III; Paper IV), functional disinclination helps in comprehending and justifying resistance to gender equality within the military organisation and profession, as gender equality challenges established beliefs about the role of a military organisation. The military profession rests on a monopoly on violence, and efforts towards gender equality could functionally be interpreted as a way of undermining its combat capability.

To sum up, functional disinclination can explain the slow progress of gender equality in the SAF and provides a deeper understanding of how gender equality is perceived and practised within the military organisation and profession. Seen in this light, it is easy both for individuals and the organisation to justify gender equality taking a back seat when the focus is constantly on the combat readiness of units, particularly at a time of deteriorating security conditions in Sweden's vicinity. However, the SAF has recently emerged from three decades of stable and peaceful security conditions, during which

normative values originating from elected politicians have gained increasing prominence. Over these three decades, the organisation has not managed fully to implement gender equality in line with the professed ambition. With today's worsened security situation, there is a risk that the focus on gender equality might be overshadowed in favour of security concerns. Nevertheless, it can be argued that prioritising gender equality contributes to Sweden's security. As previously explained, functional disinclination expresses an insider's perspective, but the underlying question remains open. From an external perspective, the stance adopted by the SAF might even be described as a dysfunctional approach.

Future research and practical implications

Given the discrepancy between the SAF's stated intentions regarding gender equality efforts and the actual outcomes, there is an interest in delving deeper into the barriers to gender equality across different organisational levels. The aim could be to pinpoint where these obstacles exist and how they manifest themselves. To gain a more profound understanding of the issue of gender inequality within the SAF it would be intriguing to investigate other initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality. Such research could potentially unveil concealed resistance that might not otherwise come to light. The military profession has traditionally been male-dominated, but the relatively recent gender-neutral conscription system enables the study of a rapidly evolving profession. The notion of functional disinclination could be further refined through quantitative research, which involves validating the concept using a larger respondent sample. Additionally, it is imperative to explore and define functional disinclination across various organisational contexts. By examining other predominantly male-dominated organisations, we can explore whether the concept of functional disinclination can offer insight into other phenomena within the realm of risk and crisis management. This concept might extend to areas beyond gender equality, such as sustainability, diversity, and more.

The findings of the thesis can be applied in educational settings both inside and outside of the SAF to enhance the understanding of the dynamics of gender equality within the military organisation and profession. The concept of functional disinclination can also be employed within the SAF to increase awareness and facilitate dialogue about the conditions for achieving gender equality in the military organisation and profession. The results can also inform

discussions during gender equality initiatives as well as decision-making processes.

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Gender (in)equality within the Swedish Armed Forces

Historically and traditionally, military work has been closely associated with men. However, the post-Cold War normalization process has brought about a transformation in both the Swedish Armed Forces themselves and the perception of the organization. Normative concerns, including gender equality, have gained significant prominence, compelling the armed forces to embark on various initiatives aimed at achieving a more gender-balanced structure. Despite the extensive profiling and efforts made by the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) over the past decades, women currently make up only 11.9% of the military personnel.

This dissertation examines how (in)equality manifests itself in the military profession today, in view of the substantial changes that have occurred. The dissertation encompasses both the experiences of personnel and the actions of the organisation. By doing so, it sheds light on the gradual advancement of gender equality within the SAF, attributing this delay to resistance against change that becomes evident at the structural, organizational, and professional levels. This resistance is further explained through the concept of “functional disinclination,” which emerges from the empirical studies presented in this dissertation. Utilizing a range of data and methodologies, the dissertation collectively highlights an organizational incapacity to align with the normative demands set forth. The barriers to achieving gender equality are not merely reflective of resistance; they also form a recurring pattern that impedes the implementation of normative changes.

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