From the holdings of the Department of Special Collections , Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ

These documents are either in the public domain, or can only be used for educational and research purposes (Fair use) as per U.S. Copyright law (text below). By accessing this file, all users agree that their use falls in the public domain or within fair use as defined by the copyrightlaw. We do not charge any permission or usage fees for the publication of images of material inour collections, including those provided by Princeton University Library, via our website, catalog, or directly from staff.For more information regarding copyright, credit, and citation please review the information onthe Copyright, Credit and Citation Guidelines page of our website.
https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/policies/copyright-credit-and-citation-guidelines. If you have any questions, including how to order higher-quality images from the collection, contact Special Collections Public Services via our Ask Us! Form. https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/ask-us

---

Doctoral Dissertations, 2011-2026 Sociology

2022

Inscribing Identities on Uniformed Bodies

Winfield, Taylor Paige

Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

---

http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp013t945t992

U.S. Copyright law: The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, §108, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of fair use that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve a violation of copyright law. https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf

INSCRIBING IDENTITIES ON UNIFORMED BODIES

Taylor Paige Winfield

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE BY

THE DEPARTMENT OF

SOCIOLOGY

Advisor: Robert Wuthnow

September 2022

© Copyright by Taylor Paige Winfield, 2022. All rights reserved.

Abstract

Drawing on three years of immersive ethnography and over 100 interviews, *Inscribing Identities on Uniformed Bodies* examines the experience of incoming cadet candidates at the United States Military Academy Preparatory School. I investigate how authorities (re)socialize candidates into future officers, and how candidates, whose civilian identities are constrained by a regimented institutional context, refashion self-definitions and embody resistance. I focus on how racial/ethnic, gender, class, sexual, and religious self-definitions shape experiences.

The dissertation presents (re)socialization in three spheres: the cultivation of the Military Body (part 1), the Officer Mind (part 2), and the Warrior Spirit (part 3). Across spheres, I argue that the military transforms civilians into soldiers by taking near-total control over recruits' embodiments. When authorities restrict individuals' bodily habits and force them to adopt new ones, individuals also become restricted in the ways they can express their subjectivities to others, and importantly, themselves. Control over bodies and discourse is what cultivates the soldier, officer, and warrior identities, inculcates discipline, and ultimately develops the willingness to kill and die for the nation.

These spheres also reveal how inequalities are reproduced in the military despite its pressing aim of imposing uniformity and the life-or-death consequences of failing to appoint the most competent leaders. Whiteness, maleness, Christianity, upper/middle-class logics, and heterosexuality are embedded within the Army's standards and procedures. The structure of the military and its interdependent tasks further make it a Petri dish for status processes. Whether candidates resist or comply with military 'ideals,' the total nature of the institution and candidates' dependence on the group make them highly sensitive to how others evaluate them—which is a powerful motivating force to change themselves or leave the institution.

In these ways, *Inscribing Identities* makes theoretical contributions to various fields of inquiry, especially institutional and cultural sociology, and studies of inequality. It shows how institutions juxtapose standardization with the diversity individuals carry with them into the setting, and how gatekeeping organizations systematically reproduce larger social inequalities. The dissertation reveals how social context alters collective understandings of self and presents the human body as a canvas upon which social processes are inscribed, transformed, and maintained.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support of the cadet candidates and leadership at the preparatory school, academic advisors, friends, and family. Thank you to the cadet candidates for inviting me into your lives, sharing with me your experiences, and co-creating knowledge together. It was a true honor to join you for part of your journeys. For confidentiality reasons, I will not share names but thank you to the staff and leadership at the preparatory school for believing in the project and trusting me in your institution. You invited me into your companies, classrooms, and homes. I deeply valued our conversations and the kindness and patience you showed me as I learned about military life. I was particularly struck by your openness and responsiveness to emerging research findings and your commitment to developing interventions to address challenges. At the larger Academy, a big thank you to Morten Ender for introducing me to the West Point world, seeing potential in my project, and for your detailed feedback on my work. Thank you to Ruth Beitler for your unwavering support; to Jacob Absalon for your friendship and for welcoming me into the sociology program; and to the other faculty and staff who facilitated my research.

The Princeton Department of Sociology provided a nurturing home for my graduate work. I was beyond fortunate to have Robert Wuthnow as my advisor. Bob, you were there for me every step of the way—always available to answer questions, problem-solve, and provide feedback on every iteration of my work. I always felt supported and knew I had someone to turn to if I encountered challenges. You shaped me into the sociologist I am today and role-modeled for me what kind of mentor I want to be as a professor. I feel honored to be one of the generations of sociologists of religion and culture you trained.

My dissertation committee was a source of boundless encouragement and wisdom. Miguel Centeno, you were my 'cheerleader' from our first meeting about the project. You introduced me to the sociologies of the military, discipline, and war. You always made time to meet, provided hands-on mentorship, and pushed forward my thinking. Patricia Fernández-Kelly, I cherish the hours we spent together at your keyboard. From preparing my NSF GRFP application to considering each word in articles, you taught me how to be an incisive intellectual and fervent mentor. My current and future scholarship are no doubt indebted to this time together.

The first sociology course I took was "Interpersonal Relations" with Cecilia Ridgeway at Stanford. The class transformed the way I looked at the world and sparked my passion for sociology. Since that class over ten years ago, Cecilia, you have helped me navigate my journey to become a sociologist. Your scholarship has shaped the way I understand organizational life and I am so grateful that you were able to join my dissertation committee.

To my other teachers and mentors at Princeton—Dalton Conley, Mitchell Duneier, Doug Massey, Kim Lane Scheppele, Brandon Stewart, and Janet Vertesi—thank you for your support throughout the graduate program. You all went above and beyond to share with me your wealth of knowledge. Janet, I am especially grateful for you serving as my 'external reader.' I have benefited immensely from learning from you about institutional ethnography, embodiment, and professional development. Amanda Rowe and Donna DeFrancisco, thank you both for your

tireless work as administrators and for making sure everything runs smoothly in the department. To my past mentors at Stanford—Prudence Carter, Tanya Luhrmann, Michael Rosenfeld, and Doug McAdam—thank you for teaching me how to be a social scientist. You have had a lasting influence on my research and thinking. Prudence, thank you for sharing your detailed feedback and insights on the dissertation.

I also could not have completed the program without my brilliant cohort and peers at Princeton. You have become lifelong friends and trusted colleagues along the way. A special thank you to Janna Klostermann and my writing buddies in Ottawa for providing me with an intellectual home in Canada and showing me how to be a 'sacred' reader and co-worker. To my friends in the U.S., Canada, and South Africa, thank you for being there for me to celebrate successes and move through challenges.

A final thanks to my family. Poppy, you loved to tell everyone about your "genius granddaughter" but also to poke fun at me to make sure I did not get too big for my breeches. Your jokes, life lessons ("lead, follow, or get the hell out of the way"), and memories keep me inspired. Nonnie, I don't think any granddaughter could feel as loved as I do by you. Our nightly phone calls have become the highlight of my day. Mom, you taught me how to balance being an intellectual with being a loving human being. Watching you serve others as a doctor taught me that it was important to use our knowledge for good. Thank you for reminding me that "there is nothing I ever need to do to make you more proud of me" and that I am loved regardless of the outcome. Dad—from making you read until you went hoarse to watching your surgery videos—you sparked my curiosity in the world. You taught me how to be passionate about one's job, while still reminding me that it was important to find balance. You were one of the first readers of my dissertation and your excitement and thoughtful comments improved the work; I feel so lucky to a family who deeply engages with my scholarship. Ashley, I could not ask for a better big sister. You are loving, creative, and always there for me when I need you. You and Tristan brought Isabella into my life, who has brought so much joy to the last year of dissertation writing. Rhona, thank you for being such a wonderful mother-in-law. You have been part of my Ph.D. journey every step of the way. Daniel, you are my rock. As my brainstorming partner and 'editor-in-chief,' you have helped me with everything from my graduate school applications to each and every article, and through the whole dissertation. You have taken care of everything else when I am under deadlines and have been an endless source of support. I am so grateful to have you as my life partner.

This research was supported by the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program under Grant No. DGE-1656466 and the National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Award No. SES-1904214. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. The research was also supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Fieldwork Grant (Gr. 9748), the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton, and the Princeton University Departments of African American Studies, Judaic Studies, and Sociology.

The soldierization process starts here. We get all these blank canvases. They're not really blank canvases—they're actually really colorful, dynamic canvases—but militarily, they're blank canvases. We take all these people from all over the world. In the beginning, you want them to identify as a soldier, as a teammate first. From day one, it's about teamwork, leadership, loyalty, discipline, adherence to standards, and attention to detail. You're starting to inculcate all these little important values that we know 10 years down the road are going to make them successful and keep soldiers alive in combat.

It's about stripping away those old bad habits of individuality and selfishness and starting to build the Army values of selflessness, self-sacrifice for the good, for the mission, for the teammates. That is reinforced in everything that we do. It's a crucible. They've got to go through adversity to bond together, to build cohesion, to build unity. They've got to go through difficult things together. If there's no fire, there's no steel on the other end.

It is for a lot of them the hardest thing they've ever had to do. The ruck marches, the runs, the physical training tests—we're going to challenge them in every single way, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically. We're going to challenge their sense of self, their identity, their self-efficacy. Every single one of them finds their flaw here. Our job is to expose it and help them overcome it. They're going through this incredible experiment of pure leadership in a total institution, and we say, "Okay, go. You're in charge. You're a follower. You're a leader. Go." They don't know anything about leadership and followership. We let them learn through all these experiential learning events that they have here—through their experiences in the barracks and the company, the chain of command, sports, every single day, and they don't even know it.

- Captain Kennedy
Personal Interview

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT **3**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS **4**

INTRODUCTION **9**

PART I: THE MILITARY BODY **41**

1 Uniforms 47
2 Halloween 60
3 Height and Weight 61
4 Leather 70
5 Muscles 71
6 Alone and Ugly! 76
7 Hair 77
8 Tattoos 91
9 Military Bearing 92
10 Voices 104
11 Drill and Ceremony 109
12 Pain is an illusion 114
13 'Smoked' 116
14 Docility 122
15 Privacy, Respect, and Clashing Cultures 124
16 Rucking 135
17 Perceived Competence 146
18 Fitness Test 151
19 Don't Ask, Don't Show 164
20 Overheard in the Barracks 172
21 Injuries 173
22 Swimming 183
23 Religious Bodies 192
24 Changing 203
25 Pass 204

PART II: THE OFFICER MIND **217**

26 First Day of School 224
27 No More 'Yes Ma'am' 230
28 Critical Thinking 232
29 Habits of Mind and Transformational Agility 234
30 The Mason-Dixon Line 244
31 Empathetic Imagination 246
32 Gaps 265
33 Privilege Walk 271
34 Top Performers 280
35 Humble Pie 286
36 The Fighters 288
37 Separations 293
38 Let me Axe you a Question 302
39 All I See is Green? 305
40 Mistaken Identity 313
41 Equal Opportunity 314
42 Spectrum Club 325
43 Speaking like Soldiers 329
44 'Put this in your notes' 337
45 'SHARP'd' 338
46 Toleration and Snitching 361

47 A Profession 369

PART III: THE WARRIOR SPIRIT 371

48 Becoming a Warfighter 377
49 Self versus Team 383
50 World War III 391
51 Obstacle Course 392
52 Let's Play Army 398
53 Calm under Pressure 399
54 Battle Drills 403
55 Protecting 'the Female' 412
56 Weapons Training 413
57 The Hunter 433
58 Cadences 434
59 'Kill Them All' 437
60 The Soldier's Creed 441
61 The 'Bad Guys' 442
62 Killing like Candy 453
63 Learning Restraint 454
64 Jesus on the Battlefield 460
65 How to Cope 461
66 Graduation 465

CONCLUSION 477

AFTERWARD: HOME VISITS 516

WORKS CITED 527

APPENDICES 558

Appendix 1: Self-Reported Participant Demographics 558
Appendix 2: Character List 559
Appendix 3: Preparatory School Map 562

Introduction

"Forward, MARCH. Left. Left. Left. Right 'on Left."

We marched out onto the parade field in formation for the first time as a company. The sun was still high in the sky and the heat almost suffocating on the July afternoon. I listened carefully to the drums, stomping down my left foot on the beat. I kept my eyes directly on the feet of the person in front of me. *Don't mess up, don't mess up. Don't stand out.*

We rounded the corner to our company position. The turn was smoother than during our hours of drill and ceremony practice earlier that afternoon.

"Mark time, March*."*

We stopped moving forward and marched in place, attempting to swing our arms nine inches forward and six inches back in sync.

"HALT."

We completed a half-step and moved into the position of attention. We stood still, waiting for the other companies in the battalion to arrive in their positions. Families were sitting in front of us on the packed bleachers, waving and trying to find their children in the sea of green suits. Athena Little, a Black woman from the South, had a perfect view of her parents and she wanted to cry and faint at the same time.

The commandant started speaking over the loudspeaker. I caught bits and pieces of his speech as I concentrated on staying still and breathing through the heat. Barbara Fenton, a Black Hispanic woman from the South, started feeling woozy and slightly swayed back and forth. I wanted to help steady her, but they had told us under no circumstances to fall out of ranks. "If someone faints, do nothing," they had ordered several times. There was no excuse to break formation.

"Today the best of the nation's youth volunteers to support this country in the face of great uncertainty. This will mark the beginning of an incredible journey that will transform them into army officers."

Sweat was dripping into my eyes. I could see it dripping down the neck of the candidate in front of me. To keep still and hold nausea at bay, I started counting his neck hairs and breathing deeply. Kelly Carter, a Black woman from the Midwest, glanced at me out of the corner of her eyes and I quieted my breathing so she would know I was okay. I let my mind wander back to this morning to distract myself from the discomfort.

When the bus pulled in behind the United States Military Academy Preparatory School in West Pont, we were greeted by a swarm of cadets yelling at us to move with a purpose, to hurry up, and cup our hands as we were ushered into the building. They came up close to our faces, shouting with flecks of spit flying out, doing their best to imitate drill sergeants. The performance was effective for those of us who were new to military life and slightly terrified, but comical to the prior service soldiers who had already been through basic training. Today was Reception Day, the day new cadet candidates reported for duty at the preparatory school, and the West Point cadets running basic training with the oversight of the tactical team were eager to shock our systems.[1]

We went back and forth through the white linoleum hallways of the building, up and down stairs, with no knowledge of where we were going. Our lack of knowledge about space

(Ridgeway 2019:160)(Anderson and Willer 2014; Halevy et al. 2012)(Block 2016; Bonilla-Silva 2021; Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011; Bonilla-Silva et al. 2004; Burke 2017; Ray and Purifoy 2019)[1] The cadets were West Point students in their third or fourth year at the Academy. Their roles as 'cadet sergeants' and 'cadet officers' during Cadet Candidate Basic Training was an integral part of their own training to become army officers. All West Point cadets are required to do a 'leadership detail' before graduation. The cadet cadre received two weeks of intensive training before Reception Day from the preparatory school tactical team (e.g., battalion commander with rank Major, company commanders with rank Capitan, and company sergeants with rank Sergeant First Class). The term 'cadre' itself is a military word to refer to a group of leaders, especially during formal training.

went hand-in-hand with our ignorance about time—we were not told what was coming next or when it would end. The message was clear: *you are not in control.* We received uniforms, height and weight were measured, and tattoos checked for gang signs. Up and down and around the building. We waited and moved to the cadets' commands. The only pause from the yelling was when we stopped to give blood for DNA testing. Lisbeth Sokolov, an Asian woman from the South, was the most relaxed she had been all day when the needle was in her arm because no one was screaming at her. Athena was disturbed when they took her blood without telling her what they were going to do with it: *It's still my body! They took my blood, they took my DNA, and now they were like, 'you're pretty much our property.'*

My mind snapped back to the present moment as the chaplain took the microphone to lead us in the ceremonial prayer for the parade.

"Let us pray."

We dropped our heads down on the command as we had been instructed during drill and ceremony practice. A few candidates were off and there was a bit of a head bobble effect. Athena grimaced slightly. She had whispered to me earlier when we first learned these movements, "What about the atheists? Why do they need to bow their heads to pray? What happened to freedom of and from religion?"

The chaplain continued. "All are given life and the freedom to fight for the American way of life. Without the soldiers, there is no way we could have this." He blessed the families and told them their loved ones had had, "quite the experience today." He wished the candidates strength in character, arms, and spirit.

"Amen."

Amen was the command to raise our heads.

The commandant took the microphone again and told us that we would be introduced to the basic military conduct and physical training during our three weeks of basic training. “It is demanding but not insurmountable. This is the leadership factory.” After three weeks of basic training, we would transition into the academic year, where we would all be facing our own battles with the books.

“Present ARMS.”

I shot my arm up at the command. I noticed the arm of the woman in front of me was trembling.

“Order ARMS.”

We snapped our arms back down to the position of attention. It was time for the ceremonial oath of enlistment. We were told to raise our right hands and repeated after the commandant.

“I, _____, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.”

The real oath ceremony had taken place after the blood station in a classroom with an American flag spread across the blackboard. Prior service candidates left the room to continue in-processing, as they were already in the armed forces. A West Point lawyer handed out documents and told us where to initial. When he handed me the form, I told him that I did not need one, as I was a civilian researcher and was not actually enlisting. He looked me up and down, a bit confused, shrugged, and confirmed with the room that we understood the form: we

had to fulfill the requirements of preparatory school but did not have any obligation to the United States Army afterward. However, once we took the oath, we would officially be enlisted soldiers and subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. He explained this was the oath that counted, the oath during the parade was purely ceremonial. He asked if there were any questions; there were none. The candidates stood, raised their right hands, and took the oath, repeating after him. I stood silently in deference to the moment.

"WELCOME TO THE ARMY!"

It hit Addison Martin, a Black football player from the South, like a ton of bricks: *Man, I'm in the Army. Fuck.* He was not shocked, mostly he was angry with himself for letting his parents push him so far into something he did not want to do. Yet, he was here now, and he would not quit. He had never quit anything in his life, and he was not going to start today. He picked a place on the concrete wall, stared at it, and blocked everything—including his emotions—out.

A cadet yelled at Ben Hall, another Black football player from the South, for smiling. He could not help it: *Wow, this is legit now. Shoot I'm a soldier for real*.

Chelsea Melton, a White woman from the South, was brimming with joy. Finally, the day had come.

Athena thought, *Oh my God, I'm really in the military right now. I'm really a soldier. This is not what I really want to do. I just want to go to college and do my thing.*

One question flashed through Kelly's mind: *what the hell did I sign up for?*

The parade was almost over. We were singing the Army song—well, attempting to sing the song. "March along, sing our song, with the Army of the free…" I could hear those around me mumbling and stumbling over the words, but luckily the band played so loudly that no one

could hear our discordant voices. The last drumbeats ended the official parade and the leadership marched us off the field.

My eyes glanced up at the families sitting in the bleachers watching the Reception Day parade. I thought about how as we marched on the field and stood at attention, to them we likely represented a unified presence. We were all wearing matching uniforms, stood in the same positions, and even had uniform movements. However, to the well-trained observer, our movements were sloppy and our uniforms "jacked up." I overheard a group of military officers laughing loudly as we turned off behind the preparatory school about the ridiculous movements they had seen us doing during the parade. Scratching faces, swatting bugs, fidgeting. How far we had to go! Within the ranks, our thoughts were far from unified: some candidates were proud, honored to finally be wearing their nation's uniform. Others felt confused; they thought they wanted this but now it all seemed so strange. Others were trying to figure out how they let their parents' dream of them going to West Point get this far.

Inscribing Identities tells the stories of young men and women as they embark on their journeys to become soldiers and future officers in the United States Army. It follows them from their first day at the United States Military Academy Preparatory School, through basic training and the academic year, until graduation. Throughout the dissertation, I examine how the preparatory school works to (re)socialize[2] the cadet candidates into military members, and how the candidates,[3] whose civilian identities are constrained by a regimented institutional context,

[2] Although West Point has moved away from coercive and attritional training models towards more a developmental approach (Ender et al. 2021; Janowitz 1960), I use the term '(re)socialize' to emphasize that becoming a soldier entails learning new bodily and mental habits that often differ from those prevalent in civilian society. Embodying these habits is a crucial way for defining group membership.

[3] I will refer to the cadet candidates as 'candidates' throughout the dissertation.

refashion self-definitions and embody resistance. I ask: what is the nature of institutionalized discipline and how does it form bodies and minds?[4] How do institutions that value uniformity and meritocracy contend with the diverse identities that individuals bring with them into the setting? And critically, how do institutionalized individuals experience, conform to, and resist restrictions and perceived inequalities?

Although all incoming recruits to the preparatory school face restrictions, *Inscribing Identities* focuses on how racial/ethnic,[5] gender, class, sexual, and religious self-definitions shape the socialization process. I take an intersectional approach to see how these identity characteristics became salient, crisscross, and interconnect in different spheres of institutional life· (Crenshaw 2017). As a full participant, I joined candidates in all aspects of their daily lives at preparatory school—from the academic classes to physical fitness tests, battle drills, and qualifying on the range—to be alongside them as they navigated institutional pressures and experienced my own changes. My ability to stand with the candidates in the ranks over three years allowed me to move beyond abstract, theoretical ideas about power and the replication of inequalities inside ostensibly meritocratic institutions to study these processes firsthand in our everyday lives at the preparatory school.

Understanding how the military as an institution aims to shape incoming recruits and the

[4] Drawing on theories that underscore the habitual and bodily nature (Foucault 2012; Weber 1978), I define discipline (n.) as *inward obedience to a set of expectations that is enacted through habitual, embodied practices.* I orient towards it as a phenomenon that exists at the intersection of physiological, psychological, and cultural processes (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Discipline is developed and exercised; it is not an innate condition with which one is born (Wuthnow 2020). The verb ('to discipline') is the corresponding attempt *to correct and shape behavior to train individuals in inward obedience.* While this may involve punishment, the two processes are not synonymous. Disciplining is inherently corrective and, in some cases, may lead to limited empowerment (Donohue 1993; Parreñas 2021).

[5] Sociologists often distinguish between race and ethnicity. Racial categories may include people from multiple ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds (Carter 2005:183). In the dissertation, I will mostly discuss race (Black, White, Asian) as this was how participants typically identified themselves and the framework they used when discussing dynamics at the preparatory school. Black candidates included those who identified as African American, African, Africano (Spanish African), and Caribbean. Candidates with Spanish or Indigenous Latin American heritage included those who identified as Hispanic, Africano, and Latin American.

complexities that emerge along identity lines is crucial in contemporary society. In the last 40 years, the populations entering public, private, and governmental organizations have become increasingly diverse. Professions and settings that were once exclusive to only the highest status individuals (e.g., White[6], upper-class men) now host those from all backgrounds. Yet, institutions continue to have a central aim to homogenize incoming populations and ensure that they become 'cogs' that fit smoothly within a larger machinery. Standardization and conformity are main objectives, enabling them to successfully mold and later predict subjects' behavior. As such, modern institutions must contend with how to homogenize progressively diverse populations.

In no other environment is the pressure between standardization and exponential diversification more acute than in the military. Military authorities rely on physical and mental conformity to direct troops during combat and successfully predict behavior in chaotic situations. Service members are the only professionals in the United States that are given 'killing authority'—the mission to destroy enemies of the state. With 'killing authority' comes great moral responsibility and the need to walk the line between ordered 'kills' and war crimes. Officers not only have to align themselves with superior officers and the U.S. constitution, but also to replicate institutional culture in their units.

At the same time, the armed forces are also arguably the most diverse profession in America. The military was the first major institution to desegregate in the United States and Black men and women are currently overrepresented in the enlisted forces compared to their population in the United States (Rohall, Ender, and Matthews 2017). There are also growing

[6] I capitalize White in line with scholars who argue that capitalization is important to emphasize the nature of "Whiteness" as a social category, draw attention to its perceived neutrality, and refuse to "grant it the power to maintain its invisibility" (Ewing 2020).

numbers of Hispanic/Latin-American, Asian, women, and openly LGBTQ+ individuals who serve. Policy changes in the military over the last 10 years—such as the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, women's admission into combat roles, new accommodations for ethnic and religious minorities, and the back and forth on the integration of transgender individuals—have brought questions about diversity, inclusion, and bodily accommodation within the institution to the forefront of national discourse. These policies permit soldiers to express some of their individual identities; however, they also fracture popular conceptions of soldiers, femininity, and masculinity, raising new opportunities for internal distress and interpersonal conflict. Some military personnel are particularly concerned about the impact of these policies on group cohesion—permitting visible differences among soldiers will make the formation of a single, salient group identity more difficult.[7]

Inscribing Identities reveals how these challenges play out in the day-to-day lives of incoming soldiers at the preparatory school. The stories show how the military socializes civilians into soldiers by taking near-total control over recruits' embodiments. Identity is more than just a matter of beliefs—it is also comprised of taken-for-granted bodily practices that reinforce social position and group membership (Bourdieu 2013; Davidman 2015). When authorities restrict individuals' existing bodily practices and force them to adopt new ones, individuals also become restricted in the ways they can express their identities to others, and importantly, themselves. Their sense of self may begin to shift even if they are resisting changes. In the military context, authoritarian control over bodies and discourse is what cultivates the

[7] There are discussions about how diversity relates to both 'social cohesion'—wherein group members like each other, spend time together, and feel emotionally close—and 'task cohesion'—wherein group members are committed to working together towards a common goal. While some argue that increased heterogeneity leads to a decrease in social cohesion, others have shown that this heterogeneity is not detrimental to and may even improve task cohesion, which tends to be the strongest predictor for group performance (MacCoun and Hix 2010; Siebold 2007).

soldier, officer, and warrior identities; inculcates discipline; encourages thinking in the interest of the mission; and ultimately develops the willingness to kill on behalf of the country.

The dissertation's focus on moments of tension between institutional socialization efforts and the lived experiences of the candidates illuminates how inequalities are reproduced in the military despite its pressing aim for uniformity and life-or-death consequences of failing to appoint the most competent leaders. Whiteness, maleness, Christianity, upper/middle-class logics, and heterosexuality are historically embedded within the standards, practices, and procedures of the Army and particularly the officer corps (Dansby, Stewart, and Webb 2001; Janowitz 1960:218). The structure of the military and its interdependent, life-or-death tasks further make it a Petri dish for status processes. As is seen in the larger United States, candidates who belong to specific identity groups (men, White, and middle and upper-class) are afforded more status in interactions at the preparatory school than others (women, non-White, and working-class). In these ways, candidates' prior identities shape their experiences, emotions, and outcomes within the preparatory school. Whether candidates comply with or are resistant to military 'ideals,' the all-encompassing nature of the context and candidates' dependence on the group make them highly sensitive to how others evaluate them—which is a powerful motivating force to change themselves or leave the institution.

These arguments have important implications for policy design. Conflicting identities and status bias in institutional settings can produce irreparable damage when knowledge about the dynamics is slim (Dubler 2013). Regardless of one's personal or political opinion of the military, there remains value in improving conditions for low-status and marginalized groups in the armed forces. These groups continue to enlist in large numbers (in what some have referred to as a "poverty draft") and those who join often have better outcomes than their civilian counterparts

(Burk and Espinoza 2012; Gupta and Lundquist 2013; JooHee 2017; Lundquist 2004; Mariscal 2007; Teachman and Tedrow 2008). There is extensive evidence that the military serves as an avenue for stable employment for those who experience poor economic and social conditions and provides a "bridging environment" for less advantaged groups to gain social legitimacy in the United States (Browning, Lopreato, and Poston 1973; De Angelis 2017; Fredland and Little 1985; Lopreato and Poston 1977). Given that the military holds immense control over the physical and verbal actions of service members, new guidelines have the potential to create rapid and pervasive change. *Inscribing Identities* concludes with policy recommendations that have the potential to not only improve the day-to-day experience of underrepresented and marginalized groups in the military but also radiate change into civilian society.

