Abstract

How are good soldiers ‘made’ in the 21st century? Based on an extensive ethnographic fieldwork at the boundaries of the military profession, this dissertation explores the process through which young citizens are turned into soldiers.

While a great deal of research has attended to the difficulties of making men want to fight for their country, this dissertation turns the matter upside down by inquiring into the challenge of becoming part of the military profession. This is done by unfolding how valuing – the assessment of who might be ‘good’ – takes place among conscripted soldiers in the Danish army. Making use of an everyday perspective attentive to the embodied routines and tacit knowledge of the soldiers, the dissertation analyses how boundaries for recognition of good soldiers are established affectively, materially, and discursively.

Drawing on the work of scholars within e.g. critical military studies and post-feminism, the dissertation unpacks the power mechanisms and inequalities that intervene in young citizens’ attempts to become soldiers. Through the analyses of specific cases such as the use of uniforms and the joking relationship among soldiers, it is argued that the becoming as a good soldier is not merely a question of inherent or individual characteristics, such as a strong will or a strong body. Rather, access to the military profession is the result of bodily performances of recognizable versions of the good soldier; a process in which questions of e.g. gender and sexuality comes to matter. Overall, the dissertation hereby illustrates that becoming part of the military profession is a difficult process in which the possibility of being recognized as a good soldier is far from evenly distributed.