

**THE VEILED BATTLE IN THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN IN THE
BRAZILIAN AIR FORCE**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, women have been increasingly taking on professional roles in areas and organizations that were previously seen as entirely male-dominated, such as the military. An example of this is the fact that in Brazil, the more active participation of women in these organizations began to increase significantly between the 1980s and 1990s (Guimarães et al., 2020).

However, besides the active participation in all of the spheres in the labor market, women also began to face a series of obstacles regarding their occupation that were not faced by their male colleagues. On account of these changes and its conditioning factors, it is considered important to understand the history and elements that influence the development of women in organizational environments, especially the ones where previously they were excluded from (Rocha et al., 2014).

Guimarães et al. (2020) discussed that the women's inclusion in the armed forces has sparked a debate about the relationships between security, defense, strategy, and gender constructs. But recently, a report highlighted a controversy regarding the participation of women in the Brazilian Army, where the Attorney General's Office (AGU) defended restrictions based on "female physiology." The Prosecutor General's Office (PGR) contested this in the Supreme Federal Court (STF), arguing that there is no constitutional justification to prevent women from performing military roles. The Army argued that specific physical demands of combat, such as muscular strength and endurance, justify the limitation. This dispute extends to the Navy and Air Force, with the PGR questioning legal provisions regarding the entry of women into the Armed Forces (Ribbeiro; Albuquerque, 2024).

Amid these discussions, not only is the physical capability of women debated, suggesting they might not meet the work demands, but their identities as women within the organizational context are also subjects of debate. In this paper, we understand identity as a meaning construction process based on cultural attributes; thus, seeks to constitute meanings for the actors themselves, originated from an identification process (Castells, 2021). Therefore, identity is formed by social processes modified or remodeled by relationships, individually produced by the interaction of the organism, of the consciousness and the social structure experienced by the individual (Berger; Luckmann, 2003) as well as stemming from motivational factors resulting from the environment where the individual performs their

activities. In this context, it is understood that motivation is what compels an individual to exhibit certain behaviors and attitudes in response to the circumstances they may experience (Oliveira, 2017).

Given the exposed, this study aims to understand the identity construction of military women in their work context, considering the motivational and environmental aspects. To this purpose, 15 military women of the Brazilian Air Force (BAF) inserted in different positions were interviewed through semi-structured interviews that were analyzed using content analysis. Considering that in Brazil, military service is not mandatory for women, the FAB was chosen among the three Armed Forces of Brazil (Navy, Army and Air Force) because of its female contingent, which is the biggest among the other army forces.

2. IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

Identity, defined as the concept of the self, is responsible to guide individual action (Machado, 2003). It can be understood as the result of the subjective construction of who a person was, is, and desires to become. Identity is involved and is a crucial element for understanding and explaining nearly everything that happens within and around organizations (Brown, 2020). Castells (2021) define identity as a process of meaning construction based on cultural attributes; highlighting that it seeks to establish meanings for the actors themselves, originated from an identification process.

According to Tajfel and Turner (2004) the identification process can be defined through three main components: The first component is the cognitive one, which can be understood as the subject's self-definition regarding how he/she/their attributes a sense of belonging to a certain group or social categorization. This group will tend to express patterns, stereotypes, and prototypes that help the individual distinguish oneself from other groups. These characteristics can express beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behaviors that consist of the process which the individual identifies (Tajfel; Turner, 2004; Fernandes; Marques; Carrieri, 2010).

The second component is the affective, categorized as the emotional bond of the individual with the group. This individual will be recognized by the group based on his/her/their feelings regarding the fact that he/she belongs to a social environment, highlighting his/her similarities, equivalences, intentions and a positive self-definition. If some characteristics affect him/her negatively, his/her tendency will be to withdraw from a certain group. When abandonment is not possible, the solution found by the individual will be to create triggers of acceptance of this group (Tajfel; Turner, 2004; Fernandes et al., 2010).