In what follows, I explain the national and local context in which the dissertation is set. I share a brief history of the preparatory school and its current mission and demographics. Then I outline my theoretical framework which combines scholarship on institutions, culture, and inequality. The introduction ends with a note on methodology and an overview of the dissertation.

National and Local Context

Inscribing Identities is set in the context of militarization in the United States. Militarization is "a step-by-step process by which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria "(Enloe 2000:291). Anthropologist Catherine Lutz (2001) argued that all Americans "inhabit an army camp" in the post-World War II era—the country is in a constant state of war readiness (Lutz 2001:3). The military is equated with national security—it protects against foreign enemies and disruptions to the domestic social order (Enloe 1983). It also promotes American "interests" abroad, which scholars have called a

"new imperialism" (Harvey 2005). The state, in turn, invests vast amounts of financial, physical, and human capital into the military. The military is the largest employer in the United States, with 1,326,200 Department of Defense service members on active duty and 1,038,198 ready reservists (Department of Defense 2019a).

The armed forces are also one of the most diverse professions in America (Rohall et al. 2017). The military was the first major institution to desegregate in the United States as part of Truman Executive Order 9981 in 1948, which stated that, "segregation as a form of racial discrimination" is outlawed in the military.[8] The demographic composition of the armed forces continues to be disproportionately working-class, White men from the South; however, Black men and women are overrepresented in the enlisted forces compared to their population in the United States (Rohall et al. 2017). Other groups that were historically marginalized or underrepresented in the military, such as women, LGBTQ+, Hispanic/Latin-American, and Asian individuals, are growing in number. Yet, diversity cannot be equated with inclusion. For example, the overrepresentation of Black soldiers is not mirrored in the officer corps—Black service members make up 19% of the enlisted population, but only 9% of officers (Department of Defense 2019a). Some scholars further show that service members of color historically received lower rates of promotion and higher exposure to danger (Badillo and Curry 1976; Butler 1976:197; Hauser 1978; Moskos 1973).

Despite military slogans such as "all I see is green," increased diversity in the armed forces and external political pressure has challenged the institution to meet the needs of those who do not fit into the historical image of a soldier. The military struggles with how to integrate new populations into the institution without "altering what it means to be a soldier, a man and a

[8] This change occurred before the U.S. supreme court ended school segregation in 1954 and allowed interracial marriage in 1967.

woman" (Enloe 1983:119). Gender is central to soldiering because combat is integral to ideas of manhood and hyper-masculinity—the amplification of conventionally "masculine traits" such as physical strength, aggression, dominance, heterosexuality, competition, and violence—is prevalent in the military sphere.[9] Conventional gender and sexual ideologies about the proper performance of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' operate alongside racial ideologies. Whiteness, like masculinity, is embedded in the Western military system: historically the Black soldier was useful as long as he was separate, controlled, and did not present an immediate biological danger (Fanon 2008). Feminist political theorist Cynthia Enloe (1983) posited that women were recruited to the Post-Vietnam army to "*dilute* [B]lack males' potential dominance of the rank and file" (137). Class divides are also ingrained in the American armed forces, as the enlisted and officer corps have largely been divided between those from lower and middle-class backgrounds. Religion too has historically been a part of the military, with Protestant chaplains present in units since the Revolutionary War and Catholic and Jewish chaplains joining their ranks in the Mexican-American War and Civil War respectively (Stahl 2017).

Inscribing Identities examines how larger dynamics of militarization and diversity and inclusion manifest within a microcosm of the armed forces, the United States Military Academy Preparatory School. Each year, the United States Military Academy's Admissions Committee selects approximately 230 applicants who show high potential but are not yet qualified for direct admission to the Academy and offers them a place at the United States Military Academy Preparatory School.[10] There are many reasons why applicants are sent to the preparatory school,

[9] Women have, however, always played an important role in the U.S. military. Even in wars when they were prohibited from serving, they often were on the frontline as were civilian nurses (Revolutionary, Civil, and Spanish American Wars). During World War I and II, women were in administration and medical units and as noncombatant auxiliaries (Dansby, Steward, Webb 2001).

[10] In their decision to apply to and accept admission from the preparatory school, all candidates to some extent had volunteered to enter the institution. Candidates have a variety of reasons for choosing to apply to West Point and attend the preparatory school, as will be discussed throughout the dissertation.

but typically it is because they did not meet the academic requirements for admission. Other candidates are sent to the preparatory school because they were unable to pass the candidate fitness assessment, had recent injuries or medical concerns, or were unable to secure a congressional nomination. The mission of the preparatory school is to prepare the cadet candidates academically, physically, and militarily for admission to and graduation from the United States Military Academy.

A form of the preparatory school for West Point has existed since 1916 when Congress authorized President Woodrow Wilson to appoint enlisted men to West Point. In response, General John Pershing established three programs in Germany and France for enlisted army soldiers who wished to take the entrance exam.[11] More preparatory programs emerged over the next 30 years to provide more officers for the world wars. The programs were attached to army installations; however, during World War II the programs relocated to civilian colleges because of the strain on military instructors. After the war, the Army regained control over the preparatory programs and merged them into an independent military program.

In 1946, the United States Military Academy Preparatory School found its first home in Stewart Army Airfield in New York. The first commandant, Colonel Frank Davis, worked closely with the superintendent of West Point, General Maxwell Taylor, to develop the curriculum. Their curriculum, built around the three pillars of academics, athletics, and military proficiency, is the foundation of the present-day preparatory program. The preparatory school opened to civilian men applicants in 1965 and women in 1976.[12] In 1996, the preparatory school

[11] Applicants had to be high school graduates, unmarried, and between the ages of 17 and 22.

[12] Twenty women entered the preparatory school in January, 1976 for a modified program that would allow them to graduate with the cohort of men who started in summer 1975. Six of the women were admitted to USMA, including one who became the first Black woman graduate of the Academy (Pat Locke, email with Melanie Wong Dodge, June 12, 2022).

moved from being under the Division of Personnel of the Army to being under West Point. In response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, many of the military instructors were pulled from the school because the Army needed more personnel. As a result, academic positions were filled by civilians, many of whom were veterans. The preparatory school moved twice more before settling into its permanent home on the West Point military installation in July 2011.[13]

The current preparatory school student body is comprised of prior enlisted soldiers ("priors") and invitational reservists, civilians who are joining the military for the first time. The candidates are between 17 and 22 years old, as the maximum age of entry into West Point is 23. Priors make up approximately 21% of incoming candidates and are sent to the preparatory school directly from Active Duty, Reserves, or National Guard units.[14] Their tenure in the military ranges from the recent completion of basic training to five years of active duty and occupation specialties span from combat arms to support. Priors are recommended for admission by their military supervisors in the field. Invitational reservists make up the remainder of the student body. Although they officially enlist in the military and are subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, if invitational reservists decide to leave the preparatory school, they owe no additional time or service to the military. Many of the invitational reservists are recruited to the Academy for athletics, including football, basketball, wrestling, lacrosse, and track. Recruited athletes tend to make up approximately 45% of the student body. Women (though they are called "females" in the military environment) comprise approximately 18% of the student body.[15]

Each year, over 50% of the preparatory school population typically identifies as

[13] The preparatory school moved from Stewart Army Airfield to Fort Belvoir, Virginia in 1957 and then to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey in 1975.
[14] Demographics are based on the average over four or five academic years, depending on specific statistic.
[15] Military standards and personnel typically use the language of sex (female, male); however, I will use gender (woman, man) in my own writing and analysis unless referring to policies or quoting participants.

Black/African American (~45%), Hispanic/Latin American (~ 10%), Asian (~ 4%), American Indian/Alaska Native (~1%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (~1%), or 'Other' (~1%).[16] This high proportion of non-White candidates is intentional as West Point sees the preparatory school as playing a vital role in enhancing the diversity, "of both the student body at West Point and the Officer Corps of the Army."[17]

Candidates stem from a wide range of class backgrounds: from the children of multimillionaire CEOs and general officers to those of single parents on disability and day laborers. Overall, the candidate population was largely middle class. Several candidates were either first or second-generation American immigrants in each cohort and small populations of openly LGBQT+ individuals and religious minorities. Out of the 230 who enter the preparatory school each year, about 190 matriculate into the Academy.[18] The purpose and demographics of the preparatory school make it the ideal location to examine how gender, racial/ethnic, sexual, religious, and class identities shape military socialization. See Appendix 1 for the demographics of the research participants.

In these ways, *Inscribing Identities* offers a portrait of coming of age in contemporary America. Candidates come from all corners of the United States and its territories, from rural ghettos to suburbia, from military installations in Honolulu to inner-city blocks in Chicago.

---

[16] These are the official race/ethnicity categories offered to candidates to select on forms. I will use the term 'Black' throughout the dissertation instead of 'African American' because this is how candidates typically referred to themselves and a few were second-generation African immigrants who did not identify as African American. Please note that candidates could select to identify with more than one category.

[17] See https://www.westpoint.edu/usmaps/history. Although West Point has been open to Black soldiers since the 1870s and to women since 1976, these groups remain underrepresented at the Academy, and in many cohorts, their rate of attrition is higher than the rates of White men. For example, the attrition rate for Black men was 38.6% in 2016, as compared to 18.7% for White men (West Point Diversity Conference 2017).

[18] About 20 leave during the academic year (~50% leaving voluntarily for motivation or personal reasons; 20% for academic separations; 15% for misconduct separations; and others for military, physical, or medical reasons). Approximately 15 do not receive admission to USMA at the end of the year, for medical, misconduct, physical, or academic reasons. The others decline their admission offers. See Part II Chapter 35 'Separations' for more information on separations.

Candidates in the dissertation grapple with questions that face young Americans across contexts, such as paying for college and discovering their own paths and beliefs after leaving home (Arnett 2006). They are also forced to contend with police violence, domestic terrorism, Islamophobia, sexism, and other issues that are plaguing the nation. As such, the dissertation illuminates larger questions of militarization, equity, and equality in modern America, and how individuals come to make sense of the world around them and their place within it.

Theoretical Framework

Inscribing Identities sits at the intersection of scholarship on institutions, culture, and inequality to explore: (1) how institutions socialize individuals; and (2) how identity attributes shape outcomes. In this section, I will briefly introduce each subfield and explain how they will shape my analysis.

All-Encompassing Institutions

Sociologist Erving Goffman's scholarship on the total institution transformed the way scholars study military socialization (Goffman 1961; Heinecken 2015:10). Total institutions are settings that break down the spatial barriers between work, home, and play—residents conduct all spheres of life inside of the institutional boundaries under constant surveillance and are cut off from wider society. Residents are forced to submit to authorities and follow a strict schedule. These organizations often impose discipline as a method of security and control (Centeno and Enriquez 2016; Cunha 2014; Foucault 2012; Garland 2001). The military contains many of the defining features of a total institution, particularly in training environments.[19] Indeed, sociologist David Rohall and colleagues defined the military as a "democratic anomaly": the armed forces

[19] Military recruits must rise, act, eat, and sleep according to the orders of their chain of command, are under nearly omnipresent surveillance, and there exists a clear social boundary between the authority—non-commissioned officers and officers—and new soldiers.

"defend democracy yet maintain the least democratic organizational structure in existence" (2017:6).

The contemporary United States military, however, falls on the more open end of total institutions: contemporary soldiers are recruited volunteers that may exit after they have served their term, and over time they move up the hierarchy of the military (within their respective enlisted or commissioned track), and outside of training and deployment they may leave the institution for periods of time (Davies 1989; Ellis 2021). As such, I define it as an all-encompassing institution to account for the stark differences between military institutions and other total institutions, such as prisons (Winfield 2022).

The preparatory school fits smoothly into the category of an all-encompassing institution. The long building has three major wings—for the barracks, academics, and athletics—that are connected.[20] The candidates follow a strict schedule set by authorities and stay within the confines of the building. They are subject to strict regulations for behavior and appearance. At the same time, the voluntary nature of enrollment into the preparatory school, the off-post pass privileges candidates receive during the year, and the fact that non-prior enlisted candidates can withdraw at any time, the institution is not completely closed off to the outside world.

Culture and Embodiment

Scholarship on culture, in particular embodiment, explains how institutionalization may shape recruit identity. As mentioned above, identity is more than just a matter of beliefs—it is made up of taken-for-granted bodily practices and positions that reinforce social position and group membership (Bourdieu 2013; Davidman 2015).

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu theorized that children are socialized to take on community-

[20] See Appendix 3 for an institutional map.

based practices, creating an embodied set of dispositions (*habitus*) that force them to think and act in specific ways as adults. *Habitus* is reflected in bodily postures, facial and emotional expressions, language use, ideologies, and moral intuitions, as well as cognitive schemes of perception and classification. Performing these behaviors is a critical way in which group members constitute, maintain, and communicate their identities and ideologies, and differentiate between in- and out-group members. Although scholars no longer accept that people hold a single system of embodied dispositions, but rather a complex system of multiple (and sometimes conflicting) systems, the concept of *habitus* is still useful for understanding how socialization can contribute to the enduring styles of thought and behavior that shape identity (Lizardo 2004, 2016; Smith and Adamczyk 2020).

More recent literature has revealed how adults can intentionally adopt a new *habitus* by altering their bodily practices when joining a new identity group (Davidman 2015; Mahmood 2012; Tavory and Winchester 2012; Vertesi 2015; Wacquant 2003; Winchester 2008). For example, religious rituals, such as head-covering, veiling, and prayer not only external symbols of a new identity, but they also lead converts to cultivate new moral dispositions, such as modesty and submissiveness (Mahmood 2012; Winchester 2008). Religious practitioners can also exit an identity group by ceasing to practice ritualized behaviors, and thus, *disinscribe* the belief system (Davidman 2015).

Just as individuals can intentionally change their embodied dispositions by altering their bodily practices, scholars have theorized that authorities can force individuals to change their dispositions by controlling bodily practices. Philosopher Michael Foucault (1977), in particular, argued that institutions can force individuals to move and behave in ways that make them submissive to institutional ideologies (Foucault 2012). By controlling minute movements,

authorities may come to have power over subjectivities and ultimately identities.

Goffman outlined how this process might work in a total institution: incoming residents are "trimm[ed]" to fit smoothly into "the administrative machinery of the establishment" (1961:18). They are given new clothing and strict instructions on how to maintain their appearances and are "stripped" of signals that broadcasted their prior identity in the outside world (Goffman 1961:20). They lose access to the tools in their old "identity kit" and are forced to adopt the tools in a new one (Goffman 1961:21). Others have also argued that in these contexts minds become docile to institutional domination as minute movements are controlled, objects take on new affordances, and discourse is restricted (van Dijk 1993; Fanon 2008; Gibson 1977; Harding 2000; Rappaport 1999). Within this framework, the strict control over appearance, bodily practices, and styles of communication in a military institution would result in recruits surrendering "all aspects of their civilian identities" to their new identity as soldiers and an embodiment of military values (Dyer 2002:148).

Cumulative Inequalities

Although existing scholarship presents socialization as a homogeneous process, I focus on three primary avenues through which social identities may influence military recruits' outcomes: (1) the relationship between status beliefs and perceived competence; (2) patterns of inequality in the United States; and (3) conflicting authorities over morality and action.

Status is a comparative ranking of individuals in terms of the respect, honor, and social esteem afforded to them in social interactions (Ridgeway 2019:1). Status hierarchies form almost immediately in cooperative, goal-orientated groups based on the basic status norm and

shared status beliefs.[21] The basic status norm is that those who are most useful for contributing to the group goal should be given prominence and attention in group interactions. Shared status beliefs determine who is considered 'useful' based on social differences in certain cultures.[22] As such, there are goal-specific competencies—i.e., who is seen as most useful on a sports team versus in the math classroom—and general competencies—i.e., who is seen as most useful across tasks (Berger et al. 1977; Berger and Webster 2018; Ridgeway 2019).

Extensive research on Status Characteristics and Expectations States Theory has found that those who belong to certain social identity groups (men, White, and professionals) are afforded more status in groups than others (women, non-White, and blue-collar workers).[23] As such, these social categories of race, gender, occupation, and class impact not only general competencies but also who is assumed will be competent at specific skills (i.e., math ability, athleticism, warfighting) (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980; Correll and Ridgeway 2003; Fiske et al. 2002). Even when individuals have specific skills and training that are useful for the goal, if they are from a social group that is perceived as generally less competent, they will be afforded relatively less influence and comparatively worse evaluations in the group (Ridgeway

[21] Within these groups, members have a rational interest in deferring to those who seem most useful to maximize the group's chance at success (increasing rewards for all group members). They also have an interest in being influential in the group to maximize their control over the eventual rewards (Ridgeway 2019).

[22] Status hierarchies function as a sociocultural schema to help individuals manage the tension between cooperative interdependence (i.e., humans are reliant on one another for their needs and wants in life) and competitive interdependence (i.e., how will rewards in the group, in terms of honor, attention, esteem, and materials be divided?). The process relies on a norm for status allocation and shared status beliefs about social differences that are believed to indicate worthiness or value for achieving the group goal. Sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway compares the norm for status allocation to the social grammar for organizing status relations and the status beliefs as the vocabulary through which the grammar can be enacted in varying social circumstances (Ridgeway 2009:3). See Fiske 2011 for the close relationship between status and competence and status beliefs and stereotypes (also Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007; Fiske et al. 2002).

[23] Scholars are unable to know the *exact* reasons why societies come to see certain social groups as more competent over time. Many connect it to who has gained control over the resources in society whether from the historical division of labor between the genders, or legacies of who had access to guns, technology, and slavery. For example, men's upper body strength and the limited mobility of lactating mothers lead men to have greater control over the production of needed resources in earlier societies. Their control over resources later translated to beliefs that men writ large were more competent workers than women. Once this initial status belief formed, it was then reinforced through time as people continued to see men in positions of power (Ridgeway 2019).

2011).

These dynamics often result in negative emotions, lower self-esteem, and a weaker sense of belonging for those who are lower status in a group.[24] Low-status group members may not personally agree with their position in the status hierarchy, but the hallmark of shared status beliefs is those from all social backgrounds acknowledge that these beliefs are what 'most people believe' and as such, typically use them to guide their interactions. When those who are lower status vie for resources, influence, and leadership positions, they often experience backlash as group members work to enforce the established hierarchy (Rudman et al. 2012). Moreover, sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway (2019) has shown how the connotations of status in terms of worthiness and esteem *legitimate* unequal outcomes for those of different social groups because of perceived 'merit'—because those who are higher status in the group are perceived as deserving of and earning their positions, their greater access to valuable resources and positions of power are seen as fair.[25]

The intensity and life-or-death implications of the goal-orientation in the military—to protect the United States from enemies foreign and domestic—and the necessity of joint, coordinated behavior to achieve this mission make status processes particularly salient within the preparatory school. Although the candidates are several years away from commissioning and deployment, as soldiers they are still assessed on how competent they will be in contributing to this goal. Tasks within the institution, such as physical performance and marksmanship, are

[24] High-status people receive more praise, positive feedback and body language, rewards, credit when things go well in the group. On the other hand, low-status people are given less attention, more criticism, and blame when things go wrong in the group. These dynamics shape the differing emotional outcomes for those in the groups. See the following studies for examples: Anderson et al. 2012; Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015).

[25] This process relates to durable inequality because when status hierarchies develop in workplaces, schools, government and health institutions, and other organizations that distribute valued life resources (income, education, healthcare) those who are perceived as low status receive less access to these resources, which later reinforces to shared social beliefs about their lower competences in an achievement orientated society like the United States (Ridgeway 2019).

oriented toward preparing for battlefield success. Moreover, as future officers, the candidates are also assessed on their competence for making strategic and moral decisions for a unit, which is reflected in academic performance and adherence to the honor code. Beliefs about mission-specific competencies and general competencies based on social identities are particularly linked in the military because the armed forces have historically relied on the gender, racial, and class-based divisions of labor (Dovidio et al. 1988; Enloe 1983; Fanon 2008).

The social identities that influence prominence, participation, evaluation, and sense of belonging in a group due to status processes are linked to broader patterns of material inequality in the United States.[26] Feminist scholarship rejects the assumption that behavioral differences are rooted in biological differences and views gender as a dynamic performance and interactional achievement (Butler 2011; West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987); however, mainstream society continues to ideologically and materially value traits traditionally associated with maleness. 'Women's work' is underpaid; women are considered less competent overall; and "feminine" characteristics are attributed to marginalized and queer men (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway et al. 2009). When women take on behaviors associated with conventional masculinity, their efforts are often met with harassment and sexual violence. In general, those who violate normative gender performance, which is rooted in biological sex and heterosexuality, face social sanctions. These sanctions have historically been especially violent and severe towards those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Ethnic and racial identities are also fluid and performed—they are forged in the interactions between citizens and the state, and between color and Whiteness to the extent that

[26] Material inequality stems from who has control over material resources in a society and access to positions of power in the institutions that distribute these resources, such as education and healthcare institutions, government, and workplaces. See Ridgeway 2019; Tilly 1998.

Whiteness is a tool of state expansion and ordering (Bashkow 2006; Da Silva 2007; Fanon 2008; Hartigan 1997). While there is immense cultural diversity between and within ethnic and racial groups in the United States, the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and ongoing racism and discrimination against Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latin-American, and Asian groups in the country have greatly influenced contemporary identities. Structurally, historical discrimination has created areas of concentrated poverty—isolated bubbles of joblessness, violence, poor healthcare, and educational failures that continue to lead to cumulative inequalities (Massey 1993). As the preparatory school is an educational establishment, patterns of disparate educational opportunities along racial and ethnic lines are relevant to institutional outcomes.

Unlike gender and race, class is not an 'essentialized' identity in the United States. Class is not seen as permeant and rooted in the body—it is viewed as a more flexible and achieved state (Ridgeway 2014, 2019). Though class identity is a performance, like gender and race, that one reveals through their dress, language use, accent, and cultural tastes, it is more socially permissible for one to change their performance over time. Nevertheless, scholarship has shown how socioeconomic class influences children's sense of entitlement and institutional navigation, particularly in educational settings (Bowles and Gintis 1976).[27] Middle-class parents and schools encourage children to express their opinions and advocate for themselves with authorities, whereas working-class families and schools encourage children to follow directions, keep opinions to themselves, and act deferentially toward authorities (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Calarco 2018; Lareau 2002; Metz 1989). Dissimilar class-based childhood socialization may lead incoming recruits to behave heterogeneously during training and in the classroom as they relate

[27] Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) argue that schools prepare students for the workforce by replicating the environment of the capitalist, hierarchical system. Children from middle-class and working-class backgrounds receive different preparations based on their projected future jobs.

to the military hierarchy and academic faculty.

Sociologists and education theorists have also revealed how schools often have the cultural codes and logics of high-status and dominant social groups and thus lead to disproportionate benefits in their favor (Carter 2005). Although institutions in the United States, like the military and schools, are often perceived as 'neutral' and apolitical, sociologist Mark Gould (1999) argues that this neutrality is actually the taken-for-granted tacit culture of White Americans. Other scholars take it further to connect the school culture specifically to White, upper/middle-class men. As such, students and soldiers who do not belong to these dominant groups may have added obstacles to their success in school.

Religion offers an additional level of complexity because, for many individuals, religiously prescribed and proscribed behaviors are non-negotiable. Religious and institutional meta-narratives may line up to some extent, especially regarding submission, but conflicts will occur (Burdette et al. 2009; Hansen 2012; Konieczny and Bertossi 2017; Mahmood 2012; Rohall, Ender, and Matthews 2006). What happens when field meals contain pork products, and the soldier only eats Halal? What happens when training occurs on a fast day? What occurs when a candidate is morally opposed to killing? Meeting cadets' religious needs allows them to comply with their religious authorities and keeps more soldiers within the military; but this accommodation also threatens institutional mandates and, therefore, creates disorder.

The focus on identity characteristics and inequality in the dissertation will demonstrate how institutional socialization is not a homogeneous process as explained by existing scholarship. Nor is it bound by a single identity characteristic. I take an intersectional approach rooted in Black Feminist Theory to examine the multiplicative impact of gender, ethnic/racial, class, sexual, and religious identities on individual experience navigating the military setting

(Crenshaw 2017). I illuminate on a micro-interactional level how identity attributes become salient and intersect upon entrance to a new setting. My ability to gain insight into these processes was rooted in my methodological approach.

A Note on Methods

My ethnographic strategy involved participating in all aspects of preparatory school life to be alongside the candidates as they responded to and navigated institutional pressures, as well as gain autoethnographic insight into the physical, emotional, and discursive changes occurring over time. With the support of institutional gatekeepers and coordination between Princeton and United States Military Academy's Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), I received permission to integrate fully into the military unit and immerse myself in institutional life.[28] I was with the candidates in the public spaces of the dining facilities, formation, and class, and in the private spaces of the barracks. I joined them in everything from calculus classes, to marching eight miles with 35 pounds on our backs, to responding to casualties in war rehearsals. I listened to their daily stories and used my own observations and embodied experiences to ask probing questions.

In addition, I conducted over 100 interviews with the candidates, and over 30 with military and civilian staff members. Interviews provided the opportunity to hear candidates expand on the themes I uncovered during fieldwork and learn about other topics I might not have been able to see in public settings. I used life history narratives and semi-structured interviews to explore how candidates perceived their behavior and sense of selves adapting at the preparatory school. I asked candidates about their childhood neighborhoods and family socioeconomic

[28]My access had a few restrictions during my first year of fieldwork: I was not permitted to sleep in the barracks or the field, fire military weapons, or wear the U.S. Army uniform. However, for my second year, the military chain of command gave me permission to undergo weapons qualification, sleep in the field and building during training, and wear the U.S. Army uniform with a U.S. Civilian nametape. I was assigned a bed in the barracks; however, I left the barracks each evening after lights out and returned at wake-up call. During basic training, I slept in an upstairs office in the building. During the academic year, I lived on post or the surrounding area.

status, high school, motivations for attending West Point, how they felt physically and emotionally at various points during training and the academic year, and specific questions about how they saw gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and class operating in the institution. Interviews ranged from one to eight hours (conducted over multiple sessions). I also visited key participants in their hometowns across the continental United States, Hawaii, and Europe to gain insight into their lives outside of the institution and interview their family members. My data collection extended over three years to widen the pool of possible participants, which better protects anonymity, and facilitates replication of the ethnographic research process.[29] In the dissertation, I use creative nonfiction to weave together their stories into a one-year journey to further increase anonymity.

As a feminist and equity-oriented ethnographer, I held a strong commitment to reflexivity and addressing power dynamics in the research and writing process. As much as institutional authorities attempted to treat me as a regular candidate in public or others saw me, in the words of one candidate, as "one of us," I ultimately had a much higher place in the institutional power schema. I was not an enlisted soldier nor subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. I had full access to my company officer and sergeant to discuss my project and logistics—a project which they knew had the support of their superiors—and if I wanted to, I could just walk out of the building at any time and leave.

Beyond the power associated with the researcher rather than candidate identity, I was a White, cisgendered, heterosexual civilian adult coming from an Ivy League university. My

[29] The first year I participated in basic training as part of a squad and was at the preparatory school full time. In second year, I participated in basic training again with a new candidate cohort and was at the preparatory school part time, spending approximately one to two weeks per month in the field and the other time analyzing the data. In the third year, I observed the cadet cadre's two-week leadership training program and then I took advantage of the "punctured revisited" to come into the field periodically with fresh eyes and notice how the setting fluctuated over time (Burawoy 2003).

nicknames throughout the years such as, “Princeton,” “CC [cadet candidate] Ph.D.,” and “mom,” off-the-cuff comments like “must be nice that you can leave whenever you want” (even though I rarely left), and the occasional “no offense, Taylor” after Black candidates spoke negatively about “White people” demonstrated the extent to which these identity characteristics were relevant to how others saw me within the setting. I was not an official military or academic authority, but my position as a researcher and several high-status identity characteristics afforded me significant situational power.

