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# Socialization, Face Negotiation, Identity, and the United States Military

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In this study, we examine stories told about basic training in the United States military. We question how these experiences are related to stories told post-exit. We collected website stories ($N$ = 100) and in-depth interviews ($N$ = 18) for analysis. The theoretical underpinnings of socialization, face negotiation, and identity guided this analysis. We note three themes throughout these stories that suggest that (1) military members adopt facework strategies performed by drill sergeants, (2) these facework strategies are used after exit, (3) military socialization normalizes typically nonnormative behavior.

*Keywords*: *socialization, military culture, facework, face negotiation, identity*

An 18-year-old boards a bus. This sentence changes meaning drastically when we add "to head to basic training." Many Americans have seen or heard basic training portrayed via movies, books, friends, relatives, or personal experience. Basic training is a time when seasoned members take young adults and train them to be committed to a unit. In 2017 the nation glimpsed the harshness of basic training. Gunnery Sergeant Joseph Felix stood accused of physical, mental, and emotional abuse toward recruit Raheel Siddiqui, who committed suicide during initial training. Lance Corporal Robert Alterisio testified that Gunnery Sergeant Felix stated: "Marines are like hot dogs; Americans love hot dogs, but no one wants to see how they are made" (Livingston, 2017, para. 21). Transforming an individual from a self-preservation orientation to being willing to sacrifice themselves for the unit is not an easy job. In this article we sought to understand the communicative process of shaping servicemembers as well as to consider how learned normative processes might influence life after the military.

Socialization and face negotiation were our theoretical guides in this endeavor. Although socialization and face negotiation studies have been used frequently, few studies have considered socialization or face negotiation in the military context (e.g., Franke, 2000; Howe & Hinderaker, 2018; Macovei, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2017). There are no studies, to our knowledge, that examine how face negotiation is shaped by the socialization processes of the military, or how these learned norms persist after exit. Examining the military experience, through the lens of socialization and face negotiation, could provide a deeper understanding of the communicative challenges this understudied population must overcome.

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## Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization explains the process of entering, adapting to, and exiting organizations (Kramer, 2010). New members learn accepted and expected organizational norms. By following these norms, members increase the likelihood of successful integration (Chui, Liu, & Mak, 2016). Jablin (1985, 2001) proposed four phases of socialization: anticipatory socialization, encounter, metamorphosis, and exit (Jablin & Krone, 1987; Kramer, 2010). Anticipatory socialization involves preparing for vocational and organizational membership (Jablin, 1985). Encounter occurs at organizational entry and is where members obtain details about the organization and the member's role. When individuals negotiate their specific roles, they have reached the metamorphosis phase. The last phase of organizational socialization is exit. Exit has been classically defined as withdrawal from an organization (Jablin, 2001; Kramer, 2010). However, recent researchers have proposed that exit can be a protracted process, especially in organizations with strong organizational identity and deep value systems (Hinderaker, 2015; Hinderaker & O'Connor, 2015). Howe and Hinderaker (2018) document the deep identity and values associated with military entry. Therefore, the exit process for the military could extend beyond the last day of service. Furthermore, scholars have shown how past and present socialization alters the future (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Current socialization literature does not recognize post-exit as a unique phase, but considers it part of the exit process (see Kramer, 2011). Davis and Myers (2012) and Hinderaker (2015) provide insight into how former members, that have officially exited, still serve to socialize new members.

Hinderaker (2015) labeled organizations such as the military and strict religious organizations as totalistic, meaning that the organization intrudes on all areas of members' lives. Such an all-encompassing culture influences both organizational socialization (Kramer & Dailey, 2019) as well as individual identity (Bullis & Bach, 1989). Chui and colleagues (2016) argue that organizational socialization is a process that can erase the boundaries between formal and informal practices and interactions within the organization, inevitably changing individual identity. Organizations use socialization tactics to control and shape members for the role the organization desires (Ashford & Black, 1996; Jones, 1986). In the case of totalistic organizations, these socialization processes are embedded in everyday activities (Knight, 1990). Some tactics serve as turning points that further shape member identity (Bullis & Bach, 1989); in the military, researchers have found that turning points are manufactured artificially rather than occurring naturally (Howe & Hinderaker, 2018).

One norm the military instills in members is the need to be unflappable. The military uses framing devices such as stories, jargon, spin, metaphors, and contrast (Fairhurst, 2011) to instill this, and other, norms (Howe & Hinderaker, 2018; Knight, 1990). Knight (1990) illustrated how framing devices forced identity transformation during basic training, specifically using military cadence songs. Knight (1990) described how these songs hardened soldiers and that "such hardening was to make us efficient soldiers, willing to kill or die on command . . . the military mindset assumes that a soldier should, under certain conditions, hold no reservations about killing women or children" (p. 166). Knight also detailed how cadence songs serve as a face-saving mechanism as they prepared members for war and developed devotion to a higher purpose (see also Franke, 2000). Such framing socializes members to accept unpleasant circumstances. Additionally, this framing helps ease the transition from individual to military identity (Howe & Hinderaker, 2018). This transition could be highly traumatic for an individual (Macovei, 2016; Wilson et

