

## THE ROLE MODELS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS OF MILITARY STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** *At the beginning is brought to attention the meaning of several concepts in the literature - personal success, social achievement, role model and counter-role model. Then, the results of previous quantitative and qualitative researches on the life models of young people in various contexts are briefly presented. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the models and counter-models of success of military students, in order to discover their motivational and inspirational sources and their authentic value benchmarks. The data collection method is a questionnaire consisting of open questions. Students from NBLFA are part of the sample. The results indicated that both role models and counter models of military students generally come from the mass-media and less from the professional environment. Also, students state that work-based strategies are more useful to achieve success than strategies based on capitalizing on exceptional personal qualities or social relationships. Another significant result of the research shows that only a small part of the students considers the success in the military career as an important personal desire, resorting instead to other ways of describing the success in the future: family, house, material goods, health. Taking these into account, teachers should reconsider the most effective ways to have a significant impact in preparing students for future life and profession.*

**Keywords:** role-model, counter-role model, success, social achievement, military students

### 1. Introduction

The main purpose of education consists in the acquisition of the competences and skills that will ensure the graduates success in life. To this end, it is necessary to train all personality dimensions in school, so that the graduated to have a wide range of options and the resources necessary to fulfil his aspirations and desires upon graduation. From a psychological point of view, the concepts of success and achievement have different meanings, even if both refer to a set of feelings associated with a favourable and positive result of an action [1]. Success represents a victory, a triumph, a performance obtained by a person, without

necessarily implying the recognition of its value by those around. Success is felt personally, individually, and it is the indicator of the individual value according to his/her own standards and has a significant affective and motivational charge. Often, personal success also meets the criteria of the community, there being an overlap between the individual and the social plan. However, there are also situations in which the result of a person's actions meets the expectations of others, but is not felt positively by the individual, does not meet personal criteria and is not accompanied by an emotional state of well-being. In this case we cannot talk about

success. To indicate overcoming the individual sphere and reporting to a value relative to others, to a community or to a reference group, the term social achievement is preferred [2]. Social achievements meet common criteria for a group or a community, having a meaning from the perspective of values and having also an impact on the group's aspirations. In the context of this paper, both terms will be used, with their particular meanings, which will be indicated accordingly.

The individualism/collectivism cultural characteristics studied by Hofstede and his collaborators [3] may be related to the way in which individuals belonging to different cultures represent their path to personal success or social success. In this idea, in the literature [4] are mentioned two main types of strategies to achieve success: (1) the strategy based on hard work, on the fruition of the psycho-biological and educational capital of the individual and (2) the strategy focused on the exploitation of socio-economic capital (social relations, social status etc.). If the first emphasizes the individual's qualities and self-realization efforts, the second has a more prominent social anchor, being based on the person's social origin, his/her environment, generally on the extrinsic factors of the actual performance.

## **2. The role of models and counter-models in personal success and social achievement**

Role models are “individuals who provide an example of the kind of success that one may achieve, and often also provide a template of the behaviours that are needed to achieve such success” (p.36) [5]. Most of the studies related to the life models of young people do not explicitly follow the concept of a social achievement, but address a series of particular influences of the behaviour patterns, and often the researchers admit the lack of representativeness of the investigated samples. Therefore, most of the researchers'

findings and conclusions are only applicable to the context in which they were obtained.

Morgenroth et al. [6] states that role models are “ways of motivating individuals to set and achieve ambitious goals”. They present three poses of the role model concept (pp.4-5): behaviour model (*how to do*), model as a representation of the possible (*you can be/is it possible to do*) and inspirational model (*what is desirable and worth making the effort to get*).

Bandura and Walters [7], as well as Erikson [8] showed that young people tend to choose as role models the people they perceive as having similar traits to themselves. Thus, young people form their own identity with the help of models of who they want to be like. Bandura [9] concluded that the main characteristics of people considered positive social models are high status, power, and prestige and also Bandura [10] argued that it is easier for young people to learn how to behave by observing those around them than by analysing the consequences of one's own behaviour. Hendry et al. [11] demonstrated the positive impact of the existence of a same-sex parental model in adolescence, an aspect also studied by Lockwood [12], but with reference to same-sex models from outside the family. Werner [13] found the tendency of young people who benefit from positive models to build resilient personalities. Bryant and Zimmerman [14] demonstrated that, for adolescents, a positive female lifestyle (especially maternal) is correlated with the person's well-being, and a positive male lifestyle (especially paternal) is correlated with school results high level. Hurd et al. [15] showed that adolescents who have a parental model achieve better school results than those who do not. Yancey and his collaborators [16] identified the correlation between the existence of positive models close to young people, with whom they have personal relationships (belonging to family or school) and the adoption of a

healthy lifestyle. Ahn et al. [17] studied the effectiveness of behavioural models in education, emphasizing the fact that the ideas promoted by previous theories in this field do not coincide with the findings regarding the behaviour of current generations of students. The category of models (or sometimes counter-models) of today's youth generally includes TV stars, social media influencers, family members, athletes, businessmen, teachers, politicians, colleagues and friends, personalities of culture [18].