To contend with power differentials, I had regular conversations with the candidates about how my place in the institution and my relationship with authorities, ongoing consent, and (the limits of) confidentiality. I also used autoethnography to better understand how power worked within the institution. I noticed how I began to embody physical and linguistic submission to authorities, and the ways in which I felt disempowered when I no longer had full autonomy over my time, body, or voice. I aimed to use my position as a woman and religious minority in the institution to better understand the dynamics between men and women and other dyads of the powerful and the powerless that were historically seen as normal in the military setting (Enloe 2015; Hunt and Rygiel 2006). However, I was aware from an intersectional perspective I was still in a highly privileged position within the institution and the larger United States. Throughout the dissertation, I use my own body and emotional experiences as part of the data. I do my best to write openly and honestly about my journey within the institution and my relationship with the candidates.

The structure and form of the dissertation are in response to researchers who have highlighted that the representation of ‘subjects’ in published work often maintains power in traditional locations and risks perpetuating stigmatization that can contribute to making research

populations more at-risk in the future (Cannella and Lincoln 2017; Liamputtong 2007; O'Neil 1996; Paradis 2000; Pyett 2001). Building off models of participatory art-based research presentation, I choose to present the research findings in creative nonfiction form to make it more accessible for participants than traditional academic works (Barone 2008; Caulley 2008; Mitchell, Lange, and Moletsane 2018). I invited my participants to choose their pseudonyms, as names are deeply intertwined with one's identity and history.[30] Study participants were additionally among the first critics and audiences for the written work. They were invited to shape, recreate, and speak back to the ways their voices were represented.

As such, all the 'characters'[31] in *Inscribing Identities* represent real individuals and the stories are created through a combination of my direct observations and formal and informal interviews with the candidates. In some cases, to protect privacy, I change marginal details about the character which did not alter the substantial meaning of their experiences. All feelings and thoughts attributed to the characters were explicitly expressed to me either in the moment or during interviews. Quotation marks are used for dialogue and italics for internal thoughts. Additional details on my methodology are published in my "Vulnerable Research: Competencies for Trauma and Justice-Informed Ethnography" and "All-Encompassing Ethnographies: Strategies for Feminist and Equity-Oriented Institutional Research" (Winfield 2021c, 2022).

Dissertation Overview

[30] Although there is debate on the merits of anonymity and confidentiality and whether it actually reduces participants' autonomy in the research process, the identification of participants to each other and authorities can lead to covert and overt consequences within institutions, including interpersonal conflicts and obstacles to career progression. As such, I present anonymity and confidentiality as reasonable goals for institutional ethnographers with the acknowledgment that these decisions are dependent on context and are typically best made through conversations with research participants. See for more information on this tension: Bosk 2008; Svalastog and Eriksson 2010.

[31] I use the term 'character' because published stories are inevitably incomplete representations of individuals' complexities and full live experiences. Instead, participants and I focused on developing a 'character' that was an authentic representation of this stage and piece of their lives.

The dissertation presents the (re)socialization process at the preparatory school in three spheres: the cultivation of the Military Body, the Officer Mind, and the Warrior Spirit. Each sphere is a fertile setting for identities to be erased, accentuated, or unaffected. As candidates navigated these spheres, their identity characteristics became salient and interacted in various ways. Some candidates felt natural alignment: their pre-institutional self-definitions fit well into the identity the sphere aimed to inscribe on them. Others experienced contestation: conflict between their pre-institutional selves and the aims of the sphere. When they vocalized this conflict, they were able to find a solution with the institution. Others underwent reconfiguration: there was conflict between their personal self-definition and institutional dictates, and paths to resolve the tension were not available. They either abandoned their pre-institutional sense of self or exited the institution. How a candidate experienced each sphere influenced their transition to military life. Each story shows how identity characteristics can present advantages, disadvantages, and interact in surprising ways in each sphere. The spheres in each section do not take place in chronological order and will move back between the three weeks of basic training and the academic year.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows:

Part I: Military Bodies pertains to inscribing the proper movements, physicality, and appearance in new soldiers. How does the preparatory school go about creating the bodies of soldiers in the candidates? When are physical changes embraced and when are they resisted? What happens when there is a conflict between the institutional goals and the actual physiology of certain candidates? The stories in this section explore these questions through the topics of uniforms, hair standards, height and weight, drill and ceremony, physical corrective action, fitness tests, injuries, and more. As basic training was the time when new bodily rules were made

explicit to candidates and heavily monitored, I often begin with a moment from basic training and then consider how changes occurred over time and into the academic year. I detail control of appearance, physical submission to authority, and the overlap between physical performance and perceived soldierly competence.

Part II: Officer Minds reveals how the preparatory school works to prepare the candidates for officership: to oversee a unit's tactical decisions and moral integrity. What is it essential for officers to *know*? How must officers *think*? How should officers *behave?* How do candidates balance institutional values with their pre-existing values? Stories in this section explore how the institution works to intentionally cultivate certain habits of mind in the candidates through the academic curriculum and "honorable living" trainings. I consider who is perceived as competent in this sphere and how the candidates recalibrate to and resist institutional ideals around officership. Topics include educational privilege and disadvantage, problem-solving, cross-cultural conversations, equal opportunity programs, sexual assault and harassment prevention trainings, the honor code, and more.

Part III: Warrior Spirits expounds upon the delicate balance between teaching soldiers to kill—a process of dehumanization—but not commit excesses—a process of restraint and empathy. How do candidates experience the potential obligation to take lives during combat? How does the institution work to condition them to risk their own lives on the battlefield and ultimately be able to pull the trigger? What happens when a candidate has a religious or moral objection to violence? The stories in this section explore these questions through the topics of teamwork, competitions, battle drills, weapons training, war crimes, and more. Returning to moments from basic training as well as field exercises and military science classes in the academic year, I investigate how the institution instills in candidates fighting and winning

mentalities. I pay close attention to how approaches to violence, death, and killing are perceived in light of other religious and cultural beliefs. The last chapter in the section addresses whether candidates felt like 'soldiers' by the end of the year.

The conclusion ties the dissertation together with implications for identity (re)socialization in an all-encompassing institution. It examines the impact of institutional pressures on candidates' identities, arguing that bodily and discursive control, as well as cognitive and moral-ethical enculturation, served important roles in the formation process. Then it reiterates that the candidates were not passive—they showed great agency in the ways they creatively responded to, resisted, and navigated institutional pressures. Finally, the conclusion addresses the question of—if the institutional pressures were so all-encompassing—why were there dissimilar outcomes among candidates. It details how identities intersected and overlapped to create differential experiences and the ostensibly meritocratic organization reproduced inequalities. The conclusion ends with a 'looking forward' section that reflects on the military as a whole and offers policy recommendations. An afterword tells stories from my visits to candidates' hometowns and shares where the main characters are five years later.

I now turn the military body, the first element of our formation into soldiers.

Part I: The Military Body

How we learn to
Look
Move
Perform
Like Soldiers

What does a soldier look like? A quick Google images search of the term ‘soldier’ provides dozens of pictures of White, buzz-cut, clean-shaven men in combat gear. There are a few images of Black men and the occasional woman. The societal images of what soldiers look like are marked in many Americans’ minds. A strong body, wearing a camouflage uniform. A body that can destroy the enemies of the United States. Groups of bodies that come together in unison.

In this section, I ask: how does the preparatory school go about transforming the candidates’ civilian bodies into soldierly bodies? How do the candidates experience these efforts? When are the changes embraced and when are they resisted? What happens when there are conflicts between institutional goals and the actual physiology of certain candidates? Sociologists of the body understand what happens to identity when adults voluntarily change their bodily practices; however, they have not yet explored this question when the changes are being controlled by another actor, in this case, an all-encompassing institution that has strict standards for physical appearance and bodily expressions.

The development of the military body began on our first day at the preparatory school, as we received uniforms, changed our hair, and learned new positions for drill and ceremony. Authorities measured our height and weight to determine if our physical compositions fit within the regulations and checked tattoos for gang signs or signals of inappropriate ties. They collected and analyzed our bodily fluids, even supervising the collection of the urine samples to ensure

there was no tampering. We were told to cup our hands and keep our eyes straight forward as we moved through the building for the entire basic training and remain silent in public areas. We learned to embody submission when speaking to authorities in the positions of parade rest and attention.

Control over appearance and bodily movements was integral to the institutional socialization process. Appearance is a primary vehicle for identity expression; thus, constraining appearance not only limited candidates' expression of alternative (and competing) identities but was also a strategy to solidify group membership—as we were repeatedly told, we were all wearing green. Authorities saw compliance to army appearance standards as an indicator of successful adoption of the soldier identity, as well as the dispositions required to take care of one's troops in combat. It was a physical manifestation of one's commitment to the profession and proxy for mission-specific competencies, despite the fact it had little to do with war-fighting ability.

Bodies that had absorbed military demeanors were perceived as the most valuable for the institution because they could be trusted in combat. Over and over, authorities demanded that we hold their orders paramount to our comfort and override previous ways of moving and acting. We started to stand differently, move differently, and pay attention to different parts of our bodies. Habits around appearance and movements that were once strange and foreign became natural and taken for granted through repeated repetition. These behaviors became so inscribed on some of us that we acted the same in uniform and civilian clothing; for example, removing civilian headgear when going indoors or stopping in the middle of the road to answer a phone call.

Beyond looking and moving like soldiers, our bodies had to take on the physical abilities

and strength of soldiers. Physical fitness was a public event at the preparatory school: fitness tests were conducted as a company, scores were posted in the barracks, and rucking was always done in formation. High physical performance was a sign of mission-specific competency—the ability to contribute on the battlefield. As such, those who performed well physically were rewarded with higher grades (the physical fitness test score went into the military science grade), awards, and leadership positions. On the other hand, those who performed poorly were labeled as "soft bodies" and having "tiny heart syndrome" (i.e., lack of drive and ambition). Our chain of command encouraged us to demonstrate our 'soldierliness' by pushing through pain and going until we dropped, a mentality that regularly led to injuries.

As the institution pressed and prodded each of us to fit into a one-size-fits-all mold of a military body, some candidates either *could* not or *would* not fit. For some it was an easy transition: their hair, weight, and musculature fit comfortably into the standards, so the transition was smooth and often unconscious. It just *happened* without much thought or effort. Yet, others had to actively work to comply; sometimes spending hundreds of dollars on relaxing or braiding their hair, buying the proper electric razors, dietary supplements, protein shakes, or corsets to fall within the standards. Those whose leg to waist ratio did not fit within the issued uniforms or their feet did not fit the issued boots had to spend money to buy their own equipment. And those who could afford it, purchased higher quality boots and other uniform items to improve their performance.

Public and private resistance to and rebellion against the ideal military body occurred across candidates. Resistance to army appearance standards ranged from quite minor and temporary to dramatic and public. Even small deviances, like crooked patches, were perceived as signaling a failure to adopt a soldier identity because they went directly against the ideologies of

personal responsibility, uniformity in dress, and attention to detail. Resistance to bodily control also occurred from the beginning of basic training: we would whisper under our breaths to ourselves or the person standing next to us and find tricks to avoid holding our knowledge books at a 90-degree angle for long periods. Although we tended to avoid behavior that could lead to "physical corrective actions" (what was colloquially called "smoking"), over time some candidates realized that corrections were not so bad and were willing to risk push-ups to have a bit of fun. Others started rebelling because they realized that if they did not react to the corrective measure there was little other power the cadets had over them at the moment. Those who requested religious accommodations also were rebellious in the sense that they were demanding that some control over their bodies (food, movement, and time) be given to an outside authority, i.e., God. Although this type of deviance was typically palatable for authorities because of First Amendment rights, it was still an inconvenience and a sign that one was not fully and solely committed to the profession of arms.

In some cases, the candidates' bodies simply did not fit into the standards. Challenges emerged for women who had low hip-to-waist ratios—small waists and wide hips. Even if they had no fat on their waist or hips, the length of both would be added together and they would fail the test. This challenge was common for Black and Hispanic/Latin-American women, who often declared that the system must have been designed for White or Asian women without curves. Similarly, questions regarding neat and proper appearance for hair emerged along racial and gender lines. Women with hair that did not neatly comply with efforts to be constrained in a gelled-back bun dealt with criticism from peers and leadership. For Black women with natural hair, this often meant spending their whole paycheck on braids, risking damage to hair through permeant relaxation, or facing censure from others who deemed their hair unprofessional.

Furthermore, some candidates who did not actively try to resist bodily control were deemed rebellious by authorities because of different cultural understandings of body language and facial expressions. Bodies that would not fit the mold—no matter how hard the candidates wanted them to—elicited frustration and worse performance outcomes, in terms of military science grades, physical fitness tests, squad feedback, and leadership positions. Their appearances lead them to be perceived as less competent, and thus, lower on the status hierarchy in the institution. The idea that it might take more work or be impossible for some candidates to look like the ideal image of a soldier was typically only discussed among already marginalized groups whose bodies did not quite fit.

Across all appearance standards, a question emerged if the standard itself was, in the words of an officer, a "patriarchal historically White male, upper-class standard."[32] Some military and civilian leadership were concerned that the standards might be biased against non-White and women soldiers. They found that often soldiers were punished for being out of regulations, when most likely the authority was reacting to their different mannerisms or culture in terms of dress, hair, walking, body language, and communication styles. Some leaders and candidates questioned whether 'professionalism' was just intertwined with the White, heterosexual, Protestant, upper/middle-class.

Questions around gender were most salient during conversations about physical standards. One group of leaders and candidates argued for equality—men and women should have equivalent standards because they would both be soldiers performing the same tasks and skills. Others demanded equity: the Army should set standards that are equally challenging for men and women. For example, it might be as difficult for a man to carry 50 pounds as it is for a

[32] Standards for military officers were long intertwined with "gentlemanly conduct" (Janowitz 1960:218–19).

woman to carry 30 pounds, or it might be as challenging for a man to run two miles in 16 minutes as it is for a woman to run two miles in 19 minutes. There were also those who thought women were inherently physically weaker than men and thus, should have lower standards and be kept out of the combat arms entirely. These dynamics manifested into regular questioning regarding women's physical abilities to be competent soldiers and leaders on the battlefield. Leaders and candidates constantly connected the appearance, structure, and movements of bodies directly with leadership abilities. In these ways, status beliefs about the competency of certain social groups to perform during war greatly influenced social relations and the status hierarchy in the preparatory school, which was reflected in candidates' emotional states and feelings of sense of belonging and worthiness for the Army. Status acted as a powerful motivator in the socialization process; candidates who wanted positive evaluations and esteem from others inside the institution had to try to force themselves into the 'ideal' mold, whether or not they agreed with these ideals.

The stories that follow explore each of these themes and dynamics in detail and how they manifested in our day-to-day lives within the institution.

1 Uniforms

"HURRY UP! EVERYONE IS WAITING ON YOU!"

I ran into my room on Reception Day and threw down my bag in the closet. As I whirled around, I spotted a picture of a cadet in the uniform on the back of my door. I ripped my combat uniform out of the plastic, hopped on each foot to remove my shoes, and quickly changed clothing. Undershirt. Pants. Belt. Socks. Top. Boots.

"HUUURRRRY UP. HURRRRRRY UP."

My feet would not go back into my boots because I had pulled them off without fully loosening them. I had to keep retrying and loosening the laces. I stuck on my patches, looking at the picture on the back of the door for guidance: American flag, right shoulder; preparatory school patch, left shoulder; nametape, right chest; and U.S. Civilian instead of U.S. Army nametape, left chest.

When I thought I was ready, I ran into the bathroom to look at myself in the mirror and make sure everything was on correctly. I was nervous that I would accidentally disrespect the uniform. I stared at myself, with my hair gelled back, no makeup, wearing the camouflage. I looked like a soldier. Wow. *Don't mess this up.* I took a deep breath, and then bolted out of the door into the stream of cadets and frantic candidates. A cadet looked me up and down, straightened my patches, zipped up the pockets on my arms, and told me to make sure I always kept the pockets on my pants buttoned up. He took out a lighter and burned away one stray thread from my collar.

Chelsea Melton, a White woman from the South, flew out of her room the first time with no patches on her uniform and nothing tucked in. She had wanted to change and come back out as fast as possible because a cadet kept banging on her door. The cadet told her to look at the

picture. *What picture?* The cadet ran into the room, grabbed Chelsea's dog tags and patches from the top of her desk, stuck them on her, and made her tuck in her boot laces.

Lisbeth Sokolov, an Asian woman from the South, did not know where the patches went and walked out with them on randomly. The cadet sent her back five times to "fix" herself. She came back out five times with the patches applied randomly again. The cadet finally gave up and explained where each one went. When Lisbeth glanced in the mirror on her way out, she thought: *Wow. I look really shitty. I look like a scrawny kid in camouflage, but you know what? I am in the Army now.*

When she heard yelling and pounding on her door, one candidate ran out into the hallway in her sports bra and combat uniform pants. She had thought when they said, "COME OUT NOW," they meant that instant. Cadet men in the hallway panicked and rushed her back into her room.

Athena Little, a Black woman from the South, put on the uniform and was surprised that she did not feel much at all. She had heard that others felt pride, but she did not feel anything. It was just another thing she was going to have to do here. Kelly Carter, a Black woman from the Midwest, did not look at herself differently, she just wondered if her parents had already left, and if not, could they come back and get her? *Please?*

Carlos Estrada, a mixed-race man from the Northeast who identified as Africano,[33] stared at himself in the mirror. *Oh my God, I'm really wearing the uniform*! Carlos had experienced being uniformed before in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, but there was a huge difference now—he was putting on U.S. Army name tape. He was now part of the bigger organization. He kept thinking, *Am I really a part of it? Do I deserve to be a part of it? Now I'm*

[33] A mix of Spanish, Native American, and African with roots from Latin America, Europe, and Africa.

a soldier, but do I really feel like a soldier? Am I just a regular student?

Lily Rose, a White woman from the South, stayed in her room for a while. Her roommate was not there yet, so she wanted to make both beds. She did not know the protocols, but she did her best to make them look neat. She could hear the cadets screaming at everyone to come back out but blocked them out. Finally, Lily changed and went out.

"THAT IS OBVIOUSLY NOT IT," a cadet shouted at her after she opened the door. So, she went back in and changed again, confused. She did not know what to do with the uniform or where to put the patches. She stuck the flag somewhere and the preparatory school pin, meant for the dress uniform, somewhere else.

"Are you retarded?[34] There's a picture, can you not see?"

She responded that there was no picture. He went to check and saw that there was indeed no picture in her room. She did not get to look at herself in the mirror because she was frantic. When she did finally see herself in the mirror later in the day, it reminded her of her sister.

Ben Hall, a Black man from the South, also did not have time to look in the mirror. He did not have time to stop and think. *Just go, go, go.* But he quickly realized that he liked the uniforms because they represented that the candidates were part of something bigger themselves. They were not individual people anymore. Addison Martin, a Black man from the South, purposefully did not look into the mirror after he had put on the uniform. He avoided looking at himself in the mirror when he was in uniform for a week. When he went into the bathroom, he made sure he was in his physical training uniform or he closed his eyes to go straight to the toilet. He did not want to see himself in the Army camouflage for the first time because it did not

[34] If the tactical team heard cadets using this word or other "unacceptable" language, the cadets would be reprimanded. See Part II, Chapter 43 'Speaking like Soldiers' for a discussion about language use and respect violations.

fit with his self-definition. He felt that as soon as he saw the mirror's reflection he might quit.

Cadets prowled up and down the hallways waiting to check the candidate who had just changed and yell at us for various reasons. "You need to pay attention to the small details here: buttons, zippers, laces."

After our civilian appearances were stripped away, the authorities worked to drill into us the nuances of proper uniform display. Each morning the cadets would bang on our doors—"IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP;" "GET UP;" "EVERYONE IS WAITING ON YOU!"—and blare rap or country music down the hallway. Candidates would scramble up from the floor, as most slept on the floor to avoid messing up their carefully made beds, and check to make sure the uniform that they had slept in was not "jacked up." We had learned almost immediately it was essential to sleep in the uniform so all we would have to do in the morning was put on our socks, shoes, and belt and do our hair.

By the time our new boots were broken in (or our feet broken into the boots), we were growing accustomed to our new uniforms. On the second day of training, the cadet cadre gave us a lecture on the Army appearance standards in Army Regulations 670-1. They explained that professionalism comes from proper appearance. We had to be careful to police our battle buddies to make sure they were squared away. The leadership reminded us often, "If you can't get the little things right, like your uniform, you can mess up bigger things like weapon safety."

Each army uniform had specific rules for its wear. Physical training uniforms, known colloquially as "PTs," were worn with the shirt tucked in, white or black socks with no logos or colors, and athletic shoes. Females could wear their hair in ponytails during physical training in

this uniform but had to return it to a bun when the physical activity finished.[35] Oh, and yes, we were called females and males, not women and men. I assumed the Army used the language of sex rather than gender because it was more interested in what our bodies could do biologically than gender identity. Transgender candidates were not officially allowed at the Academy, and in many ways, I felt like all our gender expressions were becoming more hyper-masculine when we were in uniform.[36]

Combat uniforms—which we called "OCPs" for operational camouflage pattern—were much more complicated than PTs. The pants had to be tucked into the boots, with no loose laces visible ("no snakes hanging out of your boots"). All pockets had to be completely buttoned up and not too bulky. We had a brown belt. The top of the uniform had to be zipped and Velcro 'ed up, and all pockets had to be zippered closed. Patrol Caps ("PCs") were required to be worn outside. We were taught to keep our patrol caps in our right or left cargo pocket, ready to be pulled and placed on our heads as soon as we stepped outside. In the combat uniform, the U.S. Army tape went on the left side—over a soldier's heart because "our hearts belong to the Army." The name tape went on the right. Stray threads were burned off; some candidates started carrying lighters in their left sleeve pocket for easy access. We learned that these micro-details in the uniform helped contribute combat readiness; for example, if unattended to, stray strings or laces could get caught in equipment.

Rank was worn in the center of the chest in the combat uniform. Most candidates had no rank or a couple of lines, diamonds, or stars to indicate their leadership position in the candidate

[35] In 2021, the appearance standards changed to include neat ponytails and braids in the combat uniform as well.
[36] I will use gender (woman, man) in my own writing and analysis unless referring to policies or quoting participants.

chain of command during the academic year.[37] I noticed that when candidates did receive special ranks, they stood up a bit straighter. After our squad leader placed the squad leader patch on Ben's chest during the graduation ceremony, I saw him swell with pride. A week or so after basic training at lunch, Lily grabbed the rank patch off a friend who was a candidate platoon leader, put it on her chest, and strutted around. She turned to me and jokingly shouted in her best basic training impression, "Fix yourself Cadet Candidate Winfield!" The priors had to remove their old ranks from their uniforms. Nathan Cohen, a White prior from the Northeast, was morose when he removed his sergeant rank, literally ripping off his prior military identity.

The American flag went on the right arm, and below it, a unit deployment patch, which was received when soldiers deployed to combat zones. Only a handful of priors had the deployment patches and they wore them proudly as testaments to their time deployed to the middle east. On the left arm, was the preparatory school unit patch. Many tactical officers and non-commissioned officers wore a "Ranger Tab" above their unit patch, which they received for completing the arduous Ranger School. We were taught that Ranger tabs were markers of high competency and leadership ability in the Army. We learned to decode the other symbolic markers of competence on the tactical team's uniforms: combat action badge, expert infantry badge, pathfinder badge, and more. These symbols were in the knowledge book we had to memorize during basic training. Resumés were literally worn on our chests. When meeting a new soldier, I noticed that I started to quickly take in their badges, awards, and rank—setting expectations for them and their performance. I was awed by prior service candidates who already

[37] After basic training, select candidates who had performed well were assigned peer leadership positions from the battalion tactical team. These positions replaced the those held by the cadet cadre. Roles in the candidate chain of command were held for terms lasting a quarter or a semester (higher level positions), and then were be passed to another candidate. The candidate chain of command received mentorship and oversight from the battalion tactical team.

had some of these markers from their previous training. When forming the status hierarchy in the institution, these patches offered visible and valuable information on who could contribute the most to the team.

In the beginning, it was hard for candidates to remember uniform details. However, through repetition and constant enforcement, we internalized details. Civilians started to look like the strange ones. At the range, when Lisbeth saw a civilian for the first time after two weeks in basic training—she whispered to me, "Bizarre, it's like we are at a zoo. They look so strange." A few days later, our squad leader gave us a treat and let us watch stolen valor videos. We saw how people tried to use the uniform to gain the soldier and veteran benefits; however, they did not know the nuances of how to wear the uniform properly and we laughed at their ignorance. They had put their rank patch on their shoulder, or the American flag in the middle of their chest—how ridiculous! They were wearing tennis shoes with combat uniforms—outrageous! By that time, we knew when things looked strange and could not believe people could make those novice mistakes.

The process of the appearance standards becoming taken-for-granted and learning to notice even small deviances reminded me of the sociological literature on religious practitioners changing their behavior to take on new identities: at first, performing the new behaviors required significant mental effort and would disrupt the practitioners' days, but with time, the new practices become routinized, the disruptions diminished, and practitioners performed them without conscious thought (Tavory and Winchester 2012). Yet, unlike the religious practitioners in the literature who were controlling the types and pacing of their changes, we had institutional authorities carefully observing us at almost all times and disciplining us if our uniforms were "jacked up." I posited that the changes to our bodily habits and cognitive schemes of perception

were likely accelerated due to the all-encompassing environment.

Adoption and adherence to uniform standards were integral in the (re)socialization process because clothing is a vehicle to define and communicate personal and social identities. In the civilian world, people wear certain styles of clothing to express themselves and show group membership; for example, wearing certain designers may signal a class identity, wearing a specific ritual garb may signal religious identity, and wearing a football jersey may signal one is part of a football team or an avid fan (Willis 1981). Wearing the Army uniform demonstrated, at least externally, that one is part of a group that is committed to serving the United States. As the content and name of the stolen valor videos signaled, wearing the uniform itself is a privilege only afforded to only to select individuals with "valor" and wearing it under false pretenses is equated to theft.

As such, institutional authorities saw compliance with uniform standards as an indicator of the successful adoption of the soldier identity and group solidarity. Discipline in dress not only showed that one was conforming to rules and gaining the skills to *look* like a soldier but also signaled appropriate character and self-concept. It was a physical manifestation of one's buy-in to the profession. Given that we were asked to take the same steps to prepare our appearances daily and there was an almost religious emphasis on attention to detail among the leadership, even small deviance in our uniforms was quickly noticed and took on a dramatic sense of resistance. For example, resistance to the soldier identity was signaled through something as seemingly small as crocked patches, frayed threads, laces out of boots, or open zippers or pockets. These minor aberrances were not necessarily intentional or active cases of rebellion, but they demonstrated that a candidate did not particularly care about the uniform, being in standard, or perhaps even the profession of arms overall. Checking these small uniform

details became so automatic for many of us that choosing *not* to check carefully was a sign that the enculturation process was defunct. Why did a candidate not notice or care about his patches? He wore them every day! How could she walk around with her laces out? It was so simple to tuck them in or use boot blousers! How could one walk around with an old and frayed American flag—did one not have any respect for the flag or pride in being an American soldier? These small deviations were often explicitly equated to a lack of discipline, disrespect to the military and country, and inability to care for soldiers.