al., 2019), especially when military identity can serve as a source of stigma (Braithwaite, 1997; Goffman, 2009), such as the tortured combat veteran. Remaining unflappable is one way members convey toughness and preserve face (Howe & Hinderaker, 2018). Masculinity is highly influential on the development of military identity (Van Gilder, 2018). Basic training is steeped in traditional gender norms and therefore those that identify as more feminine than masculine may face additional challenges. The willingness of an individual to display toughness and remain unflappable are ways servicemembers can signal acceptance of military identity (Knight, 1990). Ting-Toomey (2005) defines identity as a prism that supplies both self-reflection and a means of assessing others. Basic training interactions create a need to accept military identity, and this often requires a renegotiation of personal identity. Recruits must alter or develop norms, behaviors, and beliefs to interact with other servicemembers. Military membership demands absolute fealty to authoritative figures and strict adherence to military law. These demands often differ from previously learned culture norms, and recruits must therefore negotiate cultural expectations in addition to identity concerns.

## Face-Negotiation Theory

Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) explain that face negotiation helps explain how individuals communicate between cultural groups. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) define face as an "individual's claimed sense of positive image in the context of social interaction" (p. 600). Ting-Toomey (2005) notes that face negotiation involves "identity respect and other-identity consideration issues" (p. 73). Therefore, face negotiation involves both self-face and other-face concerns. Communication is often a dialogic process and thus is influenced by the actions of others. If one party offends the other, a breakdown in communication may occur; therefore, politeness is necessary, although not enough, for successful communication. Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory stems from Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Brown and Levinson argue that face needs are universal and form during social interactions, yet are defined culturally. Face can be either positive or negative. Positive face is a desire to retain favorable self-image and respect from others. Negative face is a need to uphold independence and be free of social constraints. Formal politeness is "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61).

Face-threatening acts may endanger one's face, leading to enactment of facework strategies as a form of defensive communicative mechanism. Brown and Levinson (1987) identify the following behaviors that threaten negative face: orders, requests, suggestions, advice, remindings, threats, warnings, dares, offers, promises, and expressing strong negative emotions (e.g., animosity). Behaviors that endanger one's positive face include disapproval, criticism, disagreement, communicating violent emotions, inappropriate topics, and not cooperating while participating in an activity. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2003) theorized that facework is used to save face when threatened. Facework refers to communicative mechanisms that construct and support face as part of self-identity (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Through facework, individuals enact verbal and nonverbal behaviors to maintain, restore, and validate face when it is challenged. Five politeness strategies inform face-negotiation mechanisms and include unambiguous on-record acts/off-record ambiguity, no-redress baldly moves/being redressive, positive politeness, negative politeness, and conventionalized indirectedness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Face-negotiation theory scholars assert that preserving face while engaging in communicative processes are ingrained behavioral patterns based on past experiences (Ting-Toomey, 2005). New recruits

may be socialized to perform facework differentially from their earlier experiences, although scholars have not yet explored facework in this context. These new facework strategies may be carried beyond military membership and may explain why some veterans experience communicative difficulties when interacting with civilians who are not used to military communication patterns. We first sought to better understand how military members may learn how to act in the military, and we therefore asked:

*RQ1: In what ways do military members perform facework during the entry process?*

Previous studies (e.g., Hinderaker, 2015; Wilson et al., 2019) have found that exiting highly structured organizations, such as the military, is difficult, and we speculated that this may stem, in part, from learned facework. We therefore asked the final two research questions:

*RQ2: In what ways do military members perform facework during the exit/post-exit process?*

*RQ3: How might these learned facework processes affect communication with civilians after exiting the military?*

## Method

The researchers used two bases of evidence to bolster credibility of their findings (Creswell, 2014). The first data source was stories posted about basic training on www.americangrit.com. The second data source was in-depth interviews with former members of the United States Military (USM). The following sections describe the data collection and data analysis processes in more detail.

### *Data Collection and Descriptors*

The website www.americangrit.com holds a vast number of posted stories about basic training. The website assigns a story number to each story. Approximately 650 stories were viewable at the time of data collection, August 2018. The second author subtracted the lowest story number found from the highest to determine the number of viewable stories, then used a random number generator to select 100 stories for analysis via probability sampling, then downloaded stories and website statistics. The researchers examined the language used to ensure that stories showed familiarity with military jargon, tactics, and procedures of basic training. Little is known about the story authors aside from what they provide in their stories, such as year of training, site of training, and branch of service; however, not all authors provide this information. Most authors reported years of basic training after 2000, but some were from earlier time periods, and not all stories listed the year of basic training. Website statistics supplied some descriptive data. Stories averaged 57.89 viewer ratings (*SD* = 28.53), 342.52 words (*SD* = 168.39), 9,215 views (*SD* = 2,948), 217.39 days since posted (*SD* = 86.34), and 3.49 viewer rating (*SD* = 0.85). Viewers rated stories on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *disliking the story*, 5 = *liking the story*).