The last category to be part of the identification process is the evaluative component, which is identified as a connotation of value to the group. In this way, the individual attributes value according to the way or perception that the social group is seen by other groups. Again, this perception can be positive or negative, revealing value and prestige of the social group, implying in the group's evaluative aspect and interfering in the motivation of its members (Tajfel; Turner, 2004; Fernandes et al., 2010). The three components of the identification process are interrelated. It is argued in this article that the identification process is related to motivation in its intrinsic aspect in the development of the individual's work, as will be addressed in the following subtopic.

2.1 MOTIVATION AND IDENTITY

Motivation is understood as "that which drives a person to have a certain behavior or attitude and, in the same sense, to undertake an action when facing a certain situation or circumstance" (Oliveira, 2017, p. 216). But, when it comes to motivation, self-determination theory advocated by Deci and Ryan (2002), "makes an important distinction between two different motivational questions: "why" versus "what for". "What is the goal of your activity and why do you want to accomplish that goal? What are the reasons that lead you to the effort to achieve that goal?". In this context, self-determination theory admits that the self formulates itself into identity following a tendency to develop toward high levels of integration and organization. The energy required for this process to occur is sustained in the satisfaction of three intrinsic and basic psychological needs (Appel; Wendt; De Lima Argimon, 2011).

The first refers to the need for perceived personal competence, which is based on the need to feel fulfilled by effectively achieving the desired results. Competence is related to cognitive development through adaptation and learning performed in the social environment experienced. The second is the need for autonomy, which refers to the need to experience processes arising from the exercise of the will and psychological freedom, through the high potential of reflection and awareness, aligned with personal values in decision-making (Appel et al., 2011). Autonomy can be understood as a dynamic of the person's organic functioning in the world, and its full functioning reflects in the harmonic engagement in activities that are manifested through physiological, neurological and phenomenological systems (Ryan; Soenens; Vansteenkiste, 2019). And third, the need for relationship, that refers to the need to feel genuinely accepted and connected with other people. The need for relationship is sustained in the establishment of the social bond in which affections related to responsibility, concern, and the feeling of loving and being loved interact (Appel et al., 2011).

The three aforementioned intrinsic needs - for competence, autonomy, and relationship - are interdependent, and the development of one generates the development of the others. These three basic psychological needs must be satisfied to provide well-being and health to the individual, motivating him/her to perform a certain activity (Deci; Ryan, 2000). Moreover, it is noteworthy that by meeting these intrinsic needs, the individual tends to achieve their own integration into the social environment in which they live, in a manner consistent with the cultural values in which they are inserted. In this way, the individual's motivation passes simultaneously through the satisfaction of his/her/their intrinsic needs.

2.2. CHALLENGES OF WOMEN IN MALE-DOMINATED ENVIRONMENTS

When inserted into predominantly male work environments, women face a series of challenges that are not commonly experienced by their male colleagues. As an example of this, we highlight two phenomena discussed in the performance of women in the organizational context: the glass ceiling phenomenon and the work-family conflict.

Using the concept of Steil (1997), the term "glass ceiling" refers to a subtle and transparent, but strong enough barrier to avoid women from reaching high levels in the organizational hierarchy. In the work of Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia and Vanneman (2001) four points are mentioned: the inequality resulting from glass ceiling represents a gender or racial difference that is not explained by other relevant characteristics of the employee's job. Such inequality represents a gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels than at lower levels of the organization; this inequality is also present in the advancement to higher levels; and this difference and inequality increases as the course a career takes.

Regarding work-family conflict, it can be defined as a role conflict where the pressures of work and family are mutually incompatible, resulting in an incompatibility between personal and family life and creating significant problems in the organizational context (Grzywacz; Butler, 2008). The main sources of this conflict are time, pressure, and behavior, where the importance of one role determines the time dedicated to it, increasing pressure and resulting in negative emotions such as tension and anxiety. Exercising one role can mean sacrificing the other.