More public and explicit resistance to military appearance occurred when candidates would de-blouse without permission (taking off the jacket of the top uniform and revealing the t-shirt underneath), walk around the barracks mixing and matching their uniforms (such as wearing a combat uniform t-shirt with physical training shorts), incorrectly mixing summer and winter physical training uniforms, or wearing flip flops with the uniform around the barracks. Even if there were no authorities around, some candidates—particularly those who were prior service or assigned to peer leadership positions—took it upon themselves to correct those who were out of standards. They had invested their own identities in the ideologies of the institution and now worked to enforce them. Their efforts typically had limited success because the candidates who were dramatically out of standard were quite aware of their deviance and had decided they just did not care at the moment, perhaps because it was the evening or weekend in the barracks. These candidates also often rejected the legitimacy of the other candidates' authority to correct them—"who do they think they are? We are all candidates!" Still, I found that the more candidates identified as soldiers and saw the uniform as sacrosanct, the more peers' disregard for standards unsettled them to the extent that many saw it as their responsibility to make corrections. As the year progressed, I even saw myself noticing irregularities in others'

uniforms and having a strong urge to fix them, as well as assuming those who were clearly out of uniform in public spaces had little commitment to the military or personal discipline.

Over the year, candidates and I often reflected together on the experience of being uniformed and what it signified to them. For some, wearing the uniform felt natural and comfortable. When Adam Evans, a White man from the Midwest, was in the uniform, the style and material felt like what he wore at home. He used to always wear cargo pants and undershirts in high school, so it felt similar. He liked the cotton materials of the combat undershirts even better than his old t-shirt, so when he put on his civilian clothing, his old shirts felt scratchy. Kelly Carter was used to wearing uniforms from her private high school, so this version just happened to be bigger and a bit more comfortable than her pleated skirts.

For other candidates, the bulk and cut of the uniform felt strange. Wearing the uniform was the first time I was wearing clothing that was designed for men. I felt big, bulky, and strong. My experience was similar to other women who felt more androgynous in uniform. Although there were 'female versions' of the combat tops that one could purchase that were slightly more fitted at the waist, for the most part, uniform items were unisex. I often heard comments made throughout the hallways and dining halls like, "I don't think about being a female, I just feel like a male in uniform" or "I finally felt like a woman again when I was on pass."[38] During basic training in our room, my suitemates discussed how excited they were for the training to end so they could go and buy the fitted combat tops. Maybe if they could show off their curves a bit, they would not feel like men all the time? Clothing is deeply intertwined with gender expression (West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987), and many women expressed discomfort in violating norms around gendered appearance that they had learned in the civilian

[38] Pass was when candidates were allowed to leave the military installation for weekends or breaks in the academic year.

world. Clothing that was conventionally defined as *feminine* was no longer available to us. As such, many candidates talked about no longer feeling like women—their gender identities were blurring. Some candidates started to wear lacy undergarments to make sure they still felt like women and to confirm their gender identities while in uniform even if it was only a private declaration.

Beyond blocking pathways for certain types of gender expression, uniforms had another challenge for women candidates. Lily often brought up that nothing fit her in the Army, everything was too big for her thin and petite frame. Our suitemates discussed this regularly: the uniforms were the wrong dimension for female bodies, the combat helmets were too big, and even the shower heads were too high! Why did everything have to be originally designed for men and then altered (usually poorly) to fit women? Why did they never start with the woman's clothing or equipment and go in the opposite direction? Sergeant Rae Compton, a mixed-race half-White and half-Black woman from the Northeast, told us that she had scars on her hips from where the rucksack dug into her skin because it did not fit properly. But she clarified that the idea of a separate uniform for women was ridiculous: she distinguished between the necessity for a uniform to fit well for appearance purposes versus the need to have well-fitted equipment for functional purposes that aided the mission. She reminded us often, "You joined a male-dominated profession. Why do they need to cater to every single thing for you? Like they let you keep your hair!" From her perspective, it was our responsibility as newcomers to the profession to fit into the historic mold of soldiers, and ultimately, their male bodies.

When Lisbeth was in uniform, she felt that she had to conform to whatever the leadership told her to do. If they told her to do push-ups, she was going to get her ass on the ground and do push-ups. When she told me this, I laughed saying that she liked to do push-ups anyways, and

when I first met her, she would do push-ups for fun. We reminisced back to basic training when she was bored sitting on the bleachers and decided to do 50 push-ups. The cadet cadre would not yell at her for doing push-ups, so it was the perfect distraction. She chuckled too but reiterated that if she did not do what the leadership told her she would have to say bye-bye to her army career. When she was out in the civilian world, she did not have to do anything anyone told her because she was her own person. Being in uniform was a public sign that she was under the control of the military authorities and had to follow their orders.

Athena also saw the uniform as a symbol of conformity but in a different way: we all had to look the same. This did not make sense to her—they wanted us to look the same, but we were *not* all the same. And we were not all treated equally. "It was all a facade," she explained it to me in her usual passionate manner, "Who made this stuff up! Who? We got to start changing stuff because some of the stuff is stupid. You do not have to wear a uniform every day to be part of a unit. That makes no sense. That's so dumb. I'm tired of wearing the same uniform around." If she were in charge, she would let people design their own uniforms, or at least let people wear their own clothing on Fridays. For Athena, individuals could be part of a group without all looking the same. It was more important to focus on uniformity in treatment than uniformity in dress. Wearing uniforms to all be the same when we were ultimately *not* all treated the same was hypocrisy.

Eleanor Kidds' mom continuously reminded her that there was a political act in wearing the uniform, and a source of identifying with a group that may have opinions that you do not hold: "You know people in the military, there's a lot of White racist men that wear the same uniform as you and are not going to respect you."

But Eleanor, who identified as half-Black and half-White, responded to her mom:

> I am still going to respect them. If they don't respect me then so be it. I'm still a part of an organization, same as them. I still probably hold some of the same values as them. Even people that I don't have anything in common with, we have one thing in common: we are in the Army. We fight for a cause.

The uniform surpassed other gender, racial, and political differences to show a system of shared values and a collective mission, a mission towards which Eleanor was proud to be fighting.

2 Halloween

For Halloween, we were allowed to wear costumes to class. I came across Sergeant Compton who was wearing a collared shirt, khaki pants, a leather belt, and matching leather shoes. It was our cadet candidate casual uniform to a tee.[39]

"Sergeant Compton, what are you for Halloween? A cadet candidate?"

"No, I am a prisoner!" She laughed so hard that she almost made herself cry.

[39] The cadet candidate casual uniform was what we were allowed to wear after basic training if we were leaving the institution on the weekends as a battalion or for pass.

3 Height and Weight

As we approached the height and weight stations on Reception Day, Kelly Carter started to get a bit nervous. She had spent the summer relaxing and home, eating all the snacks she wanted, and not exercising. She had been active in high school—playing volleyball and cheerleading—but had been enjoying her last bit of freedom to do whatever she wanted before basic training. She knew she had gained a lot of weight over the summer.

"MOVE FORWARD, CADET CANDIDATE."

She moved in front of the scale. The person taking the scores was a civilian volunteer for Reception Day and smiled at her warmly—the first smile in the hours since she reported that morning.

"Go ahead and take off your shoes and step on up."

She followed the instructions and tried to stand up as tall as she could while the volunteer took her height and then weight. The volunteer recorded the scores and glanced at the standards. Each height had a range of acceptable weights for men and women.

"Hold on one moment." The woman went to go talk to the officer running the station.

The officer came over and said, "You are going to come with me. You failed height and weight. We will need to review your file."

Kelly was escorted through what seemed like a maze of hallways to a small room. A few other candidates were sitting in the room already, awaiting decisions about their fate at the preparatory school. She sat there for hours. When I walked by the room, I saw out of the corner of my eye through the windows her sitting there—though I did not know her at the time—a Black woman with lighter skin and wide almond eyes. She had a serene and utterly calm look on her face. I wondered what she was doing in that room and who she was.

As she waited, Kelly reflected on the journey that had brought her to the preparatory school. She had lived her whole life in the Midwest in a city that was once booming from the steel industry but had deteriorated over time.[40] Now it had one of the highest rates of crime and drug overdoses in the country. It was not a safe or a particularly nice place to live, but it was home. Her father lived on the border between the decrepit area and the up-and-coming suburbs. Their house was almost the barrier between the two. On one side, roads were riddled with potholes; on the other, roads were perfectly paved. Her parents were divorced so she would switch off between their homes each week. Her mother never lived near the city, preferring the suburbs where most of the White community resided. Her mother's large house was lively with her stepfather, sister, nephew, and grandmother all together in the space.

Kelly had first learned about West Point when she received a recruitment email as a freshman in high school. She had mentioned casually to her father that a military school was emailing her, and when he found out it was West Point, he told her it was a huge deal: "They make leaders there!" He scheduled a visit for her that summer. She hated it. *These people are crazy, they don't have fun.* She had thought college was all about having a good time. She chuckled a little thinking back at herself as so young and immature. When her junior year came around, she started to revisit the idea. College was expensive. Maybe she should try this West Point thing. It would certainly help her in her future career in politics—it was a male-dominated field and men would not be able to just dismiss her as a woman if she were a West Point grad. Anyone who graduated from West Point was legitimate.

When she had decided to apply, her mother and grandmother did not understand: "But you're too pretty to go! You don't have to go." They heard West Point and they immediately

[40]Kelly told me about her hometown during our interviews. I visited her and her family there during my home visits after preparatory school graduation. See that afterward for further information on the home visits.

thought of war and weapons and could not imagine their princess there. With her grades and leadership experience, she could get a full ride anywhere in the country. Even if the scholarships fell through, they would pay for college for her: "Why are you doing this to yourself? Why?" Kelly had simply told them that it was God's plan for her to go to West Point. When the admissions officer visited them, her mother said flatly, "You're turning my prom queen into a soldier."

Kelly received a letter of assurance from West Point even before she had finished her application because of her high grades and leadership experience running the student council. They brought her on another visit, and this time she loved it—she stayed with a cadet for three days who assured her that if the cadet could do it, so could she. Her congressional nomination was televised. She was in the newspaper. Her principal told her that she was the first person from the school to ever go to West Point: "We are so proud of you."

The time came for her official acceptance letter, but the Academy could not issue it until she passed the candidate fitness assessment.[41] She took the test repeatedly but could not pass the pull-up or the alternative option for the flexed arm hang. They sent her to the preparatory school to improve physically over the year before starting the Academy. She did not mind—Obama's daughter had taken an internship year, right? This was her internship year to decide what she really wanted.

Over the next few hours, more candidates came in and joined Kelly in the waiting room and others left. One candidate was told he could not stay at the preparatory school because of a new medical issue and was sent back to his parents. Another candidate had mentioned sleepwalking on her forms and was sent away. One woman came into the room a bit after Kelly

[41]All applicants to the United States Military Academy, Naval Academy, and Air Force Academy are required to take the Candidate Fitness Assessment to ensure they have the physical capacities for military life.

because she had finally reported her shin splits when they made her fill out the in-processing medical forms. Her coach had warned her not to say anything until after she arrived, otherwise they would not let her come. Dominic Campbell, a Black man from the South, had been in the room even longer than Kelly after he was pulled aside for his tattoo, which the tattoo expert said was a gang sign. He had tried to wager with her, "How can it be a symbol for the Latin Kings? I am Black!" But they had sent him to this room to await judgment.

Members of the chain of command, including the commandant, came to talk speak to each person who was waiting. They told Kelly that they would need to review her file and would let her know if she could stay. She thought to herself, *oh please, I hope they let me go.* Now she was realizing the whole thing might have been a big mistake. She wondered if her parents were still near campus or if they were already driving back to Indiana. When Sergeant Compton saw Kelly for the first time, she recognized a bit of herself and decided that if Kelly was able to stay, she would make Kelly her mentee. She would help her get into shape. Sergeant First Class Lee, the Delta company noncommissioned officer who identified as African American and Italian, agreed. He would get her into standards as he had done for many candidates before her. After hours of deliberation, Kelly was told that she could stay but she would have to be on a strict diet, losing three to eight pounds per month. She joined up with the other candidates in the waiting area for the oath of enlistment.

Sergeant First Class Lee and Sergeant Compton worked closely with Kelly over the year to help her lose weight or, at least, pass tapes. Tapes were body circumference measurements that the Army used to calculate body mass index after a soldier failed height and weight. The first time I observed tape testing and helped the sergeant keep the tape measure straight, I felt like I was

measuring cattle. Checking which ones would make prime meat. It felt like the basest version of assessing bodies for suitability. It was shedding the military of "fat bodies." "Fat bodies" or "soft bodies" were terms I heard soldiers use to refer to those people who looked larger or overweight. Indeed, I had learned that *looking* in shape was part of uniform standards. Soldiers had to look fit to help maintain the appearance of unit uniformity and appear combat-ready, regardless of whether the numbers on the scale or tapes had specific health or fitness meanings.

During tape testing, men were taped around their necks and waists. The grader subtracted the length of the neck from the length of the waist—meaning the thicker the neck, the thicker the waist could be. Often very muscular men failed height and weight but passed tapes easily. Captain Kennedy (our company commander who was a White man from the Northeast) and Sergeant First Class Lee, who loved to build muscle mass, were always tape tested but always passed. Those who did not pass naturally had other strategies. They would flex their neck muscles during measurement to try to make it wider or even work out their necks in the weeks before the test— putting weights around their heads to build muscle girth there. An officer outside of preparatory school once told me another trick: one could put hemorrhoid cream on one's stomach and then wrap oneself with a towel the night before tape tests. It had worked well for him in the past.

Women were taped around their necks, waists, and hips. The waist and hip lengths were added together, and the neck length was subtracted. This meant that the waist to hip ratio was ignored. A woman candidate could have a thin waist but if she had wide hip bones, she would fail. Some of the women, especially Black women like Kelly, had tiny waists and wide hips. Even when it did not look like there was an ounce of fat on their waist and hips, they could still fail to fit within the standards. I could not understand why the military developed a system for

body fat that added waist to hip size together. Wasn't the waist-to-hip ratio supposed to signify something important?[42] Did weight and girth really matter if one could still pass the physical fitness tests? Eventually, I connected it to status and perceived competence. Soldiers needed to *look* like they were competent to perform physical tasks to show that they would be able to contribute to the mission. Snap judgments based on appearance would determine who was seen as a valuable asset to the team and also help Americans trust their soldiers' effectiveness, even if in reality body composition was not directly correlated with battlefield performance. Moreover, proper bodily appearance signaled discipline—the discipline to eat and exercise according to a strict regimen to create the most useful body for the military. If leaders did not have the discipline to control their own weight, how could they be trusted to ensure their subordinates would comply with standards? Ironically, the strategies candidates employed to manipulate their bodies to pass tapes took advantage of this focus on surface-level appearance. Tricks like fattening their necks, corseting their waists, or fasting the day before measurement were ways to pass without having to lose the weight but make it seem as though they had. They were illusions to help one remain within the system by *looking* the part.

When I brought my skepticism about the height and weight system during tape testing, a sergeant assured me that the military knew what it was doing—it developed these metrics specifically. I had to trust the system. After he left the room, the sergeant I had been helping with tapes for women whispered to me, "it is a trap." She was a thin Black woman who had never been taped in her career, but she tried to tell each woman she taped some tips that might help them. She was empathetic to their struggle and knew the system was not designed for their bodies. Certain body types (i.e., shorter and curvier women) struggled more to pass and these

[42] Research suggests that waist-to-hip ratio is a valuable health index, in some cases more so than the body mass index (Elsayed et al. 2008; Moosaie et al. 2021; Noble 2001; Sayeed et al. 2003).

body types were common in certain racial and ethnic groups, particularly those who were Black or Hispanic/Latin-American. As such, many Black women candidates failed tape tests because of their body structures. Kelly was one of them.

Kelly's body did not easily conform to military height and weight standards. The leadership kept taking her weight and tapes every other week to check on her progress and made her attend a nutrition class. One evening after another failed tape test, she explained to me that she thought her body shape made it harder for her to be in the military. She had large breasts and hips that, as she put it, "naturally made things harder" for her. She explained the situation to me in light of the show *Dear White People*:

> In the show, they were saying, 'White people think they deserve an award for acknowledging that White privilege is real,' and were like, 'well you have to do something after that.' Use that to go out into society and change how White privilege and things like that affect the world that we live in today. I was like in the Army we see it and acknowledge it, but now fix it. Take regulations, like the whole weight system. It's just so out of whack. Cause I'm just shaped differently than other females and I know girls that are bigger than me that run a lot faster than me. There are probably a lot of people that could be really good soldiers that the Army misses out on because of things like body fat, weight composition, and stuff. I get it, there should be a standard, but I also feel like, do some type of genetic coding and see who fits where and go off of that, because this doesn't work.

Kelly saw the height and weight system as one that privileged White bodies, and if the Army was sincere about wanting to reduce inequality in the military, it would have to fix this problem. She often heard other candidates talking about how the height and weight system were made for White, and possibly Asian, women. During Kelly's last tape test, she saw a Hispanic candidate fail even though she was a marathon runner. There was something wrong with the system when not even the fittest soldiers could pass. Yet, until the system changed, Kelly did what she could to make her body fit into the box.

Kelly, who already had a low waist-to-hip ratio, started wearing a corset-like waist trainer

to narrow her waist. She wore this at all times and eventually it molded the shape of her body and helped her shed the last inches to pass. I could not imagine how she was able to breathe when she wore it to the gym. She also went on a diet with Sergeant Compton, in which she would only eat solid meals for dinner. Sergeant Compton did it with her for solidarity, but she was more concerned about losing *too* much weight and falling under the acceptable standards. She was glad that Kelly was on the diet because she kept being frustrated when she saw Kelly eating candy or fatty foods at meals. She would tell Kelly, "Right now you want that Twinkie, but you're not working for your end goal. Push yourself now and relax later." Sergeant First Class Lee was equally frustrated when he saw the candidates he was working with eating poorly or when their parents would send them junk food, directly interfering with their progress. This was why he would have candidates who were on the edge stay with him and his wife over the summer rather than returning home to their families that would let them get out of shape again. Kelly hated the diet and her energy levels were extremely low from eating such little food, but it worked.

Over 10 months, Kelly went from 38% to 30% body fat. By the end of the year, she was able to pass the tape test and matriculate into the Academy. She told me she felt healthier and people at home noticed the difference. When Kelly did pass the tape test both Captain Kennedy and Sergeant First Class Lee emailed her to say congratulations and how proud they were of her progress. Athena Little was not happy: she judged Kelly for complying with the unjust system. Athena saw Kelly's compliance in manipulating her body and forcing herself to change physically as giving in to the defunct military system. Yet, Athena herself was not required to make decisions about whether to manipulate her body to meet the standards because her body dimensions naturally passed. Height and weight, unlike appearance standards, had clear cut

scales of passing and failing that were immediate grounds for separation from the Army.

4 Leather

Our platoon walked into the auditorium in time to hear another platoon reciting loudly and in sync the definition of leather from our knowledge books:

"If the fresh skin of an animal, cleaned and divested of all hair, fat, and other extraneous matter, must be immersed in a dilute solution of tannic acid, a chemical combination ensues: the gelatinous tissue of the skin is converted into a nonputresible substance, impervious to and insoluble in water; this is leather."

Dominic Campbell's eyes widen. *What? That is shit is crazy! That is saying they are like brainwashing you!* He turned to his squad mates and whispered, "Ya'll, do you hear that?"

"Hell yeah! HOOAH."

I can't be the only one who sees that these folks are trying to brainwash you and turn you into robots. That's what they are doing. How do other folks not see that? Dominic would not let himself be turned into leather.

5 Muscles

Passing height and weight was never a problem for Lily Rose—she always did—but she did not necessarily see her slimness as a positive trait. Lily told me that in the civilian world people always praised her for being small and skinny: it was a compliment. Here, being skinny was negative. She told me if she did not bulk up, she would not look like a soldier or be taken seriously. I learned alongside Lily that muscles were a visible symbol of strength in the military: muscles showed the ability to carry out the tasks necessary to accomplish the mission. If one was visibly strong, they were seen as more competent; they were more likely to be able to carry the heft of heavy equipment or drag their buddy off the field in combat. If one was not strong or fit, they were considered a liability to the unit. Indeed, one of the main reasons men candidates told me that women should not be allowed in the infantry is that they would not be strong enough to drag bodies off the battlefield. Weakness was often equated with the female body. One day at the gym, I was working out next to some athletes. One yelled back at the others who were goofing around a bit, "Ya'll aren't working out, you look like females." They should work-out and 'look like men' or get out.

During the academic year, weightlifting became a regular part of our lives. Most candidates lifted during mass athletics—a three-hour period after the afternoon study period and before dinner—though some candidates would wake up early or do extra lifting before class.[43] It was easy to get into the rhythm of weightlifting each day, switching off between muscle groups. Company tactical officers, sergeants, and in some cases teachers, functioned as almost personal trainers, teaching us how to lift for maximum results, and encouraging us to go beyond our

[43] Morris Janowitz (1960:130) argued that athletics have taken the place of "excessively harsh discipline" in the Academies because sports involve a team spirit, symbolic combat, and prepare officers to lead civilians as citizen soldiers.

comfort zones. Here too we were being trained in discipline: the discipline of regular exercise to build up a strong body. A strong body signaled the mental toughness necessary to push oneself past their limits, a quality that was necessary for warfighting.

Bodies changed throughout the year as we took on more muscle mass. My biceps, triceps, and shoulders began to bulge after a few months of regular weight training as part of the infantry club. The candidates and tactical team noticed and said I was starting to look like a soldier. My squad mate Saul Alvarez, a mixed-race man from the South, was so proud of my improvement, that he exclaimed, "Winfield, you are a warrior!" One day in the gym, Sergeant First Class Lee asked if I was wearing another shirt under my physical training shirt because my shoulders were looking so big. Later in the year, Captain Kennedy and Sergeant First Class Lee joked that I should name my book, "How the military turned me into a man." They told me that when I first arrived, I looked like a nerdy, civilian researcher but now I looked the part. One joked that I would be the one picking up my husband on my wedding day. Other women began to work out with me and ask me for training advice. As my muscles grew, I felt as though my testosterone levels were increasing exponentially. I felt more aggressive, competitive, and more comfortable joking around with the men on my team. I would walk around with a swagger, standing tall, feeling big, and ready to take down any obstacle in my way. When I went home to visit family during a break, my mother looked at my arms and asked if I wanted to look feminine for my wedding. I asked her why, and she said I was looking a bit masculine these days.

Others also experienced dramatic physical changes in their first few months at the preparatory school. Adam Evans told me his friends at home were impressed by his new physique. He had always been big but now he was "cut from stone." Carlos Estrada grew significantly larger because he was able to eat three meals per day, which was unusual for him

because at home he only had enough money to maybe eat once or twice a day. He felt more nourished and gained stature as he had access to a full gym. It was common for the men to gain upward of 20 pounds during the year.

Changes were particularly pronounced and, in some cases, more complicated, for women. When Catherine Poli, a White prior from the Northeast, went home to visit her family, her friends gawked at her back muscles and arms that they were able to see through her t-shirt. The first time she put on her old clothes, she did not even recognize herself. Catherine was in a constant mental battle between working out to be a competent soldier, but still feeling comfortable with herself and feeling like a woman.

When Olivia Greene, a White prior from the Midwest, saw her mother again after a few months enlisted, her mother stared at her in a tank top and exclaimed, “Oh my God, you have bigger muscles than me. Oh my God, you have bigger muscles than your brother!”

Olivia responded awkwardly, not sure what to say: "Oh…I’m sorry, this is what I need to do." She thought to herself, *okay, I’m turning more into a guy than a girl.* She figured that in a hyper-masculine environment the female body would evolve and grow to match the males. She knew that if she fell behind, she would be left behind. Pushing herself to become better than her male teammates helped her gain confidence as a soldier, and she kept pushing and pushing, to not only met the men’s standards but surpass them.

Chelsea Melton gained about fifteen pounds over the year, which she attributed to muscle. Her legs had grown a lot from squatting, her biceps swelled, and she often admired her new abs. She thought her growth had to do with access to a good gym and motivated roommates. Chelsea and her roommate, Grace Ives, would work out together in the evenings during the academic year while watching Netflix. When Chelsea went home for break, her family told her

how good she looked. Her friends were a little more surprised, joking with her, "Are you gay yet?" or saying "you're just a dude now" after she beat them in physical exercises. In a similar sense to wearing uniforms, women had to violate gender norms around civilian 'feminine' appearance and behavior to fulfill norms about 'soldierliness' in the military world, which were aligned with conventional hyper-masculinity. Our behaviors and musculature were more aligned with *performing* masculinity rather than femininity and friends and family reacted by comparing us to men or "gay women." Yet, to be perceived as competent soldiers—and thus, gain status in the institution—we had no choice but to bulk up our bodies, and for many of us, our muscles became a source of pride as we adopted the ideology that strength equaled value.

Grace Ives, a White from the West Coast, loved her muscles and would post pictures flexing on her Snapchat and Instagram accounts. She had a woman from her old unit that she shared workout routines with, and they continued to push each other. Grace and I often worked out in the gym together as we pushed each other to "stop bullshittin" and work harder.

Lisbeth Sokolov felt strong when she started gaining weight. When she passed herself in the mirror and saw her legs and a line in her calf, she marveled: *What is that? Holy shit! Oh my God, it's my muscles! Holy shit!* She would often look in the mirror and admire her new physique, her legs, her thighs, her arms. She was proud of her musculature. She joked with me she did not even know she had triceps before coming to the military. Lisbeth's first time back at a civilian gym, she felt huge. She laughed telling me as we exchanged civilian gym stories, "it made me a little cocky. It was like, let me get that for you, ma'am." I also felt gigantic when I went to the gym with civilians, like I was overly developed. I felt on display and self-conscious when I did pull-ups or used heavy weights that seemed abnormal activities for a woman in the civilian world; but I also felt proud as I outperformed civilian men and women, like a badass

soldier. I was inculcated with the idea that muscles equal usefulness to such an extent that one afternoon during a particularly intense workout, I mused if it would really be so bad to get some testosterone shots—then I would have larger muscles and able to fully participate as a useful member of the infantry club.

Towards the end of my time at the preparatory school, my muscles shrunk considerably due to injuries in my leg and shoulder which left me unable to lift weights. Sergeant First Class Lee started to make fun of me: "What happened?" "You look so skinny." Looking skinny was not a compliment. "You look so breakable." He noted how soft my hands felt now, no more calluses from the weight lighting. I was no longer seen as competent and strong. One day when we were at the gym at the same time and I was doing my physical therapy exercises, he told me: "I can't even look at you right now." He said that his doctor said he shouldn't work out at all, but if he stopped, his body would just fall apart. His muscles were the only thing holding his body together. He said that Captain Kennedy was on medicine that does something for his joints and lifting is bad for them, but he still does it anyway. A true infantryman. In his mind, true soldiers keep building their muscles and strength regardless of the health consequences. It was worth becoming strong and showing value to the unit through one's physical strength and associated mental toughness in the present even if it might be harmful in long run.

6 Alone and Ugly!

Lisbeth Sokolov's family was shocked when she told them she wanted to attend West Point. She had decided her junior year after attending an event at her high school about the military academies. The idea of free college in addition to doing push-ups and shooting machine guns and rockets sounded amazing. She had always imagined she might join the Army eventually and now she would not have to deal with thousands of dollars in student loans.

When she first told her mother that she wanted to go to a military academy, Lisbeth remembered her mom replying in her strong accent, "The military?! Whoa, no, you can't do that, you're a girl! You'll be like Bob, and you will look like a man, then you'll never marry anybody. You'll be alone for the rest of your life! Alone and ugly!"

7 Hair

"Winfield, About Face."

I cringed at the sound of the voice behind me one morning during basic training. I spun around on my heel and toe as instructed in the About Face command and came eye to eye with our Cadet Platoon Leader.

"If you ever show up with your hair like that in my formation again, I will drop you." He glared at me with his dark brown eyes that signaled his disgust that I would dare to show up to formation with "jacked up" hair. He stated his correction in a quiet, severe tone.