Although analyzing the content of these postings supplied interesting insight into the military entry process, the researchers decided to analyze interviews to better understand servicemember's experiences during the exit process. After approval from the researchers' Institutional Review Board. The researchers

recruited participants from a large midsouthwestern university undergraduate research pool. Participants received research credit for taking part in this study. Researchers conducted interviews in a semiprivate office during the fall semester of 2018. Data saturation, or the point where participants provided no differing information, occurred at 13 interviews; however, five more interviews were conducted to ensure that data saturation had been realized, for a total of 18 ($N$ = 18) interviews. Participants were mostly White (15); represented all four military branches: Air Force (5), Army (6), Marines (3), and Navy (4); served two to 23 years; had been out one to 25 years; had ended their contract (10), were retired (4), and were released from duty to attend college and return to the military (3). Interviews yielded 187 pages of data. Please see Table 1 for more information

***Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants and Descriptive Statistics of Interviews.***

| ID | Branch | Rank | Military occupation | Biological sex | Exit type | Years in USM | Years since USM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Air Force | E6 | Air crew survival Support | Man | Retired | 23 | 3 |
| 2 | Air Force | E4 | Intelligence analyst | Woman | ETS | 4 | 8 |
| 3 | Air Force | E5 | Military police | Woman | Green to gold | 2 | 6 |
| 4 | Air Force | E6 | Personnel management | Woman | ETS | 6 | 3 |
| 5 | Air Force | E3 | Vehicle maintenance | Man | ETS | 6 | 1 |
| 6 | Army | E5 | Ammo technician | Woman | ETS | 5 | 2 |
| 7 | Army | E4 | Combat medic | Man | Green to gold | 3 | 1 |
| 8 | Army | E4 | Combat medic | Woman | Green to gold | 2 | 1 |
| 9 | Army | E4 | Infantry | Man | ETS | 3 | 1 |
| 10 | Army | E4 | Infantry | Man | ETS | 4 | 8 |
| 11 | Army | E5 | Physical therapist Assistant | Woman | Retired | 9.5 | 2 |
| 12 | Marines | E3 | Helicopter mechanic | Woman | ETS | 3 | 25 |
| 13 | Marines | E5 | Military police | Woman | ETS | 5 | 2 |
| 14 | Marines | E5 | Sniper | Man | ETS | 6 | 2 |
| 15 | Navy | E6 | Corpsman | Woman | ETS | 16 | 11 |
| 16 | Navy | E7 | Flight engineer | Man | Retired | 20 | 1 |
| 17 | Navy | E6 | Jet engine mechanic | Man | Retired | 20 | 1 |
| 18 | Navy | E4 | Reactor machinist | Man | ETS | 4 | 2 |

After participants signed their consent form, the interview began and was recorded. Consent forms contained no information that could link them to a specific recording. After each interview, the researchers downloaded the recording to a password-protected computer until transcription. After transcription, recordings were destroyed. Consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet.

### *Data Analysis*

These sources of data were analyzed using an interpretive perspective (Creswell, 2014) that focused on how people make sense of their situations (Tracy, 2013). The analysis process was cyclical rather than linear (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using a process known as data reduction (Lindlof & Taylor,

2011), performances of facework were separated from other data, such as background and demographic information. Constant comparison method was used to group together instances of facework that suggested similar themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process involved treating the first facework example as a category and then comparing the second example to the first. Matching categories were collapsed, and nonmatching categories resulted in new category creation. This analysis process was iterative (Tracy, 2013) in that stories, interviews, and theoretical literature were simultaneously read and reread to ensure that categories reflected participant experiences. The researchers initially did this process separately and then discussed categories that did not match. Some stories needed explanation from the second researcher to the first. This iterative process continued until the researchers agreed on the categories and themes could be named. The research team then created labels or themes that best captured all categories noted in the data.

The second researcher is a military veteran. The benefits of their understanding and ability to interpret military jargon outweighs the risk of researcher bias. The first researcher has never been in nor had relatives that served in the USM and thus counteracted biases of the second researcher (Creswell, 2014). Credibility was also enhanced by receiving thick descriptions through interviews, actively searching for negative cases, and returning to willing members to perform member checking.

## Results

Interview participants and website authors described experiencing a complex combination of emotions during the military entry processes. Both data sources described basic training as a highly traumatic experience that triggered the need to enact facework practices to keep or obtain the desired face and to adapt personal identity to this new culture. Drill sergeants and peer servicemembers served as catalysts for compulsory identity transformation. Interviewees rationalized the use of speech acts as a means of facework mechanisms. Analysis of website stories revealed patterns of servicemember behavior that shed new light on how facework strategies are learned and enacted during the military entry phase. Analysis of both data sources revealed three overarching themes: maintaining face through dominance, restoring face through humor, and destroying face through aggression.