Falkenberg et al. (2020) discuss that both work and family can be sources of satisfaction and conflicting demands, making it challenging to identify factors that reduce divergences between these domains. This conflict affects work attitudes and mental health, being dangerous for both work and the worker, as well as for the worker and their family (Shaukat; Yousaf; Sanders, 2017).

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

3.1 CONTEXT

In the world, about 20 countries (Australia, Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Nicaragua, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela) have removed all restrictions on women serving as combatants in their Armed Forces. In Brazil, women have been allowed to serve as aviators in the Air Force since 2003. However, in the Army and Navy, they still cannot serve in combat positions (Gianinni, 2014). Additionally, women are exempt from compulsory military service in peacetime. Considering the Brazilian context, BAF is the only Force that provides traditional access to military careers for women. These women are also subjected to physical, intellectual, and psychological tests in order to achieve this position (Brasil, 2017).

According to statistical data, there are 10,800 women in the BAF. Of this number, 15% are permanent military personnel, making it the largest female military contingent in the Brazilian Armed Forces. The presence of women in BAF has been happening since World War II, when in 1944 six female nurses joined the Air Force Reserve Nursing Group. This presence was expanded in 1995 with the authorization of women to enter the Air Officer Training Course, which enabled, in 2003, the training of the first 36 female aviators by the Air Aviation Academy (AFA) (Brasil, 2017). The profile of the interviewees is presented in the following table.

Tabela 1- Characterization of the Participants

Respondent	Age	Year of entry	Position in the Institution	Hierarchy
R1	21	2019	Flight Controller	Third Sergeant
R2	38	1999	Intendency	Major
R3	27	2003	Flight Controller	Third Sergeant
R4	38	2001	Intendency	Major
R5	28	2012	Aeronautical Information	Third Sergeant
R6	25	2015	Flight Controller	Third Sergeant
R7	36	2002	Intendency and Commander	Major
R8	24	2017	Flight Controller	Third Sergeant
R9	28	2012	Material stockist	Third Sergeant
R10	30	2012	Intendency	Third Sergeant
R11	34	2003	Pilot	Major
R12	37	2003	Pilot and Commander	Major
R13	35	2003	Pilot	Major
R14	32	2008	Flight Controller	Third Sergeant
R15	36	2003	Pilot	Major

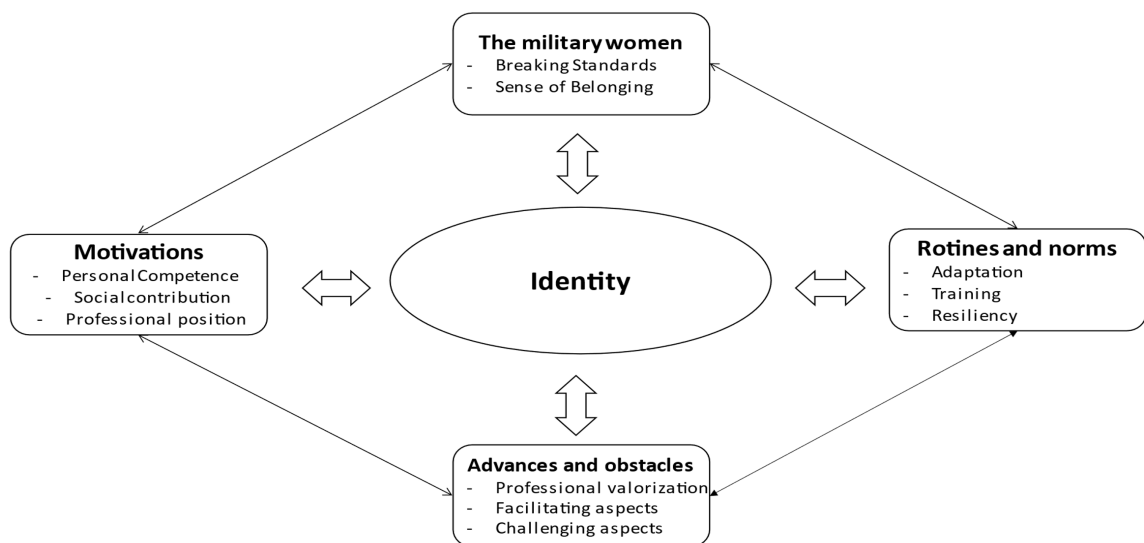
Source: Research Data (2025).