"Yes, sir. No excuses, sir."[44]

He turned me back around. My face was burning and my stomach knotted. It did not matter that I had not had time between morning physical training, changing, and preparing my materials for the day to redo my hair. He did not care about my excuses. I had failed. I had brought disorder to his formation. That day I used extra gel and hair spray to show him that I could meet his standards. Back in our suite, Jasmine Washington, a Black woman from the South, helped me make sure it looked perfect. *Ha! That will show him.* She joked that when they asked who did my hair and found it out it was her, they would wonder then why her hair was always so messed up, her big bun always a bit lopsided. My emotional experiences around hair during the first few days of basic training made me curious about how hair would play into the (re)socialization process. As a sociologist, I knew that hair was an important part of personal

[44] We had four permitted responses to the cadet chain of command as well as to the tactical team during basic training: "Yes, sir/ma'am/sergeant;" "No, sir/ma'am/sergeant;" "No excuses, sir/ma'am/sergeant;" "I do not understand, sir/ma'am/sergeant." We referred to cadet officers and cadet sergeants as 'sir/ma'am' or 'sergeant' even though they were not technically commissioned or non-commissioned officers; it was part of the training.

identity that is deeply braided with gender and race and shaped by fashion and authorities (Donahoo 2022; Donahoo and Smith 2022; Mbilishaka and Apugo 2020; Robinson 2011). I wanted to explore how it functioned in an institution that was hyper-focused on appearance, discipline, and surveillance.

On Reception Day, while the men were getting buzz cuts and shaving their faces, the women were herded into a bathroom full of hair products—gel, hair spray, combs, bobby pins—with photos on the wall to direct us. The images were clear—no hair touching the collar, no lopsided buns, no zigzagged hair parts. Army appearance regulations listed three acceptable hairstyles for females, one each for short, medium, and long hair. As of 2017, braids and twists were in regulation if they were neat and followed the guidelines.[45] Some incoming women candidates had already done their hair that morning, but for most, those civilian efforts were inadequate. We pulled down our hair, wetted it in the sink, brushed through it, pulled it back tightly into a ponytail, slicked the top back with gel, braided the tail, wrapped the tail around, and used several more hair ties to secure the end. The Black woman cadet monitoring the process told Athena Little that her braids should be fine because they were included in the regulations now, but that she might be told to take them out because they were not straight back. Athena thought, *Girl I am not taking out my braids, they cost way too much money.* As Athena looked around the room to all the women doing their hair and putting in gel, she realized, *wow, we are really in the military now. We have to conform to them.* We returned to our newly bald men teammates with our identical buns.

I had a steep learning curve when it came to learning how to do my bun. My hair is fine

[45] Hair standards changed again in 2021. New standards allow women to wear their hair in ponytails and braids outside of buns, if the hair is secured and "neat."

but curly, so it resisted being put back and easily slipped out of the bun. Fortunately, our company had Grace Ives. Grace had already been in the military for three years and her bun was her prized possession. It looked like an angelic crown on the back of her head. Her bun was made from a braid, secured into place with gel, hairspray, hair ties, and many bobby pins. She became the go-to person to teach the women how to do their hair. The cadre even sent (White) candidates with mischievous hair to her. I remember the day she did my hair. She brushed water into my hair, applied gel, and worked her magic. Afterward, I felt amazing—beautiful, professional, and like a real soldier. Unfortunately, I could never get my hair to look as good as when she did it for me, but I never varied from her techniques in hopes that I would achieve that perfect bun.

Chelsea Melton learned from Grace's skills and soon was able to model a beautiful bun as well. Grace would critique Chelsea's bun daily until she got a system to keep it perfect. Chelsea missed the attention she received in high school for her long, shiny hair. It took some time for her to adjust to the new look and it was a humbling process because she had always, in a way, defined herself by her hair. Now at least she could take pride in a perfect bun. Still, she daydreamed about leaving the institution and letting her hair down again, free.

Lily was sent to Grace to fix her hair during basic training, but her hair fell out of the bun quickly. Lily's hair was so pin-straight that when she tried to put it into a bun, hairs immediately escaped no matter how much gel was used, and she had to redo it every hour. Regardless of how many hair ties or bobby pins she used, her hair loosened. She even tried using Kelly's super strength hair gel to no avail. Two cadets were so frustrated with Lily's hair that they did it themselves. Within 15 minutes, the bun had fallen out completely. A few hours later the same cadets yelled at her about that same bun they had made. She laughed to herself, *at least when I*

do my hair my buns last an hour. Towards the end of basic training, she gave up trying to make her hair perfect. When she was corrected on her hair, she would just nod along trying to put a pleasant look on her face. When I asked her if she was going to re-do her bun before lunch one day when it looked especially terrible, she responded: "I give up. I'm not gonna try anymore with this situation because no matter what I do it's not going to help me. They are going to yell at me no matter what."

We were explicitly told that how our hair looked would determine whether we would be taken seriously as soldiers. During a "female-only" meeting in basic training, a cadet told us bluntly, "People will judge you based on your bun. If your hair is not together, people will assume your life is not together." When I shared this message with Sergeant Compton, she concurred—in the Army people judge one another based on their hair. Captain Kennedy explained that this held true for the men as well. The length and style of their hair signaled how serious a soldier was about being in the Army. A soldier with a "high and tight" cut could be recognized in civilian clothing as one thoroughly committed to his soldier identity.

As I began to focus and put so much attention on my hair, I started noticing others' hair more too. I checked out their buns, and—as the cadre had warned us—I even started judging others based on their hair. This was daily life for Grace. She would grow increasingly frustrated when she saw women with improper buns, often having to call her father to vent. She found these bad buns distracting. I too would become irritated when I saw a woman with hair flowing wild or when a men's hair extended too high above his forehead. These hairstyles felt jolting, strange, and a violation of the order and discipline I had learned to hold sacred in the setting. Hair had taken on an emotional salience for me and seeing deviations from the norm created a bodily response often before I was consciously aware of why I was unsettled. It was like the

micro-details in the uniform—each small deviance, even accidental, was perceived as a much larger message about commitment to the profession and the ability to take care of soldiers in combat. The more a candidate's hair adhered to the image of the *ideal* soldier, the more others, candidates and authorities alike, judged them as competent, committed, disciplined, and trusted soldiers. Hairstyle, like the other elements of appearance, was a proxy for mission-specific competency even though it had little to do with actual warfighting ability. The challenge was that different textures and types of hair would more or less easily comply with the institutional vision of neat and orderly hair; thus, hair became a mechanism behind gendered and radicalized inequalities within the institution.

One early Sunday morning after basic training, the Black women candidates and I gathered in the parking lot to get picked for the "PERM party." The first bus arrived, and a group of us waited for the second bus. While we waited, some candidates showed me various hairstyles on their phones that they could not wait to try when they were civilians again, different types of twists, puffs, locks, and braids that did not comply with the strict regulations. The bus returned and we traveled down to the hair salon at West Point. The room was bustling with Black women, some in uniform and others in civilian clothing. Some candidates from the first bus were already eating breakfast and having their hair examined. One Black cadet sergeant from basic training was there and hugged some candidates from her platoon.

Black women sergeants and officers, many of whom were old West Point graduates themselves, started washing the candidates' hair and braiding it. Some alumni brought up the benefits of locks and offered to do them on the candidates. Now that the Army appearance regulations had expanded to include locks and braids there were more options for the candidates

to try. Athena whispered to me, “I feel like I am back in my hair salon in Dallas!”

Athena had grown up in a majority Black area with a mix of middle-class homes and large public housing developments.[46] She lived with her mother, father, and two sisters in a yellow two-story house they owned, which was filled with small African statues of biblical figures. Now she felt that she had been transported back home and she relaxed a little. She had commented to me earlier that week, “Taylor, I am not sure if I am Black power or human power, but I do not feel like I can be myself here.” At least in the small salon in the basement of a building in West Point, she could settle into herself for a few hours.

About an hour or so into the event, the event leaders got our attention. We gathered around and the event leaders introduced themselves. There were several majors, captains, and sergeants. They shared that they had all been mentored by strong Black women and mentored each other when they were at West Point or in enlisted training. One shared that PERM stood for Partnership, Equality, Respect, and Mentorship—that was what they were trying to build through bringing the Black women together.

The first Black woman to graduate from West Point spoke to the group, almost in tears about how amazing it was for her to see a room full of Black West Point cadets and candidates. When she was at West Point, there were only two Black women and now there were so many. She reflected that anything hard for her then was worth it now. A few other alumni spoke as well, reminding us that our first goal should be to graduate. Even if we decided to transfer, we will need to have good grades. “Strive for excellence. Achieve what you came here to do!” Another shared alumna shared:

> We need to stick together and support each other. You will see Black women with their heads held up high here, because they have pride in being a Black woman. If you see a

[46] Athena told me about her hometown during our interviews and I visited her and her family there after the preparatory school graduation.

> Black woman with her head down, ask her what is going on. Or you will see her pick it up and smile when she passes you by.
>
> How many of you all know how many Black women are here? In my day, we knew exactly how many there were and who graduated. Now there are 390, but still only .006% of the West Point graduates. We knew that number because the number was important.

A Major spoke: "People are going to assume things about you or why you are here. People have assumed I was just a spouse or an athletic coach. Their version of excellence does not include you, and you need to start ignoring that. Set three goals: academic, military, and athletic. "

Then the conversation circled back to hair and regulations. The sergeant and officers present shared the following advice:

> It's not racism if it's a regulation. If you do something with your hair that is not in regulation, and someone gets on you, it's not racism. If someone asks you to take off your long nails, he ain't being racist.
>
> Keep regulations in your pocket at all times. So, if you are stopped, you are able to pull that out right away. Not everyone will know the regulations. People will have expectations for how you should look, expecting you to pay more on your hair than you make in a month.
>
> You want your sister to correct you before the White man does. This is a sisterhood, and we are in this together. Not everyone here wants us to win.

Following the discussion, many candidates got their hair washed, twisted, or French braided. I realized that hair was an opportunity to connect over racial identity and strategize about how to survive and thrive in the institution as Black women. Just as hair was essential to military identity and group boundaries, it was also a key part of racial/ethnic identity and community building.

As Athena, Kelly Carter, and I walked back up to the prep school together after the event, Athena kept saying how happy she was that this group existed—it was important to have supportive groups. She was looking for a strong Black woman mentor and thought there were many amazing women at the event who could be good options for her. She could not wait for

when she could also be a mentor for junior soldiers. Kelly chimed in that she thought the PERM party had been important because now they knew someone rooting for them at West Point and that there were officers who could relate to them.

After the PERM party, several Black women, with short and long hair, kept a copy of the hair regulations in their uniform pockets. Often, they helped one another with their hair, either giving each other cornrows before field exercises or helping to remove braids or weaves. Still, horror stories circulated of incoming women cadets to West Point being forced to take out their braids in Porto-Johns or cutting out their weaves with their Gerber pocketknife.

Over the year, Black candidates developed several strategies for making their hair fit within the Army appearance regulations. Some candidates spent the year continually getting braids, which required taking a taxi or asking for a ride to the nearest location that could properly do braids and spending a large chunk of their monthly paycheck on the hair bill. Towards the middle of the year, Athena decided the effort to get her hair braided was just too much and decided to go natural. She took out her braids to unveil her natural hair for the first time. Others, like Kelly and Jasmine, who had already had long natural hair that could be coaxed into a bun, kept their hair long, using lots of gel to secure their buns.

Even when Black candidates' hair technically fit within the regulations, many racially charged incidents occurred around their hair. There was a disconnect between the image of 'professional' hair that was deeply ingrained in many authorities and prior service candidates' minds and the styles that were now permitted in the regulations. When Jocelyn Jones, a Black woman from the South, first arrived on Reception Day, she heard two White priors whispering behind her in line, "I don't think her hair is in regs."

She turned around and said, "Yes, it is."

"Are you sure about that? I know another Black girl who has hair like that. I don't think hers is in regs either. Yours may be in regs, but I don't know about hers." The priors started researching on their phones.

Barbara Fenton, a Black Hispanic woman from the South, had her hair braided four times, in four different styles, and each time a member of the candidate chain of command tried to make her take them out. Barbara started walking around with a ruler, so when they said, "Your bun is too big," she could measure it in front of them and tell them to leave her alone.

Halfway through the year, a group of White men priors took it upon themselves to research the regulations. They spent evenings in one room looking through the regulations carefully and highlighting all the places where some Black women in the company were out of standard. One evening I sat with them, and they talked about how ridiculous it was when people's hair was so big that their patrol caps could not sit straight on their heads. That was how they knew a candidate was out of regulations. Sure, braids were technically in regulations now, but how come the braids were so thick? And their buns—way too wide! Had I noticed that one candidate's braids looked like ropes that had been chopped off randomly in certain places? I asked them how they could tell hair was out of regulations, and one told me it just looked "unprofessional, different, and weird."

After studying the regulations together, they would go out and tell the women their hair was wrong. In response, the woman in question would take out the regulations from her pocket to prove that she was right. Again and again, these situations repeated. One candidate told a Black prior that her hair looked unprofessional because it puffed out too much on the sides and touched her ears. She decided to cut her hair but asked us over lunch: "have you noticed how some of the White priors were always getting on the Black females about their hair? What is that

really about?"

When I brought up these observations in a discussion with our company commander, Captain Kennedy, he nodded along. He told me that he had noticed that often soldiers—particularly those who are White and male—would say something was out of regulation and correct others just because something felt *different*, even if it was not necessarily wrong. His words made me think about the literature on emotions and social boundaries. Sociologists are increasingly showing how emotional reactions and intuitions, rather than conscious deliberation, guide judgment, and network composition (Ignatow 2007; Turner and Stets 2005; Vaisey and Lizardo 2010). Thus, candidates may have been penalized because of the emotional discomfort of those from different gender and racial backgrounds rather than on whether they were actually in standards. Captain Kennedy continued that he was worried these dynamics were one of the reasons for the low retention rates of Black candidates; they just felt out of place and unwelcome because they were constantly being corrected even when trying to conform to institutional standards. In some cases, their bodies could just not fit into the idealized and emotionally ingrained image of a soldier that was based on White men's bodies.

I found that the leadership had a few strategies when it came to the question of Black women's hair. Some White leaders felt that they did not need to learn the hair standards for Black women; it was the job of the Black leadership to teach and correct these candidates. This approach was made explicit during one "female-only" meeting during basic training, in which a White officer reviewed hair standards, with the caveat that she was not as familiar with the hair standards for Black females. If they had a question, they should go to Sergeant Compton. Athena was outraged: was it not the job of this officer to know the regulations for all her soldiers? There were no "Black" and "non-Black" standards. The same hair standards applied to all women

soldiers regardless of their skin color.

Other leaders remained silent to avoid perpetuating inequalities. When I shared with one White officer that some Black women candidates felt that the officers were ignorant or indifferent to their hair regulations, he said it was to the contrary. He was well aware of the regulations but felt that they were unreasonable unless the woman had tiny, short braids. The existing regulations still did not adequately take into consideration Black women's actual hair. One White sergeant told me that he intentionally stayed quiet because he did not want to be perceived as racist.

Other White authorities tried to wrap their heads around the choices of Black women candidates. Why would one enter basic training wearing a weave? A White sergeant mused that Black females are less likely to try hard physically or get dirty because of messages they received growing up about getting their hair sweaty or wet. When he told Jocelyn this, she responded, "That may be true for some, but I'm in the Army now, I don't care anymore if I get my hair sweaty." His comment reinforced her belief that Black women in the Army, and women in general, had a negative reputation. He, on the other hand, was trying to relate to her and the possible struggles she and other Black candidates may have around hair and exercise.

Challenges around race, hair, and differential treatment came up often in conversations between candidates. One winter evening in the hallway, Athena was chatting with a Black candidate, Charlie, about his experiences so far in the Army:

"Do you feel like you've had to assimilate to them [White people] outside of the military training you received here?"

Charlie shrugged. "My mom taught me when you are working in a professional setting, you got to put a face on."

Athena squinted her large almond eyes, “Well, why don’t they have to put a face on? Like Black girls going natural will look different. But we have to appease them and when their hair looks like shit?”

Again, a passive shrug. “Well, the regulations are changing, the military is getting better at it, allowing braids…”

Athena interrupted him: “I don’t think you understand. I’ve seen a lot of people who are not my color whose hair looks horrible and no one says anything.”

“Black hair is more frizzy.”

Athena’s eyes opened widely and a crease appeared between her eyebrows. “Frizzy? I’m about to educate you. Frizzy is saying it’s a little bit rough for us. That is why you have assimilated. You don’t like it.”

Charlie, resigned: “What do you want me to say?”

“It’s sauce, it’s poppin. All I’m saying is that if I had an Afro and had my hat on, people would freak out but if Sally had her frizzies, no one would say anything.”

The complaint that Black candidates were held to a different standard than White candidates was not new to me. We regularly spoke about the attention that their hair got for being “unkempt” while White candidates’ hair was often worse: “Why were they complaining my about large bun when that girl’s hair is flying everywhere?” White women candidates had loose hairs—Lily was the typical example—sticking out from the bun and behind their ears and no one seemed to care. The fact that Lily had been regularly corrected during basic training was less consequential: Lily was eventually left alone but several of the Black candidates felt that they were constantly under a microscope for the entire year, particularly by the White priors. Jocelyn felt that regardless of her hair, as a Black person in the Army she was going to stand out.

As a woman, she was going to stand out even more. And, as a Black woman, she would be the most noticeable. When she saw that people had problems with her hair and not the White woman, she would ask herself: *Do I just pop out because of my race, or am I really that bad?*

Another night at dinner, Dominic Campbell said that he was upset because his sergeant came up to him and his friend and said, "I know for people like you shaving can be hard, but please shave tomorrow."

People like you? Are you serious? Dominic was angry because the sergeant was just assuming that because they were Black, they had shaving profiles and not taking seriously that it was damaging to some people's skin to shave every day.[47]

Ben Hall shared he had found a temporary solution to the painful bumps by using fancy shaving cream with Shea butter, but whenever he used a straight-edged razor he still had a bad reaction. Ben and Dominic agreed that Black officers who shaved every day had "jacked up" skin on their faces. They were not trying to go down that route. Athena used this conversation as a jumping-off point to explain to the men the problems that Black women candidates experienced with their hair due to the texture. What did the authorities expect Black women to do—spend hundreds of dollars each month on braids or a weave, or chemically relax their hair, which could lead to permeant hair and scalp damage? All to fit into the perfect White mold? No way.

Nadav Butler, a Black candidate from the South, agreed. He thought the military's approach to Black hair and facial hair reflected its White and static nature, "People don't understand. When they look at the organization like the Army, it's real old and it's not just gonna change. They've had certain rules for a long time, hundreds of years. Black people will always

[47] Candidates could receive a note from an army medical professional that excepted them from shaving daily due to painful bumps and skin irritation. There was a stereotype that only Black men received shaving profiles.

get shaving profiles, and they don't like that. They say you gotta shave because gas masks and they say it's unprofessional, but I don't think it's unprofessional, I think it's just a certain style and it's a culture they're trying to continue." The idea that braids and twists were described as "faddish" in the hair regulations was just an undercover way of saying that they were uncomfortable with Black culture.[48]

Barbara nodded. She felt that the attention to Black candidates' head and facial hair was part of a racist culture: "You don't see it on the surface. Someone that's visiting they're not going to see that. But living here, you see it all the time."

[48] The 2021 updated hair regulations removed the word 'faddish.'

8 Tattoos

A few months into the year, it seemed as though everyone was getting tattoos. Almost every weekend a candidate would come back to the barracks and show me their new ink. Big tattoos, small tattoos, on their arms, legs, backs, and ankles of crosses, biblical verses, birth and death dates, and sentimental images. I came to see tattoos as a way that one could literally inscribe their own personal and group identities into their flesh, it was a permanent canvas for personal expression.[49]

On one hand, tattoos were a way for candidates to rebel against the uniformity of appearance and show that their bodies did not fully belong to the military. Although the Army maintained some control over tattoos—with a prohibition of tattoos on the face, neck, or hands, and against gang symbols and hate speech—candidates had significant leeway in how they wanted to decorate their flesh.[50] Even when a tattoo was covered in uniform, it was an enduring symbol of individuality. Lisbeth Sokolov got a dragon tattoo on her inner bicep, as this creature reminded her of her true nature.

On the other hand, tattoos were also a way for candidates to embody a permanent commitment to military life, particularly when individuals within the same unit got the same tattoos. Three members of my platoon got matching tattoos of the platoon motto, and several of our tactical officers and sergeants had tattoos that reminded them of their past units. I hypothesized that this was one of the reasons that the military continued to allow for tattoos when it so carefully controlled other areas of physical appearance. When socialization was successful, soldiers would permanently mark their new identities into their flesh.

[49] My impression was in line with existing literature on tattoos; for example, Maldonado-Estrada 2020, "Men, Tattoos, and Catholic Devotion in Brooklyn."
[50] See Army Regulations 670-1 for regulations on tattoos (Department of the Army 2021:12–14).

9 Military Bearing

"Keep your head and eyes straight forward, Cadet Candidate!"

We walked in long, snaking lines, winding through the hallways on Reception Day. We did not know where we were going yet because the building was unfamiliar. All we could do was look ahead; our eyes plastered on the back in front of us. Or, if instructed, keep our eyes steady on our knowledge books held up at eye-level in our left hands.

Not moving my eyes was trickier than I would have expected. My eyes naturally wanted to wander around the new setting and take in my surroundings. I wanted to look at the windows, look at the cadets who were yelling at me.

"Why are you looking at me cadet candidate? Do you think I'm pretty?"

During basic training, I learned several tricks to keep my eyes under control. I studied the hairs or freckles on the neck of candidates in front of me; I counted them or made constellations and shapes. When we were outdoors, I examined the nametape on the back of patrol caps. I did whatever I could to try to keep my eyes straight and forward and not give in to the powerful urges to look at whoever was being yelled at for moving their eyes, dropping their knowledge book, or having the incorrect posture. Sometimes I would take the risk and look furtively around. I was rarely caught. But when inevitable occurred, and I did make eye contact with a cadre member or officer or sergeant during my furtive glances, I knew I would be yelled at and do push-ups.

When we were learning land navigation during our first week on post, I accidentally looked around when we were walking to the classroom and made eye contact with an officer. I quickly looked away, praying that he had not noticed or that his eyes were not under as strict control or observation. Later, as my squad was making its way to lunch, the same officer got up

from his lunch table and stopped me.

"Why were you looking at me, Cadet Candidate?"

I jumped into the position of attention.

"No excuses, sir." I shot off one of the permitted four responses.[51]

My squad was moving forward so I started to inch in their direction.

"Are you going to walk while an officer is talking to you?"

I halted, trembling. He moved closer, his eyes now drilling into mine. His face looked furious and disgusted that a measly candidate would have the audacity to look at him in the hallways.

"No, sir. No excuses, sir."

When he finally let me go, I was blinking back tears. My squad mates gave me furtive looks trying to see if I was okay. Later when we were able to go back into our rooms, my suitemates gathered around and asked me,

"Do you know him? What happened?" My squad mate, Saul Alvarez, told me later that this was the moment he knew I was truly in it with them.[52]

Eye control was the first piece of facial control. During basic training, we were trained to control all aspects of our faces. This was seen as part of developing a military bearing, an appearance of professionalism. The military bearing was also about self-mastery. Faces had to portray the correct emotion, or rather a pleasant lack of emotion—not happy, not sad, not angry, just serious and motivated. There were specific *feeling rules*: norms on what emotions could be

[51] We had four permitted responses to the cadet chain of command as well as to the tactical team during basic training: "Yes, sir/ma'am/sergeant;" "No, sir/ma'am/sergeant;" "No excuses, sir/ma'am/sergeant;" "I do not understand, sir/ma'am/sergeant."

[52] Later that day, a senior leader who was helping organize my research came over to me to see if I was okay. He told me, chuckling, that this officer had mentioned to their lunch table that he had caught me looking around and the senior leader had told him to treat me like a regular candidate and go and give me a correction!

expressed, when and in what ways, within the institution (Hochschild 1983). This required that we performed "emotion work" to keep our visible emotional displays aligned with situational and professional norms (Hochschild 1979). Just as sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) found that flight attendants had to smile and give off a happy disposition to please customers as part of their jobs regardless of how they were feeling, so too did we have to suppress displays of pleasure and displeasure as part of adhering to our professional guidelines.

On Reception Day, we learned that smiling was unacceptable. At one point in the day, I accidentally smiled a bit and a cadet noticed:

"YOU THINK THIS IS FUNNY? YOU THINK YOU CAN LAUGH? WHO TOLD YOU THAT YOU COULD SMILE?"

Several other cadets swarmed me. I tried to turn my face neutral and blocked them out, but all the screaming voices in my face were overwhelming. *Just keep breathing, keep calm,* I told myself. Throughout basic training, I struggled to keep a straight face—my face kept wanting to naturally curve into a smile. I was stuck in my civilian mindset of wanting other people to *like* me. Not only did I instinctually want to make eye contact with the cadets when they passed me, but I also wanted to smile at them! Luckily, on days when I was exhausted or fed up with all the yelling, it was easier to not smile because I was genuinely miserable.

Anytime a cadet saw us smiling they would either yell at us or, if the cadet was in a pleasant mood, they would tell us to "murk that smirk." To murk a smirk, we would symbolically remove the smile from our face, throw it into the air, and shoot it. Sometimes the cadre would have more fun with our smiles. One Sunday, a squad mate got in trouble for smiling for the hundredth time and our platoon sergeant started joking around about what to do with his smiles.

"Throw your smile on the ground. Squish your smile. Shoot your smile. Now kill the smile. Bury your smile."

He made a small little grave in the dirt for his smile and made a cross on top with wood chips. But then he laughed again, and "the smile was resurrected!"

Occasionally the cadre would try to make us smile on purpose, and when we did, we would face physical corrective action like push-ups. On a steaming-hot basic training morning, while waiting for lunch formation, we had a competition for how long we could keep straight faces. A candidate in our platoon had drawn a cartoon picture of a platoon mascot, and the cadet platoon sergeant started laughing hysterically after seeing it. He then proceeded to go through the ranks of our formation and ask us if this was indeed our mascot and flash the picture. Anyone who laughed did push-ups. The cadet sergeant clarified afterward that this exercise was not all fun and games; he was working on our military bearing: "this is not horseplay—this is concurrent training in military bearing."

Lily Rose had the opposite problem during basic training and the rest of the year: her face was perceived as sad or arrogant. Within the first few days, Lily had gained the attention of the cadet cadre and the tactical leadership. They were always yelling at her to fix her shoelaces, her hair, and her "poopy" face. When she was feeling overwhelmed, she would try to zone out and block all emotions, and this was perceived as a sad or indifferent look on her face. One night during squad leader time, our cadet squad leader was talking to us about how to not catch the attention of the cadre. He said, looking at Lily, "Don't look poopy or you will be swarmed." When it was time for her counseling, he told her that she needed to concentrate on improving her military bearing.

There was not a single time I could remember when our squad was out of our rooms

when Lily was not being yelled at. We would be standing on the wall waiting for instruction, and inevitably a cadet would come up and get in her face. Lily regularly complained to us that she was being targeted. When I asked her why she thought the cadre was so focused on her, she told me, starting with a sad and exasperated laugh: "I've asked everyone. I haven't heard one similarity. I've heard multiple reasons—isn't that sad that no one actually knows why? I've heard: one, I look sad; two, on our first ruck, when Captain Kennedy yelled at me, it was in front of the cadets, so they saw him yell at me and it allowed them to pick on me too. I've heard that I look like I am hard to break. So that's why they wanted to break me, that's what someone else said. Someone said that I didn't say the basic responses. All of those."