### *Maintaining Face Through Dominance*

Multiple actors in these stories described needing to maintain face. Drill sergeants used dominance when threatened by events or subordinates. It is important to note that drill sergeants' only tool of maintaining order is communication, and perhaps this is the reason that interviewees justified drill sergeants' communicative behaviors with statements such as,

> [Drill Sergeants] yell a lot . . . well, you know, they teach you, and then they have their reinforcement methods. So, if you mess up, they keep you from messing up again and help everybody. And I mean, everybody is treated the same, and it's just those methods used to help solidify the knowledge and the ways to keep you from performing the ways that you shouldn't be doing, to help instill that discipline.

Military facework practices are normalized, justified, and incorporated into everyday life of recruits during training. One interviewee stated: "I think a lot of times with the military people were kind of in fear of repercussions of the problem because you know higher ups are gonna yell at you and they don't care. I guess that kind of instilled you to follow rules more. Even if no one is looking or anything." In the following website story, a recruit unknowingly threatens the face, and identity, of a drill sergeant by positioning the drill sergeant in a parental rather than superior role:

> PVT [private] FakeName called out and asked, "Drill Sergeant, will there be a cake at chow later?" DS [drill sergeant] don't answer, but I saw his head redden and his shoulders shake in rage. He says nothing, and we keep marching. (Think we were behind schedule or something.) PVT FakeName asks again. Silence from the DS. For 5 seconds. And then . . . . "Column, HALT!" "Left, FACE!" "PRIVATE FAKENAME! I want you to write a letter home to your WH*RE MOTHER, and get her to start writing me CHILD SUPPORT CHECKS! Because I am TIRED of watching your stupid ass FOR FREE!"

The drill sergeant reasserts dominance through vulgar and dominant language that positions the recruit as a child. In another website story, a drill sergeant asks why a recruit is not paying attention to the drill sergeant. The recruit replies that they recruit was studying a "smart book." A "smart book" is a colloquial name for a manual issued on military entry that, by rule, should be studied during downtime. Two facework strategies can be seen here: First, the recruit maintains face by using military regulations to assert dominance. The drill sergeant cannot punish the recruit for such an act, so the drill sergeant then maintains face by asserting dominance:

> DS J is most seriously pissed. He gets in my face, the rim of his Round Brown [drill sergeant hat] pushing into my forehead and through a clenched jaw grinds out at me. "Private, if you ever f*cking embarrass me like that again I will make you eat that g*d-d*mned smart book. You are now Squad Leader and your people had better know their sh*t."

The drill sergeant maintains face through dominance by assigning the private to be squad leader. As a squad leader, the private will be more vulnerable to future punishments from the drill sergeant if the private's "people" do not "know their sh*t." The storyteller continued: "Through the cycle my guys knew their sh*t. As I heard in a movie somewhere, 'fear is a great motivator'." Here, the private admits the dominance of the drill sergeant as well as noting that the private used dominance over other soldiers in the same way.

In other accounts, drill sergeants used physical acts of asserting dominance. When a recruit became verbally aggressive toward a command sergeant major, the following event occurred:

> The CSM [command sergeant major] continues to berate the private for his stupidity when the private looks him right in the eye and says, "You're a dead man!" Immediately after he said that, the MP holding the handcuffed soldier's arm swiftly picked the private up over his head like a log drill and slammed him into the rubber field. One of our DSs, who served in combat with the CSM, lost it and rushed over toward the private. Screaming at the private and threatening him, he had to be held back by 2 other DSs. When they lifted the private's face out if the rubber, he spit on the CSM. At that point, the MP [military police] ripped the soldier off the ground, hog tied his hands and feet, and threw him back in the MP cruiser like a sack of dog food. We were just standing there in shock like "WTF!?!." Never heard anything about the guy again, and basic continued as usual.

Such dominance, slamming someone to the ground or throwing them "like a sack of dog food," would be unsettling in most contexts. However, in the context of basic training, privates admit shock, but note that "basic continued as usual." The recruit threatened the face of the highest rank a noncommissioned officer can achieve, and this appears to have made it acceptable to assert dominance over the recruit. Stories such as this also suggest that these highly disruptive events are normalized during training.

Dominance was also asserted through pranks or humorous acts. In the following story, the drill sergeant teaches soldiers to always be on guard:

> Sgt. B has us lined up and is telling us how the pin and bail work etc. . . . all of a sudden he stops in front of a medic recruit, looks him dead in the eye and pulls the pin on the practice grenade (it's at this point I should tell you we were unaware it was a practice grenade, or that the fuse had already been used, thus making it inert) and proceeds to shove it down said recruits shirt. Insanity ensues. Recruits are running everywhere, climbing out windows, making themselves small, grabbing human shields and the recruit with the prac grenade in his sh*t is stone, accepting what he believes is his fate with a look of horror on his face. All the while Sgt B is laughing so hard it looks like he might pass out.