3.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The research strategy used was a basic qualitative study with an inductive approach (Merriam, 2009, 2002; Godoy, 1995). Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews in August, September, and October of 2019. The interview transcriptions were analyzed using the content analysis technique, following Bardin's (2011) protocol. Thus, we chose to divide the analysis into three distinct moments. In the first moment, called "pre-analysis", it was performed by the data organization as well as the initial ideas aimed at the development of the analysis. In a second stage, when the materials were read again, the content was coded and categorized based on the literature, but also taking into account emerging aspects of the field. As a result of this process, four units of context were defined: "The military woman"; "Motivations for work"; "Routines and norms" and "Advances and obstacles".

In the dimension "Military women" "Breaking patterns" and "Sense of belonging" were delineated as context units. In the dimension "Motivations for the job" "Personal competence", "Social contribution" and "Professional position" were included. In the dimension "Routines and Norms" we had as context units' "Adaptation", "Training" and "Resilience", and finally, in the dimension "Advances and obstacles", the context units were "Professional valorization", "Strengthening aspects" and "Challenging aspects". These elements have a direct impact on the development and consolidation of the identification process of women in the military world, and raise the motivation that contributes to the construction of the identity of military women, through the strengthening of their identity, according to Figure 1:

Figure 1: Integrative Model of the Identity of Military Women in the Brazilian Air Force



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2025).

In this manner, the third and last step consisted of the treatment, inference and interpretation of the interview contents, aiming at a critical and reflective analysis of the collected data. In this last step, the triangulation of researchers was performed, in which the lead researcher participated in the entire process while the other had access to the audios, transcripts and the documents obtained during the collection period. The objective of this step was to bring reliability to the method through different analysis, interpretations, and perceptions of the phenomenon. Therefore, the following is the analysis of the interviews as well as the discussion of the results.

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 THE MILITARY WOMAN

The women have increasingly occupied professional spaces in jobs previously considered totally male, such as in the military environment. As an example, in the Armed Forces in Brazil there are 28,000 women in their ranks, and from these, about 10,800 women belong to the Brazilian Armed Forces (BAF) (Brazil, 2017). Another interesting aspect to be highlighted about BAF, is that this force was the first to allow women to act in combat positions (Gianinni, 2014).

In this context, according to the participants of this research, being a woman and being military represents a rupture from the social and professional expectations of the environment in which they live, since, according to them, common sense does not expect women to identify with this career profile. Hence, recognizing oneself as a "military woman" is one of the primary issues for the cognitive identification process (Tajfel; Turner, 2004) of the participants heard, as this demarcates the sense of their own individuality, contributing to the answer to the question "who am I as a woman and as a professional?" (Machado, 2003). In this sense, R5 reports:

I was the first military woman in my family, the first woman of my friends, of the children of those close to me, because despite having a lot of contact with militarism, with military people, there were no girls in the place where I live, there were only military boys, so it was different, now it still is a little bit, because when you say you are military people are like "ah, are you military?!", because men have their hair cut, they don't have a beard, they have a military face, women don't have a military face, it's different". (R5, Sergeant).

When asked directly about what it is like to be a woman in a military environment, the female respondents demonstrated that they felt fully included as professionals, without any distinction of their capabilities in relation to their male colleagues. This feeling refers to the affective perspective of their identification process (Tajfel; Turner, 2004), since their sense of

belonging in relation to the group of military professionals is reflected in the idea of professional parity, as interviewee R14 reports:

“So, as I told you, I find it very gratifying when we see people valuing you for being a woman and for being military, because even though we are women, when we are in training school they make it very clear that there is no difference for them [...] you are going to face several challenges, and sometimes for a woman it's not that simple, it's not that easy. But I really like it, I don't know words, because I am passionate about my profession, I love putting on my uniform, I love coming to work and going out and being recognized.” (R14, Sergeant)

It is noteworthy that the identification process as a military woman was permeated by her own intrinsic motivations to meet her basic psychological needs, which will be explored in the following subsection.