After basic training, when I questioned a cadet about why the cadre was always on Lily, he stated that it was because the first day she mentioned something about her sister being an officer, and then she would always talk back; so, they decided they needed to break her down. Captain Kennedy explained to me, "she had attitude—no military bearing—whenever someone said something to her, she would roll her eyes and talk back."

Lily and I spoke about her facial expressions often, and she told me she figured it out one day with her sister: "I just look European." Lily's grandparents were Swiss, and her mother grew up in Switzerland, bringing the family back often on long vacations to see family. Her older sister explained to her that she was most the European looking in the family and that her face was causing problems:

> My sister said it's my face—that I have an appearance of 'I don't care.' Because I don't smile a lot, people think that I think I'm better than everyone else or I don't like anyone here. People here just need your face to have acknowledgment, they kind of see your personality through your face. They judge the cover without actually discovering who you really are. So, my sister just told me I needed to smile more because that's what people want to see here. I'm trying to work on it. I'm like, ugh, I don't want to smile half the time because it's an effort. I do now. When I'm passing by someone, I try to smile. So that's what I'm working on. I know it's a bad trait for me here. It's just hard for me to

adapt to that. So, I am working on balancing being my real self in the civilian world and then changing myself for here.

Lily was actively working to smile more because she now saw this as an essential part of soldiering. I found this ironic because even soldiers who smiled during basic training were yelled at, but I figured this type of yelling was less intense. Indeed, smiling in some ways showed compliance because the candidate was *enjoying* basic training, at least on the surface. A soldier in a good mood during training was less of a problem than one whose face suggested negativity or an attitude.

On her way back from breakfast, Barbara Fenton passed her room by accident and turned around when she realized she had gone too far. A cadet sergeant started yelling at her, "Cadet Candidate, Fenton. Where are you going?"

Barbara responded, "To my room, Sergeant." But she had kept walking towards her room, and only turned her head around to respond to the sergeant.

"Look at me while I'm talking to you, Cadet Candidate."

"Okay, Sergeant."

"Do you have an attitude with me?"

Barbara shrugged her shoulders. *All right. I just wanna get back to my room. You're tripping right now. You're really making something out of nothing. Can we just calm down?* Since she had been at preparatory school, she felt like this cadet sergeant just kept yelling at her. *I am tired of this!*

Then, all the other cadet sergeants in the area surrounded Barbara and started yelling.

So, this is what we're doing now? All right.

A sergeant from the tactical team walked over.

“What’s the problem over here?"

“Nothing, Sergeant,” Barbara replied.

“It seems like you have an attitude problem.”

“Sergeant, I am confused. I was just walking and paused to greet but the cadets are saying I have an attitude.”

“Do you know your four responses?”

“Yes Sergeant, but…”

“Well, stick to them.”

When she finally was able to leave and go back to her room, another cadet came over and told her, "It’s okay. It’s gonna be fine. Just keep your head down".

Barbara did not cry. But she was so mad her throat was tight. The next time the original cadet sergeant who yelled at her stopped by, Barbara asked: “Can you step into my room, Sergeant?” She explained that she felt what happened in the hallway was unnecessary. “I didn’t feel like it took all seven of you to try to tell me that I had an attitude. What made you think that I had an attitude?"

The cadet responded, "I just felt like you weren’t listening and then you shrugged your shoulders”

That’s it? That’s it?! Like come on, it took all seven of y’all and you only did that because you felt that way? She reflected on the event more later that evening:

> *Did I probably have an attitude? Yes, because I was so irritated at that point. You guys can scream, ‘You have an attitude’ all day long, but if you don’t tell me how, then you just gonna frustrate me even more and make the attitude that you claim I have actually happen and then make it even worse from there. It took all seven of y’all, plus a sergeant? Do y’all think I’m a grown man that’s about to fight y’all?*

During one counseling session during basic training, Athena Little’s squad leader told her

that other cadets were saying that she had an attitude. Athena was shocked. *What?! I don't even talk to ya'll. How can I look like I have an attitude?* Because her squad leader was also Black, Athena felt comfortable questioning her about this perception: "What do you really mean? How can I have attitude?"

Her squad leader explained: "Well they say that about me all the time too. Like at West Point, it's like a stigma for Black girls to have an attitude even if they don't do anything and this is just how they look."

Athena grimaced, "I'm not going to fake it and smile when I'm not happy. And I'm not going to sit here and change my voice, this is just how I am."

Her squad leader replied, "You need to learn how to just finesse them, so they think you don't have an attitude because I've gotten really bad grades because they thought I had an attitude."

That idea irritated Athena: *I don't have an attitude, now I'm just mad.* The assumption that she had an 'attitude' just because her face looked different from the White candidates made her extremely frustrated. Being perceived as having an attitude went against her self-image: she saw herself as a flower child, who wore flower crowns at home. A person who was relaxed and listened to Lana Del Rey and Beyoncé. She was hurt that they thought she had an attitude just because of the color of her skin and her natural resting face. She was doing her best to adjust to the new environment but all they could see from her was a bad attitude. When we sat in our room one day during basic training, Renee Edmonds, another Black woman in our platoon from the South, was also frustrated. "Why are they getting on all the Black kids? They thought we had attitude in the beginning and now we do."

Later in the year, as Athena and I walked to class, she mused about what basic training

would be like at West Point. She said she thought she was going to do well as a soldier, but she would have to learn to smile more; otherwise, people would think she had an attitude. Another time she told me out of the blue as we walked up the stairs together to a chemistry study session, "I really don't want to do anything stupid down the hill and have to walk hours. But watch, I'll probably get hours for 'having attitude.' They'll see me and be like 'you have attitude—five hours!'" We joked that she would have to smile all the time and act really smiley and bubbly to not get in trouble. She would take getting push-ups for smiling over being told she had attitude any day.

The experiences of Lily, Barbara, Athena, and other women and Black candidates did not surprise me. Gendered and racialized groups are often held to different expectations regarding emotional expressions (Hochschild 1979; Wingfield 2021). There is extensive research from the civilian world in the United States on how women are expected to smile across settings, including being asked to do so by men coworkers and authorities in workplaces, and how Black women are often perceived as having bad attitudes when they have neutral facial expressions.[53] White women, in particular, who do not smile violate the feeling rules embedded in gender norms which are based on policing the behavior of prototypical women. Black women often experience "intersectional invisibility" as non-prototypical women and members of their racial group which leads others to care less about their conformance to gender or racial norms (Livingston, Rosette, and Washington 2012; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008).[54] However for Black women, a smile or exaggerated gentleness may help assuage stereotypes about Black

[53] See, for example, Freeman 2018; Hugenberg and Bodenhausen 2003; LaFrance 2011; Lafrance, Hecht, and Paluck 2003; Motro et al. 2022; Wingfield 2021.
[54] Studies about Black women sometimes avoiding backlash for agentic behaviors were conducted in gender-neutral occupations (e.g., consulting), not male-typed occupations like the military (Livingston, Rosette, and Washington 2012).

individuals being confrontational, aggressive, or threatening to White authorities.[55]

Feeling rules, understandings of facial cues, and their relationship with gender and race are deeply cultural. Certain expressions are more acceptable in some cultures than others.[56] In other contexts, the candidates whose faces were seen as deviant may have been perceived as completely normal and pleasant. It seemed to me that hegemonic gendered and radicalized beliefs regarding 'appropriate' and 'professional' facial expressions from the larger United States had inculcated the military world. This made sense because, like those in positions of power in the larger United States, military authorities tend to be mostly White men (Nacoste 2001). In this way, the military was a cultural microcosm of the country.

When I brought up with institutional authorities that I noticed that Black women candidates were often perceived as having bad attitudes, they acknowledged that they had seen this pattern as well. For some, it was because these candidates *did* have more attitude. As we sat in his office chatting about life at the preparatory school, a senior told me that candidates who were women of color often had an attitude, more so than White females: "I am 100% sure. I don't know what's motivating it or not, but something is, and I don't know if it's their race or whatever, but yes, I have seen it. We're not targeting anybody, it's just the trend. It's women of color with attitude problems throughout the year."

"How can you tell they have attitude? Like what gives it away?"

"The way they talk, particularly to authorities. There was one candidate and she spoke back to an officer with so much attitude I wanted to give her a field grade Article 15." Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice allows commanders to hold soldiers accountable for minor misconduct without resorting to court martials or judicial hearings.

[55] See, for example, Cooley et al. 2018; Duncan 1976; Raissi and Steele 2021.
[56] See, for example, Tsai et al. 2016.

Sergeant Compton could empathize with what the Black women candidates were experiencing because she also got in trouble for her attitude during her own basic training. She was confused about how her drill sergeants could think she had an attitude when she was silent the whole time and was on crutches from an injury. But she had trusted in the system and tried her best to conform, and eventually, it worked. When I questioned Sergeant Compton if she thought there was a reason that she was perceived as having attitude more than the other recruits, she said that people assume Black women have bad attitudes. Whenever she tried to stand up for herself, she was seen as having an attitude. Even now when she was passionate about something, people told her to stop being aggressive. She figured that perceptions of attitude and aggression were very intertwined with assumptions about gender and race.

Captain Edwards, a White company tactical officer, told me that he had noticed that some Black candidates, such as Renee, did have a bad attitude at the beginning of the year: "she [Renee] had a bad attitude. A really, really bad attitude in the beginning where she just was apathetic to the process and didn't act like she wanted to be here." Whenever he interacted with her, she was in violation of several regulations, and it was very frustrating for him. By not doing the little things, she was showing that she did not care, which he took to mean she had a bad attitude. When Captain Edwards had some conversations with her one-on-one towards the end of basic training, he saw her in a different light. Maybe it was not attitude after all—maybe it was a sign of her struggling to adapt or missing home? He learned that she came from a military family and her mother was battling severe facial tumors that the Army missed in her medical exams. She desperately wanted to live up to her mother's image and reputation and prove wrong everyone who had told her she did not have what it takes to fill her mother's shoes. Renee was pushing through immense physical pain in her knees and emotional pain from being away from

loved ones. When he learned these details about her life and perceived that her attitude had changed, she became one of his favorite candidates.

Captain Kennedy struggled with how ideas about military bearing negatively impacted Black soldiers, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. From his perspective, it was easy for leadership to say, “that is not military bearing” because military bearing was a catch-all phrase that was subjective for each person. He noticed that authority figures tended to see the White students as more well-behaved and having better military bearings. He found that Black candidates would be yelled at for not having the right military bearings, but to these candidates, it was just normal facial expressions or behavior. These candidates were punished because these mannerisms were not the “army way”—when really the Army way was intertwined with upper/middle-class Whiteness.

10 Voices

During the entirety of basic training, we were not allowed to speak freely in public places. We were only allowed to talk in our rooms. If we wanted to speak to an authority figure, we had to stick out our paws (i.e., cupped hand) and wait to be told to speak. We were embodying submission through our voices (or lack thereof)—the authorities controlled where, when, and how we spoke.[57] I noticed a strange sense of vocal modulation. We went from being silent to yelling out responses and greetings at the top of our lungs.

The strongest way to show that one had understood an order or was motivated was to shout out "HOOAH." HOOAH was a guttural grunt that demonstrated esprit de corps and was an acronym for heard, understood, acknowledged. The priors would shout responses, greetings, and HOOAH with force and strength. I limited myself from completely yelling because I thought that would be too much, *too* enthusiastic, too compliant, or what some would call "too HOOAH."

We had to shout our company greeting, "KILL EM ALL" at every formation with the appropriate loudness to show our pride in our company.[58] Before briefs, we shouted out "DESIRE, FAITH, AND EFFORT," the preparatory school creed. If at any point, we did not shout the mottos loud enough, we had to repeat them over and over until the cadets were satisfied. There were also segments of the knowledge book that had to be yelled out, such as the Soldier's Creed. Before five o'clock one dark basic training morning, as we were waiting to receive instructions for urinalysis, a few voices shouted around us yelling off the soldier's creed.

"I am an American Soldier."

---

[57] See Van Dijk 1993 for details on how authorities control discourse across settings.

[58] This company motto was highly controversial, and, in the following year, the new senior leadership did not permit violent mottos. For a discussion on this mottos and violent language use, see Part III: Warrior Spirit, Chapter 59 'Kill Them All'.

"LOUDER." The cadets yelled at them to shout it out.

"I am a warrior and a member of a team."

"LOUDER. THIS IS THE CREED. LOUDER."

The candidates continued belting out each word in the position of attention. The louder one could shout the soldier's creed, the more they showed their commitment to the profession and soldier identity. Lily Rose waited until a time when we were not allowed to shout to ask our squad leader if she could pass off the creed. She specifically did not want to draw attention to herself. She did it slightly above a whisper. Athena Little refused to ever say the creed, keeping her lips tight and shut when we had to shout it out as a company.[59]

I soon realized that the ability to project one's voice was also connected with leadership potential. Good leaders could get the attention of the group right away in any circumstance—a symbol that they could command attention in stressful and chaotic situations. Poor leaders were quiet and meek. Rich Rivers, a White prior from the Midwest, noticed that since he joined the Army, his voice had changed. He now used an assertive tone rather than the "little weak voice" he had after high school. Several candidates who took on leadership positions in the candidate chain of command worked to develop vocal techniques that made others take them seriously and show off their competence.

During a "Female Sensing Session," a Black woman who was a sergeant in the candidate chain of command brought up that the men in her company would not listen to her. But these same men would immediately listen to other men in the candidate chain of command or even those without leadership positions. Female Sensing Sessions occurred regularly during lunch, for which the company commanders picked a different group of women to meet with the senior

[59] For the full Soldier's Creed and why Athena stayed quiet, see Part III: Warrior Spirit, Chapter 60.

leaders to discuss what it was like being a woman at the preparatory school and any difficulties or discrimination they may be facing. At this session, the candidate explained that she had tried to modulate her vocal tones and the way she spoke to mirror the tactical team. Then she had to adjust course again to speak in a way that people said was not "bitchy;" mirroring the tactical team, which was mostly men, had violated gender norms for women. Eventually, she started to take on different vocal tones and patterns depending on who she was speaking with.

Nadav Butler noticed that women candidate leaders did not always get as much respect as their men counterparts because people did not listen to them. A woman in his chain of command could not get anyone to do anything, but her counterpart who was a man would just shout, "EVERYONE LISTEN UP" and the company would comply. Men were listened to more. Athena also noticed that the voices of women candidates who were in leadership positions were overshadowed or ignored. When women did try to stand up or speak up, they immediately were seen as having an attitude or being too aggressive.

Catherine Poli worked to develop her vocal style over time and explained to me, "I wouldn't say that I'm more masculine, but I realize I can't be as timid as I have in the past. I have to be more assertive and more dominant to get my point across."

Sergeant First Class Lee did not identify these vocal traits as masculine, though people might assume that dominance and taking charge were masculine, such as "she's like a male, she is yelling at me." On the contrary, he saw this as a mark of good leadership: "In the military, we don't take it as masculine traits, we take it as a leader, leadership traits. But maybe civilians see it as masculine traits."

Yet, loudness was not always a positive trait. Black candidates, particularly football players, were often called "loud" as a criticism. Tactical team members and candidates often told

Black men to be quieter in dining facilities or the hallways. I often heard candidates complaining the football players (which was typically a euphemism for Black men) were *too* loud, *too rowdy*, and *too* disorderly.

One evening a White candidate in a leadership position yelled at two Black candidates in the hallway to be quiet. Athena saw this as holding double standards for the White men candidates (who are always loud in the hall) and the Black men candidates. Loudness was only a problem when it came from Black bodies. As this unfolded in the hallway, Athena asked us why everyone was so afraid of Black men, and why there was a double standard for behavior. Kelly Carter said she did not think it was all about race, but it does play a role in the fear. Kelly interpreted this as people just showing favoritism towards their friends, and the friends of the candidates in charge happened to be White. She did not feel they were racist or intentionally getting people in trouble. She figured they were thinking, "Oh, well, these are my friends so I'm not really going to correct them because I want to protect them. But they're [the Black candidates] not my friends, so I don't really care if they get in trouble." Jocelyn Jones tried to improve the stereotype that Black candidates were loud and aggressive by being quiet and calm.

Over the year, I realized that our experiences learning the importance of loudness and assertiveness for influence, but also finding a double-bind for women and Black candidates was aligned with research on status. On one hand, those who are louder, more assertive, aggressive, and verbally and non-verbally commanding are seen as more competent in their ability to contribute to group effort and received more influence in group decision making.[60] These characteristics are especially important in groups where the collective goals involved aggressive competition, like war (Halevy et al. 2012; Ridgeway 2019).

[60] See for example Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount 1996; Ridgeway 1987; Ridgeway, Berger, and Smith 1985; Rucker, Galinsky, and Magee 2018.

On the other hand, when those who belong to groups that are culturally deemed lower status (such as women and non-White groups) adopt high-status behaviors, in this case, loud and assertive speaking, they experience *backlash* from the group. Paradoxically, some research found that Black women did not experience the same backlash to agentic behaviors likely because of their "intersectional invisibility" (Livingston et al. 2012; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008).[61] Still, at the preparatory school, Black women regularly told me about having to experiment with finding the right "voice" to be accepted as leaders and not be ignored as a "bitch." White and Black women and Black men all had to carefully balance between demonstrating their ability to lead through a vocally commanding presence but not too drastically overstepping their place in the status hierarchy.

[61] The studies that show that Black women sometimes avoid backlash to agentic behavior were conducted in gender-neutral occupations (e.g., consulting), not male-typed occupations like the military (Livingston et al. 2012).

11 Drill and Ceremony

When it was our turn to learn drill and ceremony on Reception Day, we filed forward onto the soccer field and were broken up into small groups.

The first command we learned was "AttenTION." The first part of the word signaled the command, and the second was the time of movement.

"Do not move your eyes. Look into the distance. Heels together, toes pointed to 45 degrees. Hands cupped at your sides at the seam of your pants. Thumbs forward. Stand up straight." One cadet gave the command and the other would demonstrate the proper movement.

Then we learned Parade REST: "Slide your left foot 10 inches to the left. Hands on the small of your back. Fingers together. Left hand underneath the right. Head straight forward." They told us to be careful not to lock our knees in the positions because this could cause us to faint. We practiced moving between attention and parade rest.

"SNAP TO THE POSITION." They explained that when a soldier goes into the correct position, they must "snap" there. One does not merely go to the position; they must move with force and purpose. It should look tight and clean. We learned that every time we spoke to an officer or sergeant (or cadet officer or cadet sergeant), we had to snap into the correct position. When speaking to an officer, we had to stand in the position of attention. When speaking to a sergeant, we had to stand in the position of parade rest. This meant we were physically always showing our submission to the authority figures—literally embodying power hierarchy. The hand position in parade rest reminded me of how prisoners I worked with stood when they were trying to show the corrections officers that they were not a threat, subdued and restrained; it was a way of recreating the position they were in when they were handcuffed. I heard that these movements in the military too also meant to display to the authorities that we did not have concealed

weapons and were not a threat. These positions brought to mind Anthropologist Roy Rappaport's theories that performing a submissive act, such as kneeling, not only allows the kneeler to "*communicate* subordination," but also, "*produces* a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself" (Rappaport 1979:100).[62] Sociologists Saba Mahmood (2012) and Daniel Winchester (2008) identified similar phenomena in Muslim converts for whom the practices, such as covering, fasting, and prayer were not only means to learn rituals but also to adopt specific moral attributes.[63] In this way, as we learned these new bodily techniques, we were not only *acting* but actually *becoming* submissive to the authorities.

Next, we learned hand salute, which was also done from the position of attention on the command "Present ARMS:" "Middle finger to the brim of the hat. Do not face the palm or the back of the hand towards the person you are saluting." Saluting was another way we could physically embody respect and submission towards authorities; however, we learned that soldiers only salute commissioned officers, not non-commissioned officers. We had to salute officers anytime we passed them when we were outside. The only time when we would not typically salute officers was when we were out in the field for training exercises, as for infantry soldiers this was seen as a "sniper check"—how the enemy snipers would learn who was in charge. For officers from other branches, however, they wanted us to keep saluting them across all locations to help instill in us that it was the proper etiquette. I felt awkward having no formal outdoor greeting for my non-commissioned officers. If I was embodying submission to and respect for officers through saluting, then was I also learning to disrespect and submit less to sergeants because I did not salute them? I noticed that I started subconsciously bowing a little bit when I

[62] This approach originates from Blaise Pascal's famous line, which Louis Althusser summarizes as, "Knee down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe" (2014:186). It is integral to Althusser theory of interpellation and in Judith Butler's work on language's performative power (1997b:13) (Winfield In Press).
[63] Mahmood 2012[2004]; Winchester 2008

greeted sergeants to physically show my deference, and perhaps too, my resistance to the legacy of differential treatment of officers and sergeants. I had equal respect for my sergeants and wanted to convey that I was equally docile to their commands. Sergeant First Class Lee thought this was hilarious and during the academic year started bowing a little with his hands in a prayer position when he saw me, "Hello, Cadet Candidate Winfield" with a smile and laugh. Although sergeants regularly made comments that they pride themselves on not being officers ("I work for a living!"), the differential treatment still made me feel uncomfortable.

These bodily positions were not new for Athena Little—she had learned them during her years in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps during high school. Yet, she still despised them. She told me that saluting was the first thing she would remove if she were in charge of the military: "If they say in the military we are all one team and we are all equal, why am I saluting you then? That's like me saying you're my ruler. That I am going to do everything you want me to do, that I respect you even though you don't do shit…Like who made 'you a king? I hate that!" She felt when saluting someone she was coronating them as royalty even if they had done nothing to earn her respect. She was intuitively aware that through saluting, she was reinforcing her bodily submission to authorities and the institutional power hierarchy, a hierarchy which she believed undermined efforts for equality and unification amongst soldiers.

In a similar vein, Athena found the idea of saluting officers but not non-commissioned officers extremely disrespectful. She could not stomach that her sergeants, who had been in the military for a long time and earned their ranks, had to salute junior officers who just finished training. She was equally irked that she was forced to stand in different positions for officers and non-commissioned officers. She thought the only respectful thing was to stand at attention for both:

> Who said that an officer deserves this much respect? Who made that rule up anyway? Because this stuff has been here forever, we have to keep it? No, sometimes because something has been there forever is the reason why there is a big issue. That's just like saying to enlisted people, 'ya'll ain't shit.' It's like enlisted people they are like slaves to be honest; they don't get respect. Like one day Sergeant First Class Jag was sitting by himself and everyone else was on the other side because I guess officers and everyone else can't sit together. I remember someone saying to me that they cannot sit together. I was like what the fuck? Is this like segregation or something? That is crazy. But then again, the military is definitely a White man's society, and they like that shit. I hate it. And I am definitely going to change it. It shouldn't even be allowed. It's dumb, so dumb. That was my issue with saluting, it's stupid, it's dumb.

These practices seemed to Athena as outdated remnants of segregation, and even slavery, in which white men held unearned power over others. The reality that the officer class remained largely White men and Black soldiers made up approximately 24% of the enlisted army population but only 12% of army officers reinforced this dynamic for her.[64]

When Athena would vent to her non-commissioned officers about this inequality, they would tell her to calm down. They did not want to be officers! They work for a living! Did they want to spend all day saluting back? Sergeant First Class Lee laughed and told her that officers had to avoid walking in crowded places otherwise they would be stopped every second to salute back, while he only had to stop every once in a while when he came across an officer. He was the lucky one.

But these competing perspectives did not change Athena's mind. She just figured the sergeants were too brainwashed by the system to see what was happening. The saluting and different types of postures demonstrated to Athena how deeply the power imbalance between the officers and the enlisted soldiers was ingrained into the military system. These were just external symptoms of the underlying racism and embedded inequality that continued to disease the Army. She felt she had no choice but to stand in the positions when speaking to the members of the

[64] I calculated these percentages from the 2019 Demographics by dividing the total number of army officers and enlisted soldiers by the number of Black officers and enlisted soldiers (Department of Defense 2019a:13, 25).

tactical team but did her best to avoid saluting officers whenever possible. She could not rebel against the movements outright and stay in the institution, but she could try to limit the situations in which she would have to embody values with which she disagreed. She did her best to resist while complying enough to stay—promising herself that although she was externally complying, she would never internally comply. Over winter break, Athena got into a fight with her father about saluting, through the metaphor of bowing down to royals. They were eating dinner together as a family, and as usual, Athena and her father had entered a debate. Her dad told her she was being ignorant because it was part of army culture. She told him the only person she was going to bow down to was God.

12 Pain is an illusion

"Pain is an illusion," Captain Kennedy yelled at us as we continued well past five minutes in wall-sits. "It's all mental."

My thighs were burning and shaking. The muscles were spasming and I had sharp shooting pains. *Yes, it's just mental. An illusion,* I replayed in my mind. I distracted myself by thinking about what I knew about pain from a biological and sociological perspective. Although colloquially the sensory experience of pain is conflated with the emotional experience of pain ("suffering"), they are two separate processes.[65] Sensory pain can be nociceptive (occurring from a noxious stimulus, an event that signals damage or perceived damage to bodily tissue from injury, chemicals, or inflammation), neuropathic (damage to the nervous system), or nociplastic (when sensory neurons change the way they function; i.e., become more sensitive) (Campbell et al. 2019). I figured I was currently experiencing nociceptive pain. My nociceptors, the sensory neurons for pain, were communicating to my spinal cord and brain that damage was occurring. My brain was in turn sending back feedback to the cord cells to amplify or reduce their messages. *Reduce*, I tried to convince my brain, *reduce.*

I knew this seemly hardwired process of pain sensation was largely mediated by other biological, psychological sociological factors. Stimulating nonnociceptive fibers in the damaged area—rubbing, slapping, scratching—can interrupt the signals of nociceptors and reduce painful sensations (Melzack and Wall 1965); but I could not take the risk disrupting of uniformity to start rubbing and slapping my thighs. If I did that, Captain Kennedy might start the clock over because of my disobedience. Nervous system state and cognitive-emotional state can also

[65] See, for example, Moayedi and Davis 2013; Winfield 2021a.

influence pain perception, which is documented in research on hypnosis[66], placebo and nocebo,[67] mindfulness meditation,[68] and cognitive behavioral therapy;[69] I tried to take a few slow deep breaths to calm myself. Yet, I sensed the most powerful weapon in my toolbox to defeat these painful sensations would be to focus on the Army ideology about pain, as studies also show that the response of others to the painful event and cultural beliefs about pain alter the perceived impact.[70]

Pain is an illusion, I repeated to myself again, *it is all mental. Pain is honor. Pain is sacrifice. Pain is nothing but another enemy to defeat. Soldiers push through pain. Soldiers become brothers and sisters in arms by pushing through pain together.* Pain was not something to get rid of or suffer but a sensation to embrace as inherent to the soldier identity and team building.

I gritted my teeth in resolve and let the burning in my thighs brand these beliefs into my brain. Each time my muscles burned again in the future, these seared thoughts would alight in my mind.

[66] See Garland et al. 2019; Kendrick et al. 2016; Kropotov, Crawford, and Polyakov 1997; Rainville et al. 1997, 1999; Thompson et al. 2019.
[67] See Colloca and Benedetti 2005; Colloca, Sigaudo, and Benedetti 2008; Eippert et al. 2009; Wager et al. 2004.
[68] See Anheyer et al. 2017; Ball et al. 2017; Garland et al. 2019.
[69] See Garland et al. 2019; Salomons et al. 2004; Sharp 2001; Zgierska et al. 2016.
[70] See Fuller 2008; Institute of Medicine 2011; Winfield 2021a.

13 'Smoked'

"HALF RIGHT FACE."

Within the first few days of basic training, we had already learned to dread this command. We were about to face "physical corrective training," or what we colloquially called being "smoked."[71] We had done something wrong—said something out of turn, moved too slowly, or just pissed off the cadre. We took a turn 45 degrees to the right, creating more spacing in the ranks so we would have room to move into the push-up position.