Drill sergeants also combined humor with punishments, as is seen in the following website story when a private was found with a cell phone:

> Apparently, a PVT had been housing one [a cell phone] in his dirty laundry bag, inside rolled socks. How they missed this I will never know. They even searched our flashlight battery cases. At any rate, the DS yells out, "hey PVT Y, we may have found your cellphone, but we're hookin' you up with a replacement. We got your back!" DS S walks up with a 1 ft by 2 ft cardboard cellphone replica. He hands it to PVT Y and informs the entire company that "Mr Y will be answering his cellphone to anyone who calls him with the intro, 'this is PVT dumbass. They found my phone. How can I help you?'" He had to take that thing taped to his rucksack on our marches and even ran with it during PT [physical training]. The first DS "phone call" had everyone rolling. Yeah. We were pushing Carolina into the ground, but it was the funniest sh*t.

Here, a private violates a rule set forth by the drill sergeant, no cell phones. As a way to maintain face, the drill sergeant turns the situation against the private and makes him the laughingstock of the unit. Interviewed servicemembers described how they disliked these types of punishments, but they often acknowledged that it was necessary "because of the nature of the job."

Sometimes pranks were direct in that the subject knew who had performed it, but often pranks were indirect attacks on peers, as is seen in a website story about a problematic recruit: "Someone decided to deal with Private P. They wrote home and a few days later he was getting packages of gay military porn." Ordering this material undoubtedly led to punishment of the private, as pornography is forbidden at basic training. In a similar website story, recruits punished a member in a different manner:

> DS C asked: "Who has been wiping they ass on Private P's pillow?" I assumed that nobody would say anything, but an idiot raises his hand. Then I look around and 3 others have their hands raised. I thought it was like Spartacus, but no. They each came up with the idea separately and didn't know about the rest. DS C looked at Private P, who was holding the pillow and said, "Well, it's obvious that everyone hates you. Good luck" and he just walked out. No smoking [punishment]; nothing.

This story shows not only the pranks that recruits would pull on an individual to either get them in line or punish them in return for the platoon being punished but how drill sergeants normalize such behavior by allowing it to continue.

Germane to the interpretation of the following stories is the understanding that in the military, recruits are not judged on their actions alone, but also on the actions of the unit. One interviewee said this:

> I mean it wasn't a tough experience for me as far as the rules went . . . it was just learning how to deal with the other 89 knuckleheads that were messing up. Being held accountable for their actions as well as my own.

Such an acknowledgement aids in realizing that sometimes unit face was more important than individual face. This accountability for the actions of others may explain why military recruits used dominance to bring others in line or to maintain unit, and by proxy, individual face. In one website story, a soldier was having difficulty with platoon members, and the following happens:

> So, the next day, when I had to get up in front of them and we were waiting for our D.S. they started getting chatty. So, in a loud voice I told them all to "shut the F*** up!" As I was finishing my D.S. walked up behind me laughing his ass off and said, "Did you say what I think you just said Private?!" I said, "yes Drill Sergeant." He looked at me and looked at them standing their quietly, grinned slightly and said to me "I told you they'd obey."

Here, we see a direct example of how drill sergeants influenced recruits to discard learned methods of facework in exchange for asserting dominance to maintain face. The drill sergeant praised the recruit for this performance, and such praise reinforces that dominance is an acceptable practice in face maintenance.

Other stories of dominant actions revolved around members violating both military rules and behavioral norms. In the following website story, a member begins to enact sexual harassment:

> PVT W decides he was going to reach over and grab her ass. She turns around, obviously shocked, and asks which sh*t kicker groped her. PVT W chuckled and drunkenly blows her a kiss. Before I knew it, I see a right hook knock PVT W back and onto the ground, and he's out ladies and gentlemen. DS S flies over knife handing, wondering what the f*ck just happened. PVT Q, looking satisfied with her KO [knockout], looks at DS S and says without batting an eyelash, "Well DS. Seems I knocked him the f*ck out." I never saw PVT W again.

The violated private uses dominance to maintain her face and dignity. These stories show that members have learned and enact dominance as taught by drill sergeants, as well as the normalized masculine nature of the military.

Developing dominance as a facework strategy may aid recruits in fostering short-term unit cohesion and adaptation to the military culture, but it may be done at the expense of long-term consequences. If veterans perform such dominance, and especially if dominance in the manners described above is performed toward others who have not had military training, it could lead to the person with whom they are communicating feeling threatened. If a veteran enacts this dominance often enough, it may lead to social exclusion, as suggested by interviewees. One interviewee said:

> I've seen a couple of these [veterans] in class where, and it's usually a man, which doesn't necessarily mean anything. But they have a strong opinion about something, they think a certain way, they, they tell you that, and they're kind of loud and aggressive with how they say it in class.

This participant describes how a veteran that disagrees in class attempts to maintain face through dominance, but it is interpreted as combative. Interviewees described that this specific and distinct behavior created problems when interacting with nonveterans.