4.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR WORK

Regarding the motivational aspects, respondent R11 highlights the professional responsibility that military women carry for being women. She reinforces how much they need to demonstrate that they are competent on a daily basis and that they are responsible for opening spaces so other women continue to have the opportunity to follow a military career, reaching positions of command.

R11 was part of the first class of women aviators, she is one of the pioneers in the area. For her, this responsibility dissolves into motivation to continue overcoming barriers and conquering spaces, a fact that corroborates with Castells (2021), in which the author states that identity is understood by socialization processes of a reflexive nature in the search for a self-referential based on their experiences and transformations, as mentioned by R11 *"I have been seeing and living these changes in my whole professional life, and this is challenging and motivating, it is good for me"* (R11, Major).

Another aspect is highlighted by respondent R12 regarding the social contribution that BAF has in society, also relating to risky missions and opportunities that the institution provides to its employees:

"Today in the function that I am, I feel very motivated, mainly by learning, I think that the teaching part for me is dazzling, [...] new horizons open up, there are phases and each phase is a different motivation. When I was on patrol, the search missions were also very motivating, I had the opportunity to help other people who might be in an unsafe situation, at risk. The organ transport missions were also motivating [...] and knowing that you are going to save someone's life is very cool. These steps, these attitudes make me very fulfilled. [...] The structure that BAF offers is also a differential in the current national scenario, no doubt about it!" (R12, Major).

These reports clearly demonstrate gratitude for the aspects that military life offers. The elements highlighted in their motivations play a crucial role in shaping the meanings within the identification process (Castells, 2021). By examining their motivations, one can identify the

key factors that connect with the profession and contribute to the construction of their sense of identity, primarily through their experiences and the meanings they share within the military context.

The interviewees' statements reveal that military women identify with and connect to their work through their professional roles. For instance, the R2 report illustrates how the interviewee takes pride in being the only major in her sector. Despite not being a conventional position, she feels respected and heard by others: "*I think it's sensational [...] that I am the only major [...] I don't feel slighted at any moment for being a woman, one nice thing about our career is the function, I am a major, and a major reaches up to the General Officer* (R2, Major). Therefore, it can be seen that the reasons why women are motivated in the military profession are also the reasons why they identify themselves in exercising their profession, regarding their competence, autonomy and relationship as highlighted by Deci e Ryan (2000).

4.3 ROUTINES AND NORMS: ADAPTATION, TRAINING, RESILIENCE AND GLASS CEILING.

It was only in 1981 that women also became part of the military environment in Brazil, and this was the year that the Air Force Women's Reserve Corps was created. However, it was only 14 years later that their participation increased and they became part of the Air Force Academy (AFA). We expected to find reports about drastic routine changes in relation to norms and procedures, however, what was exposed was even more interesting.

Among the routines and norms, Major R10 and Major 11 points out that besides the existing rules regarding personal presentation in the uniform, what they have noticed was an adaptation aimed at women: "women don't have beards...so we would have things like, for example, hold your hair back, don't dye it in a different shade than your natural color, avoid using too much makeup, can't use dark nail polish, you have to keep your nails short [...] the concept in general wants you to be discreet, always" (R11, Major).

The processes, especially those involving training and physical development, are similar. According to the interviewees, there is little or almost no perception of differences, making it possible for one of the interviewees to point out "No matter how macho the environment is, you have more equality in the military environment than in other organizations" (R1, Sergeant). In this sense, R11 highlighted that the procedures are based on the premise that "if you got in, you got in because you wanted to, and now you adapt", emphasizing that women in the BAF are there of their own volition and that the organization advocates for women to adapt to certain procedures.