On the other hand, Hurd and Zimmerman [19] indicated the existence of a significantly smaller number of studies regarding the role and impact of counter-models on young people. Among them, we mention the research carried out by Sharma et al. [20] regarding the correlation between counter-models and the habit of smoking in adolescence. Lockwood et al. [12] studied the power of influence of positive and negative models, and Lockwood, Sadler et al. [21] investigated the strong effect of life models on addictions and abstinence. Al Khalidi et al. [22] identified positive effects on the training of future teachers exercised by teachers who constitute counter-models. The same topic is addressed by Coppell [23]. Gladstone and Cimpian [24] make a match between the typology of role models and the typology of students, which will contribute to the induction of desirable learning behaviours, and Garcia-Martinez [25] formulates a series of tips that can be useful for students to find an appropriate lifestyle.

In general, the low representativeness of the samples investigated by the researchers, as well as the peculiarities of qualitative research lead to the need to continue conducting studies of this type, in order to intensify the understanding of how people choose role models and the influence that role models have.

### **3. Research design**

#### **3.1. The aim**

The purpose of this study is to investigate

the perception of military students on the role models and counter-role models of social achievement, which can provide interesting data regarding the real motivational sources and significant value benchmarks of the students. These findings can help teachers to identify appropriate ways to increase the motivation of young people to be more involved in their professional training.

#### **3.2. Methodology**

The exploratory research was carried out on a sample of 108 military students chosen on a voluntary basis, of which 44% from the first year, 22% from the second year and 34% from the third year of studies. The distribution of the sample by gender shows as follows: 33% women and 66% men. The questionnaire was sent using the Google Forms application and no data was collected about the identity of the respondents.

The questionnaire includes open questions and questions with optional answers, with the intensity of the answers graded on a 3-step scale. Along with the questions developed by the author of this paper, the questionnaire included some questions adapted from a study coordinated by Popenici [18]. The data were processed and interpreted from a qualitative and quantitative point of view using the method of content analysis and frequency analysis.

### **4. Results**

The first requirement in the questionnaire was: *"Name a person who is a successful model for you. Would you like to be like..."*. For 17% of the respondents, the models of success come from their families (sister, brother, uncle), for 27% from the military environment (military commanders from the academy) and for 56% from the mass media (celebrities from sports, public figures of nowadays, personalities with successful businesses, with a very good financial situation: Beckham, Ronaldo, Suarez, Mike Tyson, etc).

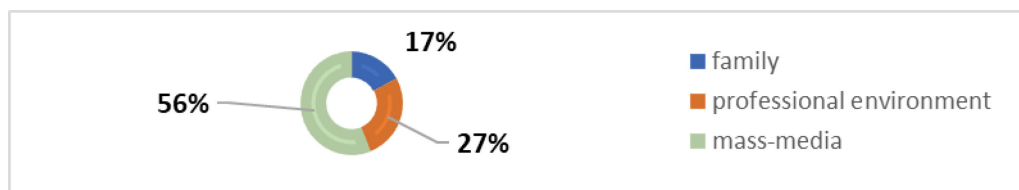


Figure 1: Where do the life models of military students come from?

Source: Author

Another requirement was to describe some of the reasons why they want to be like that person. Among the reasons why life models were chosen, their intellectual qualities (intelligence, wealth of knowledge) are rarely mentioned, instead their character traits are mentioned, and among these, ambition is highlighted most often. Diligence (sustained work), courage, altruism and self-confidence are also mentioned. Several respondents mentioned as a reason that people managed to build a career and obtain considerable income from their passions. Another reason why many of the respondents want to be like model people is the balance that these people manage to create between their personal and professional lives.

Regarding the role of education in achieving success in life, the respondents believe that the people who are models for them achieved success due to the education they received to a large extent (55%) and to an average extent (45%). Not a single student said that education is not important in achieving success.

To the question “*In your opinion, the person you choose as role model was successful because ...*”, 89% of the students mentioned strategies based on hard work or on the fruition of the psycho-biological and educational capital of the individual, and 11% strategies focused on the exploitation of socio-economic capital (social relations, social status).

To the requirement “*Mention a person*

*whom you do NOT consider a successful role model. You would NOT want to be like...*” the students mentioned personalities from the current national political life or international personalities from the present and from history, but also celebrities from the mass media (the Tate brothers, “the girls of on television”, Dorian Popa, Laurențiu Reghecampf, Mike Tyson). Among the people with whom the respondents interact in real life, only a few people from the military professional environment and from the family environment were mentioned. Percentage-wise, 61% of the respondents mentioned counter-role models with whom they did not interact directly, but learned about their behaviour from the media and social networks. Among the reasons that lead respondents to mention these counter-models (“*Describe the reasons why you do NOT want to be like that person*”) are, in order of frequency, the following: frivolity, immaturity, lack of interest, abusive behaviour, arrogance, opportunism, dishonesty.