> I remember when I first started working that I had difficulty with my coworkers because when something needed to be done, I would just say, "Do that". Not please, or could you, or would you like I would say, "Do that," and then they would look at me like I was rude.

This veteran is describing using direct, dominant language as the boss, but that this offended others. One interviewee described how she tried to shape the messages in a manner that would be nonoffensive, but failed in doing so. A fellow student said: "It doesn't look very professional when it says sent from my iPhone." The interviewee responded to the student: "You know, actually I'm a nurse and we do a lot of communication from our phones because we do all of our charting in houses and so that's not necessarily the case." The interviewee then described how this upset the student, and how the small amount of dominance that was shown to maintain face caused the student to, "I mean, he just kinda looked at me,

I don't know how he received that." The interviewee continued to describe how they were still trying to figure out how to communicate with civilians in a way that did not upset them or threaten their face.

Some interviewees described wanting to physically dominate others:

> When I cannot hear what the professor is saying because students are talking, it really irks my chain. I just want to pick somebody up and throw them out of the classroom and just say, "Come back whenever you're an adult."

Another said:

> Definitely with my relationship with my friends. Like right now, I'm at ends with my roommates because they can't keep a clean house. They want to, you know, they just don't want to contribute at all, and it's just like this is common courtesies and they just don't get it. And then I get angry and I got into full Sergeant mode sometimes and they just can't handle it. You know?

This inclination to perform dominance could be dangerous because if left unchecked it may result in acting on these urges. Even though former military members were trying to enact strategies to maintain their face and communicate effectively with civilians, facework mechanism that they chose often had negative effects on the face of civilians.

### ***Restoring Face Through Humor***

Many of the stories told about basic training and about adjusting to life after the military described how humor was used to restore face after a face threat. Types of verbal humor included sarcasm, irony, and dark humor. Participants described the use of humor by military members as follows: "I think military people have such a dark sense of humor, joking, that it kind of makes us at ease in a way because we know there's no off-limit topics or anything." In the following website story, we see both drill sergeants and recruits using humor as a strategy to restore face. It is important to note that the military has strict guidelines prohibiting recruits from taking food out of the dining facility. The recruits in this story are about to get caught with contraband food, so to restore their face for breaking the rules, they perform a humorous act:

> He [drill sergeant] screams to our formation and the formation directly behind him. So, food of all types starts to make its way to the front: muffins, apples, oranges, bags of granola, full sandwiches, etc. THEN IT HAPPENED Someone launched a muffin straight into the sky and like all the cool war movies with huge waves of arrows, muffins started flying! Let's just say even though you could see the surprise and awe in the DS face, they did not once hesitate when screaming for everyone to start pushing! As we were in the front leaning rest the food was collected and put in one of the large trash cans, the can easily became overflowing! The DS's were in disbelief with the amount of food that had been taken photos were being taken [by the DS]. With that we were then awarded the muffin crew nickname!

The drill sergeant realizes a personal face threat of the rules being broken, and their authority challenged, but instead of punishing the recruits the drill sergeants turn it into a unit building exercise by dubbing the recruits with a humorous nickname.

Website story contributors described using humor as a defense mechanism against drill sergeants when the recruit was under face threat. In one story, the drill sergeant finds pink soap in the belongings of a recruit, and the following conversation ensues:

> "What the f*ck is this, trainee?! Did you get confused when they said boys to the right and girls to the left?! I seriously have to question your manhood here!" There are a million things I could have said that would have been appropriate, but what came out of my mouth horrified even me: "Sir, you can paint a nuclear missile pink, does not make it any less effective!" Another long pause. He places the soap back on my bunk and walks to his office, closes the door and cranks up some Metallica.

Interviewees also mentioned how they continued to enact humor to restore face. One interviewee said:

> I remember on Memorial Day someone told me "Happy Memorial Day," there is nothing happy about this day I am thinking of those that have died and friends I have lost and the fact that they don't get that makes me thing they don't get me yet instead of saying something I just waited for Father's Day, cause this girl was a mom, and told her "Happy Father's Day" I dunno if they got it or not, but it helped me relieve some stress.

Many civilians do not know the difference between Veteran's Day and Memorial Day, and this does serve as a stress for many veterans. Here the interviewee uses humor to restore their face by pretending to be confused by Mother's Day and Father's Day in the same way that the civilian was confused. The fact that Memorial Day is meant to honor the dead could challenge the face of a living servicemember. Veterans used humor after exiting the military to navigate face threats, although responses to this humor varied.

### *Destroying Face With Aggression*

Destroying face with aggression differs from maintaining face through dominance in that the end goal is not to reassert the self, but to reduce the other. Both drill sergeants and servicemembers used this strategy. Drill sergeants used verbal attacks to tear down the face of recruits. In these attacks, drill sergeants were not under face threat but were looking to have fun, at the expense of a recruit. Interviewees characterized such instances as: "I don't think some people could handle it. . . . I think that would be extreme for some people. I think that would be their breaking point. That's why you go through medical [pass a physical to enter the military] and you go through certain things." Somewhat surprising was how recruits internalized these attacks and used them later when communicating with others. These servicemembers were not seeking to preserve face but to destroy the face of others. In the following website story, one recruit attacks another:

> I finally get pissed off waiting on his ass. I throw both hands on my hips and stepped up in his face. "Hey numb nuts, are you gonna get some f*ckin' chow or stand there and stare it down? Get something on your f*ckin' plate and move the f*ck out." This kid actually started crying and pissed his pants.