The interviewees also highlighted the processes of training and adaptation. It was emphasized that training is a progressive process and the work to achieve results - especially the physical ones - is done together. In this context, R2, a Major, highlighted her experience in jungle survival training, as reported below: "We went through moments of challenges that we couldn't even believe, one that was very hard, was to survive in the jungle, it was 5 days, this was the only time that men and women were separated in the 4 years of the academy, it was 5 days, 8 women, 2 parachutes, two machetes and a rifle, that was all we had to survive" (R2, Major).

Regarding the physical training period, R6, who is a third sergeant, pointed out that there is an adaptation period that consists of 40 uninterrupted days at the training school in which everyone has to wake up at 4 a.m. and go to bed at midnight. Despite the physical effort required, she points out that what she found difficult was having to deal with the physiological and biological differences that differentiate men and women. When highlighting her experience in the survival tests, she pointed out the case of women who had their period for five days in the jungle "Imagine, staying for five days like this without taking a shower...these are situations that we have to be strong to endure, not that we are special because of this, but we don't know ourselves and have no idea of our strength" (R6, Third Sergeant).

Among the procedures, routines and norms highlighted by the interviewees, only one applies only to women in BAF. This norm is specific to female pilots and stresses that if women are pregnant or with suspected pregnancy, they should inform their superiors or their commanders and the flight is not recommended. This is because of the risks that may be involved in certain types of flight. R11 pointed out that in these flights, there are greater demands to the body and its own support in relation to the maneuvers performed. Thus, women must sign a term of responsibility committing themselves not to fly pregnant or from the moment a pregnancy is suspected in order to avoid putting their own lives at risk, as well as the lives of the flight crew.

According to the reports, it was possible to verify that, as stated by Brown (2020), the identity of women in BAF is defined as they come into contact with the meanings, values and ideologies of the organization and its social groups in this environment and, by analyzing the routines and norms existing within the organization, as well as the adaptation of these women, it is possible to perceive identity as one of the elements responsible for guiding individual action (Machado, 2003) but also, the events in the organization researched (Brown, 2020).

A point of reflection is that even when asked explicitly about routines and norms, the women participating in the research highlighted their experiences not specifically based on the descriptions of their positions or aspects that are experienced in their day-to-day but, focusing on experiences that they considered remarkable throughout their careers. Through these reports, it was noted the three components highlighted by Appel, Wendt and Argimon (2011) regarding the intrinsic and basic psychological needs, in which it was noticed the relevance that the component "perceived personal competence" of such women has on them, highlighting the differences experienced at this stage of their training in relation to their male colleagues. In this regard, it was observed that there is a satisfactory perception of the challenges faced, which is subsequently a motivational factor for the performance of these women in the military environment.

When R1 pointed out that the military environment is, in her words, classified as "macho," she emphasized the existence of "equality" in her point of view, and these issues were reinforced by other interviewees as well. Here, we wonder if this equality really exists or if it is something illusory, hidden, and based on the transparent barriers characteristic of the glass ceiling conceptualized by Steil (1997). We are aware that what has been mentioned about pregnancy is totally justifiable in relation to health risks, and we agree that within such circumstances it is more than appropriate to have differences in treatment. However, disregarding such an incidence, what was reported by the interviewees underscores the fact that even with the insertion of women in military organizations, they are still prohibited from occupying certain positions within the organization, which allows us to affirm that the glass ceiling exists and prevails when the performance of women in higher positions in this organizational scenario is put on the agenda as also discussed by Cotter et al. (2001)

4.4 ADVANCES AND OBSTACLES

The space for women's participation in the Brazilian Air Force has become wider due to their professional military development and the continuous processes of institutional opening. Through the women's narratives it was possible to perceive signs of egalitarian aspects, while at the same time identifying constraints that indicate the need to advance in other achievements.

In general, women do not perceive apparent inequality in the work process, but some situations highlighted in their narratives expose subtle circumstances that may reveal conditions that are simultaneously (un)equal. When asked about the valorization of women in the military

environment, some of the interviewees reveal that there is equality but not valorization, while others find it difficult to answer because it is still something in process.

