'Being regimented': Aspiration, discipline and identity work in the British Parachute Regiment

By

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All interested are welcome
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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how the preferred self-conceptions of men in an elite military unit - the British Parachute Regiment - were disciplined by the organizationally-based discursive resources on which they drew. The research contribution this paper makes is twofold. First, we argue that preferred self-conceptions (i.e. desired identities) are mechanisms for disciplining employees’ identity work, and analyze how paratroopers were subject to, and constituted by, the discursive practices of the Regiment. Paratroopers’ preferred conceptions of their selves were disciplined by understandings both of what it meant to be a paratrooper and of the institutional processes by which they were made. In talking about how the Regiment ‘manufactured’ them, paratroopers provided insight on how the Regiment produced and reproduced the idealized identities to which they aspired. Second, to complement other understandings of identities, we suggest that people are often best characterized as ‘aspirants’. An aspirational identity is a story-type or template in which an individual construes him- or her-self as one who is earnestly desirous of being a particular kind of person and self-consciously and consistently in pursuit of this objective. The recognition of subjectively construed identities as narrativized permits an appreciation of individuals as sophisticatedly agentic, while recognizing that their ‘choices’ are made within frameworks of disciplinary power which both enable and restrict their scope for discursive manoeuvre.