In this account, the attacker is simply destroying the status of another. In one website story, drill sergeants destroyed the face of a recruit who was disloyal to the platoon.

> Pvt D has the gall to say, "DS, I want to be in third platoon DS." This DS seems a little pissed off by this answer. He walks over, grabs DSs from 1st and 2nd Platoon. He then asks Pvt D to repeat what she has said. . . . DS then asks 3rd platoons DS if he wants Pvt D. 3rd DS goes off "No f*cking way I want a traitor in my platoon. Go stand in the corner." 2nd DS then states the same thing. They left her in the corner crying for the rest of the afternoon. . . . Everyone referred to her as private traitor and was mandated that nobody could communicate with her. She was still moping around though as we went through and graduated.

At the end of this story, recruits mimic the actions of drill sergeants and ostracized the member for this act.

In some cases, verbal attacks directed from the drill sergeants during basic trainings were so harsh that it resulted in grave consequences—specifically, suicide attempts. Accounts of recruits being unable to deal with the verbal attacks of basic training sometimes ended similar to the following:

> The final straw was when the guy decided he'd had enough so he decided to end it all and commit suicide. He had a good plan, he thought. He took a floor buffer, tied the end of the cord around his neck, and threw the buffer off the balcony.

Although this recruit survived the attempted suicide, the offhanded communication illustrates how normalized suicide is during basic training. One particularly disturbing website story was about a drill sergeant teaching recruits how to commit suicide after two failed suicide attempts:

> He [drill instructor] called a school circle to the quarterdeck, and had the recruits stack the three footlockers for a podium, and the DI proceeded to give a class on "How to kill yourself successfully." He then took a canteen, poured the water out of it on the deck, and said "Eyeballs!" . . . "It's not that hard recruits, lookey here . . . this is how you go about it. Not one part, not two parts, you fill the f*cker up. Understand?" At this time, he filled the canteen to the brim with bleach, and said, "You drink this whole thing, every last drop, understand?" Everyone sounded off "YES SIR!" Class was over. That night, a brilliant recruit gave it his all to use this method to go home; however, he filled it halfway with water, and halfway with bleach. He got sick as dog shit and had to go to medical.

This account of both the prevalence and normalization of suicide is troubling. More disturbing, though, is that a drill instructor taught recruits how to commit suicide. One narrative recounted in stories either

implicitly or explicitly was that those who tried or committed suicide "could not hack it" and "I would not want them watching my back in combat."

Interviewees described how they enacted destroyed face both during and after their military service:

> No, socialization, especially in the grunt [ground replacement unit not trained] world, infantry, is different. You always have to be . . . you had to be a d*ck or an asshole just to get along with everybody, and if you weren't, then you got snubbed out.

One interviewee illustrated why destroying face is necessary in the military: "Their yelling helped me become a better airman." Other interviewees talked about the negative effects that learning to destroy face had on life after the military:

> When students are talking in class, I kind of give them that look, and it's like . . . you know. Like, seriously? Then I also look at the professor, and I'm like, why are you allowing them to talk in class also. So I'm like . . . I don't know. Just short of getting up and start screaming at somebody and making a big scene.

In this description, the military veteran describes wanting to attack another, but acknowledging that it will "make a big scene." Other interviewees described how this desire to destroy face were prevalent in health, organizational, interpersonal, and academic settings. In a final illustration of this category, one interviewee admitted:

> I think it's definitely my attitude, too. I mean, it's just kind of, like it's frustrating, it's very frustrating coming back into the civilian world. The military I was used to it, cause like you tell somebody to do something and they do it.

These stories exemplify the difficulties that military members face when performing facework with civilians who do not understand the directness of facework in the military context.

## Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine how military members learned facework while in the military, performed facework after exiting the military, and then to compare these two. Face-negotiation processes revolve around the concept of facework. Facework is various communicative behaviors used to install, maintain, or recover desired public image that may be threatened as a result of social interactions. We found three overarching themes that encompassed stories related to face negotiation in both the collected website stories and participants' interview data. These themes were maintaining face through dominance, restoring face through humor, and destroying face through aggression. The analysis of these themes contributes to the intersection of military communication, socialization, identity, and face negotiation. First, we found that military members quickly adopted the noted facework strategies performed by drill sergeants. Second, we noted that the facework strategies that were adopted continued to be used

after exit. Finally, we found that military training normalized suicide and that suicide may be seen as the only possibility of escape for recruits.