The following requirements were related to the future projection of the students' lives, the points of interest being what the students want to have, to be and to do in the next 10 years. Regarding the requirement “*In 10 years, you most want to have ...*”, 39% of the respondents want success in their career (in the army or as a private business person), 17% mentioned material goods (house, car), 28% want a family, and 17% want health and a balanced life.

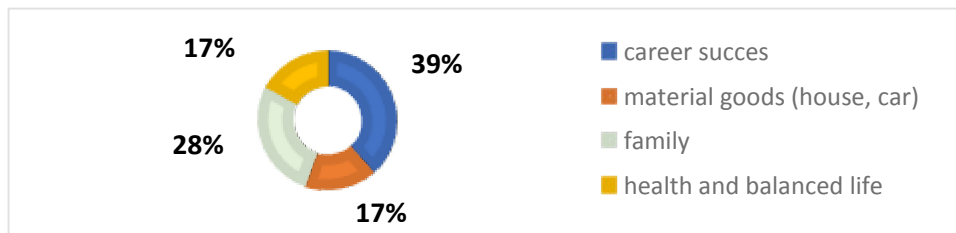


Figure 2: "In 10 years, you most want to have..."

Source: Author

Related to the requirement "In 10 years, you most want to be ...", some of the respondents referred to success in the profession as officer (45%), to a career outside the military (17%) and others (38%) have made only general statements (accomplished, devoted, committed, innovative). To the requirement "In 10 years, what do you most want to do is..." most of the students mentioned the desire to work with pleasure, to do something meaningful (61%), the desire to help others (11 %), the desire to do something extraordinary (an extreme sport or something above average – "to succeed where others failed" - 11%). There are also students who want to "make money" and even reach a level of well-being so that "they don't have to work anymore" (17%).

## 5. Discussion on the results

It is found that none of the female respondents mentions the fact that they would take models of professional success from the military environment, unlike the male students, who identify with some of their commanders and consider them successful people. The role models among the members of their own family are chosen exclusively by female respondents.

In contrast to the results of a study conducted on a sample of civilian students from Bucharest [26], the results of the present study show that most of the life models of military students are not people from their close circle, with whom they can interact frequently in real life and whose features or way of life they can really know. Most of the role models chosen are public figures, celebrities that the students could only know

indirectly, through the successful images created by the mass media and social networks. If we continue the differentiation of terms presented at the beginning of the paper [2], we can say that military students choose life models depending on social recognition (the level of fulfillment of some expectations and aspirations of the community) and less depending on the personal success of these people (the level of fulfillment of own expectations). The orientation towards models of military students is strong, and these role models have a great motivational power on students. One can observe the presence of particular aspects in the perception of social achievement. Due to the fact that the military have a stable career and a clear career plan, social achievement is not primarily determined by career, but by material security (money, house, car) and family life. Personal and professional success is left to chance by military students, probably due to the feeling of comfort and security offered by the profession.

Just like the models, the counter-models of life are taken from the mass media and the internet, but also from history, as some of the respondents gave somewhat childish answers and named the absolute negative character, Hitler.

The orientation towards models and counter-models is correlated with the students' perception of social success. The sources and factors that contribute to social success are: personality (self-confidence, ambition, tenacity) and hard work, without any of the respondents mentioning training/education on their own initiative. However, to the explicit question related to the role of education in achieving success,

the respondents greatly appreciated that education has an important role. This answer is surprising to some extent, since the personalities mentioned by them as role models are not distinguished by education and culture, but by notoriety and success in business. At the same time, the students' response is gratifying, as it opposes the general opinion that young people no longer consider education to be necessary and useful. The results of a previous study coordinated by Popenici [18] on a representative sample of high school and vocational school graduates show that education is not perceived by young people as a necessary premise for their social success. A finding from the opposite category is supported by the results of a study conducted by Calotă [27]. According to her, the motivation to learn for 65% of secondary school students is supported by the belief that education will ensure their success in life. Similar percentages were obtained in other studies [28]. The results of these studies draw attention to the fact that the perception of the importance of education can change radically over the ages. Identifying models of social achievement and studying the relationship

between these role models and education can contribute to teachers' efforts to discover and better understand their students.

## 6. Conclusions

It seems that the military academy has a moderate importance in establishing the students' models of success in life. Although at the declarative level education is important for students, the analysis of their role models shows that education is not the key ingredient in achieving social success. As expected, the Internet and social networking applications play the most important role in building young people's role models. Considering these findings, military and civilian teaching staff should realize and accept that they are not perceived as role models and do not actually have the power to inspire students. Therefore, if they cannot enhance students' life aspirations, the contribution from the utilitarian perspective might be more beneficial. Thus, teaching staff could increase their impact by highlighting more strongly the usefulness and applicability of the taught contents for the students' future professional and personal lives.

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