Each military woman expresses a way of understanding appreciation in the military environment: R4 understands that valorization is in small institutional gestures such as tributes on Mother's Day, command options for women, and the encouragement of women to enter the military world; R5, on the other hand, perceives little valorization, feeling that a man's orders are obeyed without resistance, whereas a woman's orders are subjected to scrutiny or validation processes by other men; R6 understands that prejudice as opposed to valorization is more related to the differences in hierarchy than to gender differences; R13 understands that, despite the conquests of equality, some older military men still have difficulties in dealing with women as equals; and finally, for R11 and R12 there is little valorization, when they perceive the lack of understanding about the needs surrounding maternity.

Thus, it is verified in this set of perceptions that the valuation transits between the limitations for being women - considering their social burdens, gender stereotypes - and the few gestures of daily achievements that they encounter in their work routines. Therefore, one verifies the constant interaction of barriers produced in the work-family conflict and in gender conceptions that feed the glass ceiling at work (Steil, 1997; Cotter et al., 2001; Falkenberg et al., 2020;), while at the same time military women articulate their intrinsic motivation (Ryan; Soenens; Vansteenkiste, 2019; Appel et al., 2011 to construct her military identity through the cognitive, affective, and evaluative identification processes (Tajfel; Turner, 2004; Fernandes et al., 2010). This can be verified in R13's speech:

There are still some obstacles [...] I perceive these differences [...] in this sense about valorization, I am not able to affirm clearly that there is valorization. But there is a demand [...] standard, it is as if they expected that the woman would not comply with the norms, would be in shape carrying backpacks, carrying rifles, and, despite being a woman, she was able to do everything. So it's like this, there is the prejudice of expecting that you don't do it (R13, Major).

Among the positive aspects listed by the female soldiers as social prestige (R2), satisfaction in working (R4 and R6), the possibility of career growth (R10), it can be noticed that these aspects strengthen the identification with their professions, and mark their representativeness in an environment considered male as highlighted by R2:

"So I love being military, my brother is military, I went to military school, I love the army, but in the air force, being close to aviation, I had the opportunity to fly in two fighter planes, and other aircraft, as in the academy we did helicopter, transport aviation, [...]. Every time we are close to this it is very good, for me it is routine, but how passionate people are about this, I think it is a great privilege to work close to this" (R2).

Gradually women have conquered other spaces by means of recognition for their professional performance, so as to help mitigate disrespectful situations. However, there are still some critical situations in the interviewees' lives that during their careers stimulate reactions and regulate their way of acting. In most of the responses, the critical moments were related to the burden of being a woman, revealing the phenomenon of work-family conflict (Shaukat et al., 2017; Falkenberg, 2020;), the vulnerability of not being able to oppose military personnel with the highest hierarchies, or even moments when they feel a lack of credibility for being a woman, revealing the frequent challenge experienced in the face of the glass ceiling phenomenon (Steil, 1997; Grzywacz; Butler, 2008).

Military organizations tend to be institutions prone to bullying through legitimate acts of depersonalization, disempowerment, and the disciplinary nature of harassment can be seen as an element of Darwinian selection, in which the strong stand out. In this context, the military women interviewed share the most critical elements in their professional trajectory: R5 reports about moments in which female credibility is questioned when not endorsed by a male military, besides situations of moral harassment; R8 states that women need to impose themselves and be firm all the time; R10 recalls the moments in which they underestimated their intellectual capacity; R2, reports on the doubts that exist about women's word, as being a question not so much related to gender but to the person's character; and R13 chooses the emergency during a flight as the most critical moment, because of the nervousness and tension, and the technical and professional learning that this moment provided.

From these perceptions we can verify that the military profession presents technical and professional challenges that are transversally influenced by the emphasis on derogatory social conceptions of the female gender (Falkenberg et al., 2020). And, at times, this calls into question women's speech and decisions in the military environment, as verified in R2's narrative "*I would say that today the culture is that it tries to treat seriously..I won't say that it has never happened, that is, impossible to happen now with any of my colleagues or one of the subordinate girls*" (R2).