When considering how dominance was asserted to maintain face, it makes sense that drill sergeants must engage in these activities to keep control of recruits and ensure the rapid identity transformation necessary (Howe & Hinderaker, 2018) to be successful in the military. Although Knight's (1990) piece has addressed this issue, it did so by examining the rhetoric of cadence songs. We contribute to Knights work by providing participants illustrations of basic training. We noted active engagement by drill sergeants to maintain face through verbal, physical, and humorous acts. The rules of the military today do not allow for drill sergeants to physically harm recruits, and even cursing is technically against the rules of drill sergeants. Therefore, the only tool a drill sergeant has is the power of their voice, or communication. Through communicative acts, drill sergeants can establish and maintain both power and face. However, such actions have unintended consequences. Recruits that have had their identity stripped during the basic training process must now build a new identity, and it appears that the identity that is built is one that mirrors the drill sergeant who is the new prototypical example of what the recruit should aspire to be in the military. However, recruits are not drill sergeants, and engaging in such verbal exercises could have short- and long-term consequences. When military members leave the military, they communicate with civilians that have never served. If veterans enact these communicative behaviors with nonmilitary individuals, they feel misunderstood, outcast, and different. Civilians may socially exclude veterans because of these encounters, or veterans may choose a life of social isolation to avoid such communicative encounters. Both issues are problematic. Furthermore, when considering the earlier literature on face negotiation and politeness, there is an underlying assumption that both parties to the conversation are mutually concerned for the face of the other. However, in these website stories we see little to no evidence that servicemembers are interested in preserving the face of the other. Some interviewees admit to trying to consider the face of the other, but finding it difficult and possible to do. Thus, the benefits of learning to communicate clearly and effectively in the military, but perhaps not appropriately, might create problems when communicating with civilians after military exit.

Perhaps the military should implement exit training that is as dedicated to making a servicemember a successful civilian as basic training is to making a civilian a servicemember. Ting-Toomey's (2007) implications on the nature of intercultural conflict support this idea of the destructive power of identity transformations as the result of basic training and facework strategies adopted. The research on facework have revealed complexity behind the facework processes in multiple settings (e.g., organizational, healthcare, interpersonal) that can often result in conflicts due to an inability to acknowledge cultural differences and a strong clash of underlying emotions. Previously mentioned factors serve as a display of the convoluted processes involved in facework enactment. Moral insinuations about the consequences of these experiences should be considered by the military about transition from one cultural setting to another. Since the cultural, linguistic, and behavioral norms differ between military and civilian life, it is crucial to develop an intercultural training program based on Ting-Toomey's (2007) recommendations that would aid veterans in the transition processes.

In addition to the maintenance strategies discussed, humor and vulgar attacks were used as facework strategies. These strategies appear to be learned from drill sergeants and carried after military

exit. A review of these stories and interviews revealed that military members often use dark humor and vulgar language. Knight (1990) suggests that the military wants members to be able to laugh at death so that they do not freeze in life-and-death scenarios. Although this may be beneficial to active servicemembers, it could harm veterans when they leave the military as it could lead to misunderstandings and alienation. Many people would recoil at the thought of laughing about suicide, calling someone's mother a filthy name, or challenging the sexuality of another. Yet in the military this behavior is both accepted and encouraged. These stories are only a small sample of some somber and more depraved narratives that we did not feel comfortable including in a scholarly article. The rating system of the website from where stories were gathered has language that many would consider vulgar such as "F*** Off" and gendered "Give That Man a Beer." An analysis of these stories from a gender perspective, like the work done by Van Gilder (2018), could prove fruitful in helping understand the diverse socialization experiences of military members.

If military members learn how to perform facework that society does not accept, they may feel alienated and outcast. It is feasible that such feelings could contribute to the rise of veteran suicide. Bruce (2010) found that veterans are much more likely to commit suicide than nonveterans are. According to the Department of Veteran Affairs, 26.1 veterans committed suicide per 100,000 people in 2016 (Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, 2018). That suicide risk is 1.5 times higher for veterans than for nonveterans, after adjusting for age and gender. The veteran suicide epidemic is a complex issue that needs much more research and attention to see how society can effectively reach out to veterans. We believe scholarly attention must be directed to how military socialization normalizes suicide. In this article, we have reported multiple stories of veterans that did not adapt to the military and therefore tried to commit suicide, and that drill sergeants treated these suicides as normal and, in some cases, encouraged them. If veterans carry learned behaviors, and if they learn during training that committing suicide is a response to lack of adaptation, then perhaps one solution to begin to address the issue of veteran suicide is for the military to reform the communicative practices of basic training.

## Limitations and Future Research

Relying on anonymous website stories could be problematic. Any individual could have gone online and posted a story about basic training. With more than 100 stories analyzed, we believe that most stories we examined are legitimate basic training stories. We can make no causal claims in this study. However, we believe we can supply a base from which scholars can launch further inquiry into this issue. One possible approach could be a longitudinal study assessing members at specific time points throughout the military process. We also believe that a study that actively sought military members to journal their basic training experiences could prove valuable.

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