"FRONT LEANING REST POSITION—MOVE."

We scrambled into a high plank.

"THE PUSH-UP. ONE."

We went down.

"TWO."

We came back up.

"THREE"

Down again.

"ONE!" Up again and calling out the number of repetitions, until we had done 10 two-set push-ups—20 total times up and down.

We did not know it at the time, but the cadets were limited in the number of push-ups they could make us do. We also did not realize that whenever we did push-ups, the cadet had to do them alongside us. These limits ensured that proper "corrective action" did not devolve into hazing.

[71] The military leadership did not like the word "smoked;" as they were executing physical corrective training in accordance with army standards and policies.

On the first evening of basic training, Captain Kennedy explained to us the difference between corrective action and hazing: "Basic training is not hazing, this is physical corrective behavior. There can be a gray area, but that is up to me to decide in those cases. Corrective training is directly related to a military skill deficiency and corrective action is directly related to infraction. Correction action must occur immediately." They explained that push-ups, squats, wall-sits, lunges, or sprints were helping us develop discipline and a military bearing. These exercises were not only vehicles to improve our physical fitness, but also ways to create and refine dispositions, like submission to authority, pushing through pain, and attention to detail. Again, I connected it to the idea that through acting in accordance with authority we were not only *communicating* submission but actually becoming *submissive*. When muscular pain was involved—as it often was in corrective training—the movement became even more conscious and cognitively and emotionally salient, and likely more influential for dispositional change.

I found the ability to correct behavior through physical action to be a unique aspect of military life. The Army held authority over soldiers' bodies and thus, could force them to do any action, as long as it was within the morally appropriate left and right limits of command. Push-ups or other exercises could be done in response to any behavior. For example, when a candidate left his common access card in the dining facility, Sergeant Compton had him do multiple sets of push-ups and other exercises. The tactical team was not limited in the number of push-ups they could make a candidate do—which they often reminded us of if we started to make them angry. Sergeant Compton wanted to make sure that the candidate would never make this type of mistake again and have a physical memory of what happened when lapses in attention to detail occurred. The leaders were able to move beyond the verbal (yelling, explanations) and emotional (expressing anger, disappointment) tools in the civilian world to exact physical consequences on

us.

Whenever our squad leader caught us talking in the hallway or we were late or too slow, we had to do push-ups. When we were in the field eating dinner, and candidates kept standing up and forgetting to put back on their patrol caps, the cadre moved us from the front leaning rest position to push-ups and then made us stand still in parade rest for what felt like an eternity. Any time someone in the formation moved, they started the clock over. The pain of standing in formation for long periods was unimaginable for me until I had to do it myself. The pain was a feeling of being trapped in my own body. Every inch of my body wanted to move, I had muscle spasms, but my mind controlled my limbs from seeking relief. I felt like I was imprisoning myself in my body with my mind. During one particularly long time standing in parade rest, I had waves of nausea and dizziness pulsing through my body. My limbs started shaking and my eyes watering. It was more painful and difficult to keep still than any other aspect of physical training during basic training. Over time it did get easier. My body and muscles adjusted to the new positions. I learned techniques to keep my nervous system calm through deep breathing, and my mind became stronger, the military ideologies around pain more ingrained within me.

Physical corrective training did not only apply to the individual candidate who messed up—if any member of the team acted inappropriately, we all were "smoked." On our second day of basic training, Lily was lagging in changing her uniform. Kelly and I went around the room trying to help her as much as we could. We put away the uniform items she was talking off, handed her boots, and even tied her shoes as she arranged her patches. There was banging on our door.

"C'mon. Hurry up. The rest of the squad is waiting, Lily," Kelly Carter urged her. We could not leave the room without our battle buddy. By the time she was ready, our squad leader

made us do push-ups because we were all late. Candidates started to act better because they did not want to be responsible for their friends' pain. We had to not only worry about our own bodies but also the bodies of our squad mates and friends. If we made a mistake, other people would physically suffer.

In the beginning, we avoided behavior that could lead to physical corrections and presented the proper behavior (facial, vocal, and physical) when the cadets were nearby. Rebellious movements and whispers were performed quickly and with a ruse. I would sneakily lower my knowledge book by pretending that I was reading from the bottom page or take quick breaks by pretending I needed to turn the page or wanted a drink of water. Holding up the knowledge book at eye-level with our left arms straight out for long periods of time was incredibly painful, particularly at the beginning of basic training before our arms had developed more strength, so we would do whatever we could to lower it for a few moments. We would also whisper out of the sides of our mouths when the cadre was not around.

However, some candidates realized that corrections were not so bad and were willing to risk pushups to have a bit of fun. This was especially true for the more physically developed candidates for whom doing 20 push-ups was very easy. Indeed, they laughed that "smoking" was just "free PT!"—adopting the language of the cadre around us who would tell us to stop complaining because we were receiving free physical training and that people around the world were paying to go to boot camp at their gyms. Joshua Samson, a Black recruited athlete from the South, would always joke around and smile with his cadet cadre, and thus, was always doing push-ups. One time he asked his cadre if he could cut his hair, and the cadre responded, "You can cut off some push-ups. Give me ten." Joshua would make silly quips like that all the time because it kept him happy during basic training, and it also built rapport between him and the

leadership. However, I noticed that this type of semi-joking rebellion against facial and language control during basic training was performed by only the candidates that had a good rapport with their cadre and relatively high status—due to overall proficiency at military tasks and skills—and could afford to push their buttons a bit. The cadre for the most part did not mind because it made their jobs more fun. As such, it was a type of rebellion that would only occur if one otherwise was relatively compliant to the system.

Other candidates started rebelling because they realized that if they did not react to the physically corrective measure the cadre member had little other power over them. During a lecture about medical evacuations, Kelly Carter started nodding off to sleep. A candidate asked the cadet who was teaching the class how they train people to maintain composure in stressful situations, like calling for a medical evacuation during combat. The cadet responded, "We expose them to stressful situations." Another cadet that was lurking in the corner said, "Like this" and yelled in Kelly's face, "WAKE THE FUCK UP!"

She had fallen asleep on her desk. She got up without saying a word and looked at him with a blank expression. She was honestly a bit glad because he had shocked the sleepiness right out of her.

"ARE YOU GIVING ME ATTITUDE?" He brought her outside of the classroom. Athena Little clenched her fists; she could not believe how disrespectfully he had just yelled at Kelly.

Outside the classroom, Kelly was not fazed. In the hallway, he told her to put her heels on the wall. She responded, "No."

"So, you're just going to disrespect me?"

"No. I can't do it. It hurts."

"I don't care."

"I'm not doing it."

The cadet went to go get the cadet first sergeant. She realized that this cadet, who everyone was scared of, was not scary at all because he did not even "smoke" her himself. *So, you're not going to do anything about it? You're going to go get someone else to do it? You're not even scary! Ha!*

He got the first sergeant and the first sergeant just made her do some wall sits and push-ups. Since she did not respond emotionally to the corrective action, he eventually just sent her back into the room. That was when she learned that the cadre could not make her do anything. If she told them no, all they could do is make her do some exercises. They could not hit her, and if they did, she would be allowed to hit them back. From then on, Kelly knew that that cadre did not have that much power. When we were cleaning weapons and they started yelling at us, she would whisper, "What can they do if we don't do it? What if we don't participate?" She urged on a rebellion.

The entire system depended on the cadre keeping their symbolic authority and fear from us about consequences of misbehavior. Once we no longer feared or hated push-ups or other physically corrective measures, there were few other tools the cadets could invoke other than to send us to the official members of the tactical team who had legal authority over the candidates and could enact more severe consequences. Without visible signs of pain and emotions, the "smoking" lost its effectiveness.

14 Docility

After the basic training graduation parade, we walked to lunch unaccompanied and unsupervised. We no longer had to walk along the walls, square our corners, keep our hands cupped, and brace our arms at a 90-degree angle at the elbows on the stairs. Around me, I could hear remarks:

"My hands feel weird!"

"Ah, look at me, walking in the middle of the hallway." Candidates jumped around the stairwells and others touched both side of the walls, swaying from side to side when walking to lunch to show they were no longer squaring their corners. I repeatedly cupped and uncupped my hands to get used to the new sensation. For a few days, we laughed when we caught each other with our hands in fists.

I was amazed that it had only taken a few weeks for our bodies to absorb these basic training specific practices and those that we would have to comply with for the entire year, such as standing in attention or parade rest when speaking to authorities, saluting, marching, and drill and ceremony. Over and over, the military leaders had demanded that we put the institutional directions before our personal comfort and override our previous ways of moving and acting. Compliance with the movements was linked with discipline and restraint—not swatting flies away, wiping sweat from our eyes, or stretching stiff and numb limbs when in formation for long periods of time and other ways of controlling instinctual behaviors demonstrated our self-control and ultimately our ability to put the military and the mission above ourselves.

Priors, those who had participated in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps or from military families were already familiar with these movements and bodily habits and they took them on without much effort. Yet for those of us coming from the fully civilian world, the focus on micro-movements altered what felt natural to us. We started to consciously stand differently,

move differently, and pay attention to different parts of our bodies. I often thought of the literature rooted in disability studies in which having to consciously (re)learn how to move one's limbs changed one's perception of being an embodied person. We were (re)learning some of the most ingrained bodily practices that one has since childhood—walking, standing, hand gestures, speaking, and understandings of pain—and in this way forging a new relationship with our bodies and ultimately our identities. We were switching out the bodily practices of a member of our previous civilian communities with those of a "soldier" and the military community. And unlike in childhood, where bodily practices and expressions are typically learned through observation and mimicking parents, our new rules for behavior were explicitly verbalized to us, and deviance was explicitly and painfully punished.

As the year progressed, I found that military movements became increasingly automatic, less painful, and did not require conscious thought. In terms of the dual-process theory of cognition, I imagined we were moving from controlled cognition—which is "cool", slow, and conscious—to automatic cognition, which is "hot", fast, and unconscious—in our military behaviors.[72] Individuals rely on automatic cognition and automatic behavior when they have to make decisions quickly or under stress; thus, when our behavior became automatic, it meant we would continue to act this way in stressful situations, such as combat. Body docility to this degree ensured that soldiers would act in a uniformed and planned manner and yield to authorities even under immense pressure.

[72] For information on dual-process theory see Chaiken and Trope 1999; Evans 2008; Nisbett and Wilson 1977; Schneider and Shiffrin 1977; Sloman 1996; Smith and DeCoster 2016.

15 Privacy, Respect, and Clashing Cultures

During the first week of basic training at 4:30 in the morning, we were brought to the auditorium for urinalysis. Captain Kennedy read out the legal instructions and Sergeant First Class Lee briefed us on the procedure. Step one was checking off our names from a list. Step two was providing social security numbers. Step three was getting a cup for the urine that had the correct social security number sticker. Women would receive wider cups to use and then transfer their urine into smaller cups.

Each candidate would then enter the bathroom with an officer or sergeant of the same sex and the authority would observe the candidate urinate through the open stall door. The authority would stand looking in and watching the collection of the sample, until either the candidate was victorious in peeing while supervised or was unsuccessful and had to leave and try again later. If a candidate could not pee on his or her first try, then the candidate had to line up along the wall, holding up the pee cup at head level, elbow bent at 90 degrees, and drink more water. We would have to try again and repeat until we were done and had submitted an adequate sample. We were told to take our time, but to not be last. Sergeant First Class Lee had us raise our hands if we had peed already that morning. When he saw the number of raised hands, he laughed, "What are you doing listening to me? Drink up!" Then he instructed candidates who really had to pee to get up and start the process.

Lily Rose whispered under her breath, "Oh great, I only pee once a day, I will be the last." So, she stayed drinking and studying her knowledge book. I also had already gone to the bathroom that morning so started drinking vigorously. They had warned us to sip on the water and not chug, to avoid vomiting. If we did need to vomit, we should go outside. I stayed seated for what felt like a long time, as other candidates moved by me to submit their samples, and

those who had finished sat again and studied knowledge. There were still several other people left sipping water when I finally got up. *Awesome! I won't be last*, I thought to myself. I never wanted to stand out more than necessary.

I thought it would be no problem to go. I simulated going through the stations and was escorted to (but not observed in) the bathroom. I thought it was inappropriate to ask someone to observe me when I was not giving a legal sample. I sat there for about five minutes but could not go. So, I went out on the wall and held up my hand to simulate I had a cup. A big group of non-pee-ers had just gone in again when I arrived, so I was the first in the line. Lily and another candidate came up behind me after a few minutes. Each held up any urine that was collected. I filled up my Camelbak and kept drinking. When I thought I might have to go again, I was escorted back in. But no luck. I went back to the wall. Lily tried again. No go. I drank more water but was also worried about drinking so much. They recommended that we jump up and down to get the water into our bladders. They said usually people will have to suddenly pee or vomit the water everywhere. One candidate threw up. He had started drinking water out of fear of being last and then threw up, and then still did not have to urinate.

A sergeant came over and told us once they had to wait three hours for someone to pee: "Don't be that person." Finally, when I emptied my Camelbak another time, I decided to try again. They brought Lily too, because "you never know if you don't try." Lily could not go after a couple minutes, so they left. I stayed in the bathroom alone and waited and waited. Finally, I was able to pee. Victory! However, this success may have been due to the few minutes of privacy I did get in the bathroom which none of the candidates received. When I went back to the auditorium, they were counting off people by platoon because they knew someone was missing. I wanted to tell them it was Lily, but I did not want to violate candidate conduct and talk

out of turn. A few weeks after our first urine analysis, one candidate in our company was sent home because his sample had shown marijuana use from before he reported on Reception Day. My heart broke for him because only a few days earlier he had shown me a framed photo from his West Point celebration party where all his family and friends had splurged to buy West Point t-shirts and sweatshirts. They had seen West Point as his ticket out of the neighborhood and straight into the middle class.

Although we only did urinalysis once during basic training, during the entire period, we were never allowed to go to the bathroom without a cadre member. Although it was difficult, I became used to going to the bathroom when others were present and waiting for me. I surrendered to the fact that privacy was not possible in this setting. The only time I could go to the bathroom alone was when we were back in the barracks or in the field porto-johns. Even in the field my "battle buddy" had to wait outside the stall for me. Just like there was no privacy in hallways with all the video cameras and the constant watching eyes of cadets, there was rarely bodily privacy in the bathroom. The experience of being under surveillance and the lack of privacy even in the most intimate settings emphasized to me the extent to which the institution was all-encompassing. Unlike a panopticon—in which prisoners could never know if they were being watched from the central observation tower—we could see the eyes of authorities on us, even in the most private of settings. The fact that internal bodily fluids were also subject to surveillance—with blood samples collected on Reception Day and urine throughout the year—further highlighted to me the degree of bodily control. The candidates' bodies were no longer fully their own. Athena Little's thoughts she had shared with me about Reception Day often echoed in my mind: "They took my blood, they took my DNA, and now they were like, 'you're pretty much our property.'"

After basic training, there was no longer constant surveillance in the restrooms, yet we did have periodic urinalysis which was observed. It was supposed to occur randomly, but it was consistently done after returning from breaks. One candidate in my platoon whispered me as we waited in line for our test in January that he was slightly nervous because he had smoked marijuana over break; however, he was confident he had shed any indication of the drugs from his system and had not smoked in the period when he could be detected. He explained that there were things one could drink and exercises one could do to flush it from one's system.

Dominic Campbell was called into his sergeant's office after one urine test because the lab had said he tampered with his urine sample. "Sergeant, how could I have tampered with it? They were observing me when I peed."

The sergeant ignored the comment and told Dominic he had to sign a counseling form for urine tampering. On the counseling form it said that he acknowledged that if another urine sample came back tampered with or positive, he would receive punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The sergeant read him his rights under the code and asked if Dominic wanted to talk about what happened. Dominic shook his head, thinking to himself, *Hell no! I've been in this situation before, and I don't have to say shit. And I will talk myself into something that I do not need to be talking myself into. Damn.*

His sergeant escorted him to repeat the test again, and the results said tampered again. For Dominic, this was the last straw. Again and again, he felt that he was experiencing unfair and disrespectful treatment from his leadership. When he told me his story, he explained that it had started on Reception Day when they told him he would have to get his tattoo removed because it was a gang symbol for the Latin Kings despite his reasoning with them that it was impossible because he was Black. Then there was the time he had gotten in trouble for whispering with

Deon L'Condo, another Black football player from a similar area, when they were waiting on the bleachers at the range. A cadre came up and pointed at them, "you, you, come with me." *Oh, we are going to do push-ups, whatever.*

"You look at that pole," and Deon went over to a pole.

"You look at this pole," and he sent Dominic in the other direction. *I'm a grown-ass man. Going to look at a pole? What, are you going to put me in timeout? Are you serious? I'm not doing that shit.*

Dominic was fuming. Dominic bit his tongue and grit his teeth.

A sergeant from the tactical team was called over to talk to him.

"I know you probably came to West Point for the benefits afterward, like the money and the cars, you want to make your mom and brothers and sisters happy right?"

"Um…" Dominic was shocked. *You don't know me. You don't know anything about me. You don't know how many siblings I have. And money and cars? That's not everybody's dream. So, you just look at me and see a hoodwink.*

This was just one incident of many when he felt the cadets and the tactical team were disrespecting him. He sometimes would punch the brick wall in his room to take out the anger—he felt if he punched anything else he would break through the wood. Respect was critical where he grew up and he felt like he lost it all when he came to the preparatory school.

He told me that in his hometown, "everybody knows not to fuck with me because I will whoop your ass, I don't care who you are. If you are bigger than me, stronger than me, you've got to show me respect." Yet, the cadre and the tactical team would talk to him in a way he would never tolerate at home, and he could not say anything. When he would try to talk to his tactical team about it, they would tell him to "man up" and brush it off. He knew that if he said

anything back to people when they yelled at him, he would get kicked out. The customs and courtesies were not a problem for Dominic—he did not mind standing at attention or parade rest—problems occurred when people came at him "talking out of their necks."

I was familiar with this trope as many Black candidates had shared with me how difficult it was to take the disrespect from the leadership. They often told me that the disrespect from the cadre was the most difficult part of basic training, not the physical training or the other standards. They were spoken to and treated in ways that would not be tolerated in their home communities. The behavior that many candidates were seeing was called "to buck" in their hometowns. One candidate explained to me, "if you 'buck' somebody, you're going to get beat up. There aren't any if ands or buts about it, you are going to get beat up on the spot, you're going to get hit in your face." Renee Edmonds whispered to me that she had heard one of the squad leaders saying to candidates at morning formation, "Who is going to be a piece of shit today?" She told me, "If he said that to my face, I would have been kicked out of basic training." She would not have been able to restrain herself from hitting him.

Dominic's experience was particularly common for candidates who self-identified as coming from "hood" or "ghetto" areas; but even candidates from more suburban areas could not stand it. Addison Martin who was from the White suburbs in the South would regularly squeeze his fists so hard he felt like he was going to break a finger. Ben Hall, who was from a similar area as Addison, repeatedly told our squad that he could not take any more disrespect. Sometimes he said this in a jokingly dramatic manner and other times he said it with a darkness and seriousness in his eyes. His constant repeating of the idea of disrespect is what made me notice the pattern in the first place. The traditional military approach to forcing new soldiers into subordination and docility through yelling, insults, and entering one's personal space seemed to

be in direct conflict with cultural norms around the sanctity of respect in Black communities (Anderson 2000). Mr. Franklin, a Black teacher from a civilian background, explained that there was an additional disconnect because some ways that Black candidates learned to *show* respect in their own households, such like not looking authorities in the eye when being reprimanded, were seen as actually disrespectful by the authorities and only infuriated them further.[73] There was a clash of cultures regarding respectful behaviors, which provoked anger across groups.[74]

Another time Dominic remembered a White sergeant telling him he was the "most cultured" in the company and needed to change, which Dominic interpreted as, "you're too Black, you need to change." He resolved that he would not change the way he walked, talked, or acted for someone else. *The day I change for someone else you might as well kill me on the spot.*

On the first room inspection, a sergeant called him over and said, "Dominic, you probably like Jordans right?" *Oh, so all Black kids like Jordans?*

"Sure."

"Well, you can't have all 30 pairs lined up under your bed."

Dominic made eye contact with his squad leader, who made eyes at him like, "Oh damn." Before the room inspections, his suitemates would all check that each other were" squared away," but inevitably his side of the room would be "flipped"—with his belongings thrown around and his bed turned over. One day, when he left his room for a minute to talk to someone and he left his sleeping bag on the floor, he came back to his belongings sprawled everywhere. His roommate's side, which also had a blanket and pillow on the floor, was spotless. Dominic was mad as hell. He was ready to go down and give his sergeant a piece of his mind but his

[73] See Carter 2005.
[74] Miller 2001 suggests that anger resulting from feeling disrespected is a main source of anger in interpersonal relations.

teammates from the football team caught him in the hallway and held him back. He tried to think why his roommate's side was not flipped. The only reason he could think of was, *I am Black and you are White. On top of that, I am not from some country-ass place, I am from the hood. And I know for a fact the sergeant doesn't fuck with me.* A few weeks later, he was brought in for counseling for throwing up gang signs on the football field.

Dominic did not want to tell anyone what was happening because he did not want to be seen as a snitch, but eventually his teammates convinced him to go talk to his coaches. He told his coaches about the incidences and how he wanted to leave the preparatory school. They said they would talk to the tactical team, but nothing changed. Then there was a rumor they were going to move him to another company so he could be under Sergeant First Class Lee, but he stayed put.

From these events, Dominic concluded there was a lot of racism at the preparatory school, but no one seemed to notice. People turned a blind eye to it. *I can see it but no one else see it because they think everyone is all green and all that shit but nah, fuck that, they are racist.* He found that people would turn a blind eye to anything that was happening at the preparatory school because West Point was put on such a pedestal. But this was not church: it was not worth sacrificing everything for. If one more thing happened, he was going to snap. His mother told him to pray.

When the second urine analysis results came back, he centered himself and called his mom. She finally agreed he could sign his out-processing papers. He had called his mom every time something happened, and he explained to me that this was ridiculous,

> I am like a grown-ass man. I am not supposed to be calling my momma for nothing, but at this point, we are like all kids all over again, we are like in elementary school. Folks forget they

> are 20, 21, grown as fuck, like you graduated high school, you're in college. But they drill into your mind that you are so, what is the word, so low rank, inferior, they drill into your mind you are so inferior, people lose sight of what the fuck is really going on.

Dominic was disappointed because this happened right when his grades were finally picking up and he was ready to stick it out at the preparatory school. He explained to me that whenever his tactical team thought he was ready to leave, they would leave him alone. But when he started doing better, all the sudden he was tampering with his sample. In his mind, it was clear: "When they want you out, they want you out."

When Dominic shared with some of the institutional leadership that he had experienced racism from his company leadership, the chain of command investigated the situation. [75] His sergeant had documented each of the counselings with Dominic and the reason behind them. The paperwork showed that again and again that the sergeant had tried to counsel Dominic to be a better soldier, but Dominic kept resisting the transition and refused to make any changes to his behavior. The sergeant had received news from the lab that the urine samples were not urine at all—but mostly water. He told me that there was no way the urine was *not* tampered with. He was just doing his job. However, after working with Dominic, moving forward the sergeant was more hesitant to correct Black soldiers for fear of being perceived as racist. It was too risky, and he understand how his attempts to be a good sergeant could be misconstrued.

When a senior leader investigated Dominic's situation, he did not think it was racially motivated. He explained to me:

> Dominic was probably one with a rough background that had attitude behind it. It's all about perception. When you have teachers also saying that he's not paying attention in class, or he's not doing his work, it just piles up. All the evidence to say, okay, is he fit for West Point? And if the answer is no, then it's no."

He found the fact that Dominic did not get his tattoo removed as a testament to that Dominic was

[75] Dominic encouraged me to speak to the chain of command about his situation.

not that committed to the military. Sergeant First Class Lee had worked closely with Dominic as a football team coach. He asked Dominic why he thought they were targeting him, and recounted the conversation as follows:

"Well, they thought I was throwing up gang signs on the football field."

"Well, were you?"

"Yeah, but how did they know that?"

"What else?"

"They held me for two days after I got here."

"Yeah. You have a gang tattoo for the Black Kings. I am not stupid."

"No, no, no."

"What else?"

"My room being tossed."

"I went up there with the sergeant when he tossed your room. Your room looked like crap. I would have tossed it too."

Sergeant First Class Lee felt bad for other leadership members who were White; no one could use the "racist" card against him because he was Black. He told me in a flat tone, "How is that fair to anybody else that works here? It's not!" He had had a similar experience when he was a platoon sergeant. There was a Black soldier in another company who kept getting in trouble. Whenever the soldier got in trouble, he would blame it on having a White chain of command. The commander moved him into Sergeant First Class Lee's platoon where there was a more diverse command team. The soldier was "just a dirtbag" and Sergeant First Class Lee treated him the same as his last leaders. He would get frustrated when soldiers used race as a "shield" to say, "the man is holding you down."

Captain Kennedy had a different perspective on Dominic's situation:

> He was picked out on day one as like, 'Oh, this guy's a thug.' That was not spoken, but that was the perception. There's not a lot he could have done in those beginning time to change that perception because the way he came across and he fit all the mental models of our society's image of that scary, African American male and racism that we have built into our culture. So, when somebody fits that bill and you have a White staff, it's hard to get them not to see that kid as a young kid just like anyone else who needs mentorship and development."

The way I saw it there was too big of a gap between Dominic's existing behaviors and the expectations authorities had of him as a Black man from the "hood" and those of a soldier, in particular a future officer. To fit into the institution, Dominic would have had to completely change the way he walked, spoke, interacted with authorities, and surgically remove the identities already inscribed on his flesh. Mr. Franklin gave the metaphor that Black candidates had to act like dogs with their tails between their legs, making themselves smaller, timider, and quieter to please the White authorities and be successful at the preparatory school. Dominic also would have to override instinctual responses to what he experienced as disrespectful and discriminatory behavior and his own expectations about how White authorities would treat him as a Black man. In other words, he would have had to entirely reconfigure himself internally and externally. Even if he did recreate himself, his path would still not be smooth given the low expectations for his competencies as a soldier. Authorities expected him to at the preparatory school to just play football or to make money for his family, not because he was committed to the profession. From the beginning of basic training, he was seen as aggressive, having a bad attitude, and undisciplined. Dominic would have to over-perform again and again to change how the authorities and his peers evaluated him. As Captain Kennedy noted, without mentorship and a reciprocal commitment on behalf of the institutional authorities to make space for soldiers like him, it was fighting a losing battle.

16 Rucking

It was still dark outside when we formed up with our rucksacks, fighting load carriers, army combat helmets, and rifles for our first company ruck march during basic training. The rucks were filled with approximately 25 pounds of gear, which seemed quite heavy to me at the time. I prepared myself mentally for the march: four miles up and down the notorious West Point hills. I wanted to prove myself.

The cadets moved through the ranks checking our equipment with the utmost attention to detail. Captain Kennedy and Sergeant First Class Lee joined, showing the cadets what they needed to fix on the helmets and rucks. The cadre instructed us to make sure we had access to our water hoses in the rucks. They also had us fix the straps on the helmets to make sure they were placed correctly put over our chins and told us to tighten our boot laces to prevent blisters.

When it was almost time to start, they told us to put on our rucks. We moved too slowly, and we had to take our equipment on and off several times until we could do it quickly and correctly. This was the first time I had put on my ruck and the straps were digging into my back. I tried to figure out which strap was causing what pain, but I just gave up and let them dig. I did not want to get in trouble for moving around.

The other companies left first, and we filed in behind them, making up the back of the movement. Demarcus Wright, a Black man from the West Coast, was in front of the company with the guidon, walking alongside the cadet company commander and first sergeant.