Finally, it was verified that the identification of military women contrasts with some perceptions about negative aspects in their trajectory in the military institution that present themselves as challenges to be overcome. The women highlight as challenging aspects the obligation to be available all the time at the barracks (R2); the issue of hierarchies that can be positive for the performance of activities, but that can be something negative depending on the profile of who is in charge (R4); stability is a positive point, but can become negative when it

causes accommodation on the part of some people (R6); the issue of women often having to submit themselves to situations in which they are misunderstood, and having to go through times when they are not taken seriously (R10); and, finally, the lack of understanding about maternity and the fact that family life time is almost always a function of work (R11).

The narratives reveal that the interviewees entered the military with a view to stability and financial employment, even if they entered to take advantage of the opportunity of the competitive examination or because they chose the military career for symbolic and affective reasons (such as admiration or a childhood dream). Besides the prestige obtained by the image of being a woman and military, or by the influence of the presence of military men in the family. Such perceptions feed personal motivation through, mainly, the intrinsic psychological need referring to the self-perception of competence for the job and, refers to the need for relationship in which the woman feels part of the military world, even in the face of social barriers (Appel et al., 2011; Ryan; Soenens; Vansteenkiste, 2019). In this way, maintaining motivation stimulates and strengthens women's predisposition for the identification process with the military identity.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Since the insertion of women in the labor market, this previously male scenario has become a space of even more constant changes and different challenges than those that were seen until then. These changes brought with them debates about performance, the influence that culture, social and even organizational structures have for women in their experiences, identity and motivation to remain in such contexts, since they are where bonds, symbols and meanings are created (Machado, 2003; Brown, 2020; Castells, 2021).

In view of the particularities that may be present in an organizational dynamic, identity stands out. By putting it on the agenda, the individual gets answers to the question "who am I?" mainly in face of his daily experiences (Machado, 2003, Castells, 2021). However, in this article, we argue that the constitution of an identity and the identification process occurs, among other ways, according to the motivation that an individual may have in relation to his/her/their work activities (Oliveira, 2017).

Thus, the objective outlined for this study was to understand the identity construction of military women in their work context, considering the motivational and environmental aspects. For this, through a snowball sample, 15 women working in the Brazilian military were interviewed, reporting their experiences and perceptions about being a "military woman".

Through the interviews, the researchers gained deeper insights into the field. Officially, opportunities are presented as equal for both men and women. However, as the interviews progressed and the conversations became more intimate, it became evident that there are obstacles hindering the achievement of complete equality in the military. There are still remnants of a structure which is entirely male oriented, and, in light of this, it can be seen that women in military careers feel the constant need to prove themselves competent. The women highlighted their identities as military women and also as professionals. It was seen that these women are often faced with the need to prove that they can perform the same activities as men - in the case of aviation, focusing mainly on flying a plane.

Inserted in such a structure, the women who participated in the research emphasized that they feel they need to prove these things not only to their superiors but to their colleagues as well, even if they are at the same levels as them. Even with the understanding and awareness of these differences, there is also the perception that these "trials" are a "necessary side effect" for more women to enter and remain in this type of organization so that they can be respected in environments previously considered unconventional.

As a theoretical contribution, this article places the construction of identity considering intrinsic aspects - related to the personal motivations of each professional - and extrinsic aspects - taking into account the social and organizational context of individuals. This duality provides a holistic view of the phenomenon of identity development, especially when one seeks to understand identification processes in environments that are not welcoming to a certain gender, as in the study presented here, of women in the military brazilian context.

The practical contribution lies in the attempt to suppress negative categorizations and prejudices of society in this environment, especially regarding the predominance of the male presence and the patriarchal history present in militarism and in today's society. This study opens fronts for public management and society about the importance of the role of women in the military environment. Furthermore, this research can contribute to women further expanding their spaces; ascend the discussion of gender in military organizations, including LGBTQIA+.

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