The ruck was fine on the way down. We were instructed to remain quiet, “tactical,” and all I could hear was the sound of our footsteps and some chatter between the cadre members echoing in the silence. We walked in the middle of the deserted streets of West Point campus. Cadets in brightly colored jerseys went to each intersection to stop any traffic. Whenever a car

was approaching, we were told to relay "Vehicle from the front!" or "vehicle from the rear!"

Kelly Carter was towards the back and our platoon sergeant decided to move her up because of the slinky effect. The slinky effect occurred when small changes in pace at the front of the formation caused large and abrupt changes at the back of the formation. This led to people having to run to catch up and then stop abruptly. It made rucks much more difficult. Kelly made it about a quarter of a mile before she fell out to the side. She kept walking, but the formation moved ahead of her. Her legs were aching and the weight on her back was making it worse: *It's just like the worst pain in the world. It feels I've have been walking for days, like I walked here from Indiana.*

As she walked, she saw on the side of the road the "fallouts" from other companies. Some looked as if they had passed out, and cadets surrounded them with the medics. *What is happening? People look like they are dying on the side of the road.* At one point, they told Kelly to get into the vehicle that was collecting fallouts.

When we reached the bottom of the hill and started up another incline, the cadets started shouting at us: "Keep it up. Pain is an illusion. You'll be mad at yourself later if you fall out. Quitting is not an option."

"Don't quit. If your mind quits, your body will quit." Renee Edmonds cried out that her knee hurt. Captain Kennedy heard her, and asked: "Is it pain or an injury?" She said just pain and kept on going.

We went up and down hills and I leaned into them, looking at the ground pretending it was flat. It helped me to encourage others and shout *HOOAH*. I was not going to give up. I saw one woman fall out ahead of me who looked like she was fainting. Another was walking slowly to the side, repeating over and over that she just needed something to eat. Another had tears in

her eyes, saying her ankle was twisted. I yelled for the medic. More and more fell out, men and women. I wanted to stay in to prove that women could do it because most of the fallouts were women. I felt the approving eyes of the cadet cadre as we pushed ahead. Surprising my biggest discomfort was holding the rifle. To hold it properly, I had to engage my biceps and keep my right hand on the handle, which hurt my wrist. If I held it properly, my thumb was rubbing against the outside of my uniform and rubbing on a hangnail. I was getting a blister on the inside of one of my other fingers. The sweatier my hands got, the harder it was to hold.

Demarcus and those with the other companies' guidons ran around the formation in their full gear cheering for us. They repeated this several times throughout the ruck to encourage us to keep moving forward. I was in awe at how they could sprint with so much gear.

Lily Rose kept scrambling to keep up. She had not thought rucking would be *that* hard. She was used to being the most athletic person in a group so she imagined that she would at least be proficient at rucking. Had she not been the best performer in her squad in the Air Force Academy high school summer program? The fastest runner and the best at push-ups and sit-ups. Yep, but they did not have rucking. Why was she doing the Army again?

The weight was not bad for Lily—it was the speed that she could not handle. Her short strides could not compete with six-foot-tall Adam Evans, a White football player from the Midwest, in front of her. Her issued boots also did not fit properly. She had selected wide instead of narrow because she did not want them to be too tight, but her feet slid back and forth in the boots making the skin on the bottom of her feet peel. She could not take a step without agonizing pain, but after like a mile or two, her feet went numb. When she looked around her to see all those who had fallen out, she was proud of herself because she was not going to quit. *These people quit but not me.*

The cadre started to get angry with Lily for slowing down the formation. Yet, she figured she was only the slowest one because everyone else had dropped out. *Why am I getting so much crap for actually trying?*

Whenever there was a significant gap between her and Adam, Lily would run to make up the distance. This meant that I had to keep slowing down in order not to bump into her when she fell behind and then had to run when she ran. We had been specifically told not to run because it would make the slinky effect worse. We were supposed to "stride it out," taking longer strides more quickly. Yet, Lily's legs were much shorter than mine and she was a strong runner, so she preferred to run. I, on the other hand, much preferred the pain of rucking quickly to running with full gear. I swore a lot under my breath, but the rest of our squad and I kept encouraging her

One of the cadets came over and told her, "Give me your rifle." She gave it to the cadet, but within a minute, a man came up behind her, and shouted, "Why do you not have your rifle?" Lily did not recognize his face or rank, and responded, "Oh she told me to." He shouted something she did not fully hear. She took her rifle back and kept going.

We started up again towards the steepest hills. Jasmine Washington started yelling that she wanted to fall out. She fell once to the ground, but they pushed her back up and told her to keep going. Then she fell again, "I CAN'T!" She collapsed. Then everyone screamed, "MEDIC! MEDIC!" And "GO AROUND HER. KEEP GOING."

Adam started slowing down as we reached the top of the hill. His back was starting to give out on him, and his legs were exhausted. He felt it was the hardest thing he had done in his whole life—harder than any football training. We encouraged him to keep going, to make it to the top of the peak. The candidate behind him pushed on his backpack to keep moving him forward: "We are almost there! Keep it up."

Claire Row, a White woman from the Midwest, was a platoon ahead of us. She was struggling with figuring out the rhythm of her steps and how to lengths her strides. As she made her way up the hills, she felt accomplished and energized. She experienced intermittent sharp pain in her hips but ignored it, telling herself it was fine, and to block it out. She always dealt with pain after she had completed the task at hand.

Right before our turn into preparatory school at the top of the hill, the formation turned around. The cadre led us back down the steepest hill. It was a trick. We were not done yet. Going down the hill gave me a chance to catch my breath, and I felt motivated as we pushed up the hill the second time.

Lisbeth Sokolov felt that her body was burning. She felt like she was on fire. Her legs were overheated, and she felt a sharp constant pain. She struggled to keep up with the prior in front of her who was six-three. The rifle felt heavy in her arms, and she could not use her arms to help propel her forward. She started cradling her rifle in her arms because it was easier to hold like that. A cadet saw her and yelled, “Stop carrying it like a toy, cadet candidate.” She moved her hand back to the proper position. Everyone around her was moving too fast.

“Sergeant, I can’t do this. I got to fall out.”

“Okay, fall out to the side.”

She moved to the side, and several cadets came rushing over to her. “What’s wrong?”

“Everything. I am burning!” She panted. She was purposefully being dramatic so they would believe her. She wanted a break, to sit down for a little while. When she saw some other people who had fallen out and that they really needed help, she felt a bit guilty. One of those people was Chelsea Melton. Chelsea struggled to keep up with the tall man beside her, but each of his steps felt like five of hers. At one point, she could not breathe anymore and passed out.

She was carried to the side, as the formation moved around her. The medic took off the uniform top and her shoes. Her breathing was staggered. An officer came over to her, telling her to, "come on, come on, get over it, stop feeling sorry for yourself." She hated that because she did not feel sorry for herself, she was humiliated. *I'm a pansy, can't finish a ruck, and this sucks.* They loaded her into the fall-out vehicle with Kelly. Chelsea felt better when she saw how many others had fallen out too.

Athena Little and I stayed together. Her feet were on fire and her legs felt like they were going to fall off. She looked at the men around her and she reflected on the difference between a 25-pound ruck felt on her versus a man. *They ruck like they have nothing on their fucking backs. It is not fair.* Halfway up the hill, her right leg went numb, but she did not want to quit. In her back, she felt deep pain whenever she breathed, opening and closing with the inhalation and exhalation of her lungs. She wanted to stop so badly but refused. She felt it would be humiliating to fall out. She saw how cadets treated those who had already left formation. She kept looking at a small, woman cadre member. If she kept walking, so was Athena.

The cadre dropped Kelly, Lisbeth, and Chelsea off right before the last hill because there was no more space in the vehicle. They said, "you can do it, you can walk." They walked up the reminder of the hill with the fallout group. The three were happy that they were able to finish with everyone else. Lisbeth was still glad she had taken her little break despite her pang of guilt, *Unfair? Yes. Cheap? Yes. Malicious? Maybe. Selfish? Definitely. Beneficial? To me.*

A medic came up beside me and Athena as we bounded the last corner, "Put this in your study: You know what pisses me off, people like Kelly, who can't carry their own weight. People who are weak. The Army needs to cut off its fat." Athena and I looked at each other shocked. He said that they were coddling us at the preparatory school, and he had expressed that

to the higher-ups but they didn't care about his opinion because he was just a specialist.[76] I asked him if he thought all women were a burden to the Army and he said no, "Women like Grace Ives are badasses. They are killing it. Some women are doing amazing things in the Army."

This time when we got to the top, we turned left towards the preparatory school. As we made our final descent on the sloping road towards campus, euphoria ripped through my body. Everything hurt, but I had done it. The cadets cheered us on and shook our hands. We pulled Kelly, Lisbeth, and Chelsea back into our ranks. We were going to finish together as a platoon.

Still in formation, we were led onto the field to drop our gear in a straight line and stretch. We stood together, drenched in sweat but mostly elated. We were all there. Other squads had lost a lot of people who had not yet returned. There were three vehicles full of fallouts. Again, I was struck by how people did not prepare physically to come to boot camp or break in their boots. I had been preparing with practice rucks for months.

Suddenly, Captain Kennedy appeared behind Lily. It was the man who had yelled at her during the ruck for not holding her own rifle. He told her to turn around and asked her to repeat the four basic responses since she clearly had forgotten them on the ruck. She responded, "Yes, sir; no, sir; I do not understand, sir; no excuse, sir." He snarled that she had a terrible attitude.

Up until that point, Lily had felt accomplished for finishing the ruck. She did not care that people had been yelling at her. *If I had the worst attitude ever, I'd be like screw this let me get on that Humvee with other people. No. I don't quit. How can I have a bad attitude if I am trying my best?* She held herself together as he shouted, but once he left, she broke down. She had given the ruck her all, but the leadership thought she was slacking off. Tears welled up in her eyes.

[76] Medics and sergeants from other units came to help at cadet candidate basic training. They left the preparatory school after the training ended. Occasionally there was a clash between the tactical team who was familiar with the West Point developmental model and these outside soldiers who preferred a more coercive and attritional approach.

When we returned to our rooms for hygiene, Jasmine spoke with a woman cadet. She felt inadequate because she had not completed the ruck. She wanted to leave. But the cadet told her, "Don't let anyone tell you, you can't do something because you're short, or you're Black, or you're female. You can do whatever you put your mind to. Don't let cadre get in your head when they say shitty things to you. If you know you're trying your hardest, that's the best you can give, you should be proud of yourself." The cadet shared that she had also struggled on her first rucks, but now was able to complete them easily. Jasmine decided she wanted to practice rucking.

Lily kept asking me how I was able to keep up. She could not believe that I had been able to stay in. I told her I had no idea but that it was probably my stride length and my body proportions. She was frustrated that people kept telling her to lengthen her stride, but it did not seem possible. Kelly laughed and said, "Yeah, what do they expect us to do? Do the splits in the middle of the road?" How was she supposed to open her short legs any wider? I realized that my comparative advantage at rucking would be the key to gaining respect from the leadership and other candidates. I was not a fast runner or particularly strong, but if I could keep up during rucks, I would be taken seriously.

Before the next ruck, Sergeant Compton came to our room to help us adjust our rucksacks to fit better on our curves. She told us that she had scars on her hips from where the rucksack dug into her skin because it did not fit properly. We would have blisters and bruises but there was a bit she could do to help redistribute the weight. She warned us that a lot of women soldiers ended up with hip and hamstring issues from rucking and we should be prepared. I told Sergeant Compton that I was happy that no one had been majorly injured given the number of people in the fallout vehicles on the last ruck, she said, "yes, no major injuries, just tiny hearts."

"Tiny hearts" was the Army way of saying people who did not have a fighting spirit and gave up too easily. They lacked discipline. Whereas discipline in appearance was reflected through compliance with standards and uniformity, physical discipline was shown through endurance and pushing oneself to one's breaking point. It was about mental toughness and grit.

Over the year, I came to realize that rucking ability was tightly intertwined with "soldierliness." Rucking was so critical to army identity because, as the ground force, soldiers needed to be able to move from place to place by land, lugging heavy equipment. In many ways, rucking was also the most masculine and *HOOAH* of any of the physical activities we did together as a battalion because it was so closely connected to the infantry, the Army branch that engaged in combat on foot. Those who could ruck were recognized as good soldiers and badasses, those who could not were "soft bodies" and had "tiny hearts." Those who could not finish ruck marches were seen as liabilities—if they could not carry their own weight and keep up with the team, what use would they be in combat? They were holding the entire unit back.

During the academic year, when I joined the infantry club and the team realized that I could keep up with them on the ruck marches, one commented, "You are the most badass civilian I've ever met." It surprised them that a civilian could be proficient at this skill—often forgetting that several of them were civilians only a few weeks earlier. Captain Kennedy told me he was surprised I was doing so well. I asked him why—I figured he was going to say it was because I was a woman—but he said it was because I was a civilian. The message was clear: civilians did not have the grit, mental fortitude, and emotional or physical discipline to ruck. Rucking was one of the ways that soldiers were set apart from civilians, a way of marking symbolic boundaries the between these groups. As such, candidates who were good at rucking

gained significant status as soldiers and rose in the institutional status hierarchy. They excelled at a mission-specific skill that was deemed essential for soldiering and thus gained influence throughout other spheres of life at the preparatory school. Even during the academic year, when one candidate tutor tried to help another with his homework, he snapped at her, "I'll listen to you once you learn how to ruck."

Rucks were also imbued with ideas of honor and sacrifice. Honor was achieved when one finished the ruck on one's own, often sacrificing one's own physical well-being in the process. There was no honor in doing the activity if it was not done properly. In the spring, the infantry club joined in on a fallen comrade half-marathon ruck. I had recently injured my hamstring and asked Captain Kennedy what I should do: should I do the ruck at the speed of the team with less in my rucksack? Or should I do it with the full weight and do it slower? He told me just not to do it if I was really that injured: "Don't do it or do it right." Another officer overheard and laughed sarcastically at me, "I didn't realize you had such a tiny heart, Winfield." In the end, I was stubborn and had accepted the idea of bodily sacrifice for honor, so I did the march with the full weight and ended up significantly injuring my leg. I either ignored the pain or used it as motivation to push harder for months and ended up with muscle tears and pinched nerves. Yet, my decision seemed rational at the time—I was not willing to lose the status that would result from revealing physical weakness or signaling a "tiny heart." Instead, I would show my discipline in performance, the willingness to push through bodily pain. The decision had an additional layer: I was not willing to confirm the status biases about women and rucking.

From the first ruck, I realized how rucking was enmeshed with gender. When women performed poorly on rucks, they were seen as confirming larger cultural status beliefs about the limited strength of women and the specific status beliefs in the military about women and

rucking. The competence of women soldiers—particularly their ability to be in the infantry—was constantly called into question with the example of their inability to ruck. Though there were certain women who excelled at rucking from the very beginning, like Grace, and Claire, they were seen as the exceptions rather than the rule. As status research reveals, the performance of those who exceed status expectations is often ignored or diminished (Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997; Foschi 2000; Williams and Dempsey 2014). There were also certain men who did fall out of rucks; but again, these were seen as the exceptions and ignored.

I noticed that after our first ruck that the majority of women feared rucking and thought that women were inherently "bad ruckers." These beliefs stemmed from their personal experiences during rucking combined with reinforcement from cadre and other military leaders the "fact" that "females" struggle with rucking. Those who tried to give advice to women who were struggling said things like, "lengthen your stride." But this was vague and hard to implement. Even as we improved over the year, our muscles adjusting to this strange mix of backpacking and speed-walking, many women resigned themselves to always being "terrible at rucking." There were those, like Jasmine and Athena, who were determined to improve and went on rucks on the weekends or joined the infantry club to get in extra practice; yet, it was all too often a *self-fulfilling prophecy*—those who are deemed low status for certain tasks come to see themselves as performing poorly, experience greater anxiety and lack of confidence, look for confirmation of their poor performance, and eventually end up actually performing worse and fulfilling the prophecy.[77] And because rucking and soldierliness were so interconnected feelings of failure in rucking often lead to feelings of failure as a soldier.

[77] See Correll 2004; Lovaglia et al. 1998. On the effects of stereotype threat, see Schmader, Johns, and Forbes 2008; Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady 1999; Steele and Aronson 1995.

17 Perceived Competence

One evening a retired officer came to speak to the battalion about his experiences in the military. At one point in his speech, he brought up how strange it was for him when women integrated into his units. He gave stories of women not being able to perform military tasks, such as changing a tire, but concluded that women could be useful in the Army for their "brains." After the brief, the candidates were buzzing and gathered in the Open Forum Club, a place to practice active listening and discuss hot topics.

A candidate started the conversation right away: "Most of what he said I did not agree with. He can't see, or choose to see, what women contribute. Women have a place in combat arms, the Army, and everywhere."

A prior jumped in, "Males and females are biologically different. This is a job of physical competition."

The conversation took off and popcorned around the room.

"No one chooses what ethnicity or gender they are born with. If you have a strong drive to do combat—why not?"

"The military is not a social experiment. Americans don't have to serve. Just because you want to does not mean you get to be in combat arms." A group of men nodded.

Barbara Fenton jumped in, "Look—I can't get mad at biological differences. There is a difference in testosterone. But the mindset that women can't do it? What time period are we in? I thought we were in the 21st century. If you feel so passionately about the standards, then raise them. Women will do what they want to do. The sooner we get over this mindset that women can't do it and trust that she can do it, the better."

Another woman, "Yeah, there are physiological differences, so we will just have to work

harder."

Renee Edmonds spoke up, "Guys need to realize that there is a difference in body parts. Train with us, help us out. Girls can do it. It is not impossible. It's not impossible to have a girl beside in you in combat."

Nods among other candidates.

Athena Little added, "Yes, a girl can run a 12-minute two mile—but do you know how long it will take her to get to that? So long. But a guy—two months. Give him two months and he can do it. So, maybe give us four months? I heard women aren't even supposed to have abs because of childbirth. So, my body is not designed to do some of that stuff, but when I do decide to do that stuff, I want the system I am in to accommodate my body to the limit I can go to. They need to accommodate more to women."

An athlete jumped in, "I get the whole training thing, but these women cannot submit my coach who was 250 pounds. You feel it as soon as they grab on to them."

"But there are women with blackbelts. You can share the weight."

Another White man shared, "There are women who are police officers. They are guaranteed to be in life-or-death situation in the field. Combat that doesn't depend on body mass. There techniques for using weight against them. She may be smaller than me, but she can take people down on the street. Yeah, there is a difference between police and infantry, but still, female police are guaranteed to be in a struggle with the opposite sex."

A prior replied, "Look, I am all for integration. But going into some personal situations, I was concerned because I knew the female on my squad could not drag us off to cover if we were shot."

Catherine Poli asserted, "Combat is not all physical. You have to be mentally strong.

When you get down to people firing at you, being physically strong won't matter if you crack under pressure. Your training, your mindset is an advantage"

Another man, "We put too much weight on how much people can drag. Can the soldier pack your wound? Can your team suppress fire? Who has the best marksmanship?"

Captain Kennedy, who was leading the conversation jumped in, "How does it feel for the women in here to be constantly labeled by their gender. I see a lot of White males in here talking with no experience being categorized solely by gender or race. Every time issue of this topic comes up, we keep saying, females this, females that. Are we not all soldiers?"

A White recruited wrestler, interrupted, "Why is race even a part of this?"

Captain Kennedy stared him down. "If you pay attention, White men in this country don't have to be viewed by race and gender. They get a free pass into the room. They are automatically qualified. Everyone else has to justify their qualification. You walk in with a level of acceptance."

Barbara jumped in again, "I can speak according to my race and gender. I already have to work twice as hard because I am not White, but then I am female too. We all come from different backgrounds, we come here and are supposed to be at a military institution. Trust us to have your back. It's hard when you come here, and people already don't trust you. We are judged before y'all see what we can do. You expect that we are weaker even when we meet the same requirements."

This conversation was just one of many that bubbled up around the institution about expectations around the competencies of women in the military profession. From the first week of basic training, women who were officers, sergeants, and cadets warned us that we would constantly be

judged on our physical strength. They told us that we had to beat the men and be better because no matter what we would always be looked down upon. “If you max a PT test, they will still say it’s just because you have an easier scale.” Black women were told that they had an even stronger penalty because their skin color reflected another deviance from the norm. There was also a stereotype among some candidates that Black bodies were inherently more physically fit, which may have counteracted some of the gender and race penalties, but overall Black women were often classified as the weakest. From an intersectional lens, Black women’s experiences were not the simple sum of White women’s experiences plus Black men’s experiences—their gender and race (as perceived by others) combined to create a unique experience.

Although the words of the women leaders and the experiences of candidates like Barbara were painful to hear, they made sense to me. I knew from status expectations and characteristics theory that low-status groups (women, non-White) have to outperform those from high-status groups (men, White) to gain recognition (Quadlin 2018; Ridgeway 2019:111; Uhlmann and Cohen 2005; Williams and Dempsey 2014). Even when they do outperform, they still often receive fewer positive evaluations and less group influence. There is constant questioning of their abilities and legitimacy to move up in the status hierarchy. In the Army, beliefs about the direct correspondence between physical strength and ability to contribute on the battlefield were deeply ingrained; thus, the importance of expectations for perceived competency seemed extra durable. Although, as Catherine pointed out in the discussion, there is much more to warfighting than brute strength, and not all soldiers are in the infantry are dragging bodies off the battlefield, these facts did not alter the emotional response to who is *useful* as a soldier.

When it came time for quarterly candidate peer evaluations women and Black candidates were consistently ranked lower than their peers who were White men. The evaluation asked

"Can you trust this person? Would you follow them to combat? Would you share a foxhole with them?" Catherine, who was prior service and trained in combat lifesaving, performed extraordinarily well physically, was in the infantry club, and was at the top of the class academically found that she got yeses for trust but no's for combat. When she spoke to her squad mates and other candidate leaders about why they said no, they said told her that they wanted someone more dominating when they go into combat. She understood the underlying message: they wanted a man. When Catherine looked at the ranking list with her sergeant, he had put a line through the middle of candidate rankings based on these evaluations to show her that almost all those folks under the line were Black.[78]

[78] A research study showed that White and Black officers were equally likely to receive positive evaluations but the language in the evaluations was markedly different. The researchers found that "positive" comments for the Black officers, such as "attentive to the needs of others" and "gets along well with others" were negatively associated with promotion recommendations. On the other hand, the White officers' comments, which said that they were "motivating" and "instructive," were positively association with promotion recommendations. The only comment that was positively associated with promotion recommendation for Black officers was that they were "aggressive" (Johnson 2001)

18 Fitness Test

We stood in front of the building in formation before sunrise one basic training morning. Our black physical training uniforms blended in with the darkness, but the bright orange fluorescent belts made each candidate stand out. Our squad stood in silence, reading from our knowledge books for 10 minutes before the rest of the platoon, then company, and finally battalion arrived. My arm was aching by the time they finally ordered us into the position of attention. Every time there was a pause, we were put back into parade rest and had to take out our knowledge books. Out and away. Out and away. The cadets reminded us to help each other put them away if we wanted to do it fast enough.

"If you want us to leave you alone, you will have to help each other and correct each other." We had to take out and put away our knowledge books several times until we performed it in what was deemed an appropriate amount of time.

"This is our daily abuse," a candidate behind me hissed.

I did my best to follow directions correctly and quickly. I did not touch the bugs that were crawling on my face and neck.

As sky started to brighten, our company was instructed to move to the soccer field for the Army Physical Fitness Test.[79] We double-timed it over—running in unison—and were instructed to gather around the cadet first sergeant. He read to us the official instructions for the test in a formal manner, as the test had to be performed uniformly across the whole army corps. Each activity had a scale of points for a certain number of push-ups, sit-ups, and two-mile run time, and the points for score were determined by age and sex. For the candidates' age range—17- to

[79] The Army Physical Fitness Test was replaced by Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT). The ACFT took full effect as the test of record as of April 2022 (U.S. Army n.d.).

22-year-olds—42 push-ups were worth 60 points for males and 100 points for females. For the same age group, a 15:54 two-mile-time was worth 60 points for males and 98 points for females. Sit-up standards were the same for both sexes. A soldier needed a minimum of 60 points per activity to pass. The maximum score was 100 per activity for a total score of 300. It was possible to use the "supermax" scale to determine who was really the strongest amongst those in the "300 club" who exceeded all the maximums.

The first component of the test was push-ups. A cadet sergeant read through the directions for the push-ups and another cadet demonstrated proper and improper form. We lined up in several lines, with approximately 10 candidates per line. The candidate at the front of the line approached the grader and started the exercise at the timer's command. The grader counted the number of push-ups out loud and repeated the same number if a certain iteration did not count. The rest of the candidates in line turned around to give the testing candidates some privacy.

When it was my turn, my stomach was in knots. I was very nervous. I went relatively slow and was relieved that I scored 20 push-ups. I had passed! 18 was the minimum score for females. I felt I could probably have done more if I had gone faster, but I basked in my victory until the next exercise. Over the course of the year, my push-up scores would increase to 48—past the maximum for females. My growth paralleled the other candidates, many of whom were able to move from barely passing to maxing within a few months into the year. Lisbeth Sokolov started out the year almost maxing and easily passed the maximum threshold by the second test—she loved to do push-ups and often did them in her free time. Grace Ives reflected on her experiences as a prior and told us it was about learning to take the test and building up the right muscles and movement patterns. However, scoring could depend heavily on the grader. One

candidate was extremely frustrated because although she always maxed, during the winter test, her grader did not count any of her push-ups. She left the event furious, only barely passing. Catherine Poli had learned from her prior time in the Army to test her graders at the very beginning of the event to see how far she really had to go down to make the push-up count.

Once the whole company had finished the push-ups, the cadets read out the instructions for the sit-ups and demonstrated proper and improper form. When it was my turn, I struggled to throw myself back between repetitions. I was afraid of hitting my head too hard on the turf. I only got 47 iterations, failing the event. The minimum to pass was 53 for males and females. Sergeant First Class Lee told me that if I was not dizzy or disoriented after the event then I was not throwing myself back hard enough. He laughed saying every time he did sit-ups for the test, he threw himself back so hard he could not see straight for a few minutes. Over the course of the year, I was able to reach the maximum for sit-ups as well. Jasmine Washington maxed the sit-ups her first time. She energetically threw herself back and forth. Kelly Carter had no problem maxing push-ups and sit-ups by mid-year.

Next, we received instructions for the two-mile run. The sun was rising, and humidity was intensifying. I was worried about how I would perform in the heat. The cadets set up a big timer so we could see the time when we completed each lap. We were given colored jerseys to wear to help our graders keep track of us. Demarcus Wright finished his two miles in 9:56, over two minutes ahead of the next person. He was used to running eight miles a day at home for track, so two miles was a breeze for him. He just put his body into "cruise control." When the cadets realized how fast he was, they started yelling "Faster! Faster!" to see how fast he could run the two miles. When he finished his run, he did not want to just sit and watch everyone else, so he grabbed the company flag, held it high above his head, and kept running with other people

and helped motivate those who were struggling. He did not want to hide his strength as it was a public symbol of his soldierliness. Adam Evans came in around thirteen minutes and blew me away how fast he could run with his bulk from football.

I got 18:38, which was passing. The minimum score for females was 18:56 according the 17 to 22-year-old standard—even though I was older, I wanted to hold myself to the candidates' standards across all events. My run time would drop to below seventeen minutes by the end of the year. Jasmine finished around the same time and was happy because she ran the whole way without throwing up. For our first week of basic training, she threw up during every single running event. As I gasped for air after we powered through the finish line, she told me, "I feel like I can tolerate more pain now! Look at us now!" Her run time dropped to around 16:30 by the end of the year.

I caught my breath and returned to formation. Lily Rose had been finished for a while. She ran the two miles in a little over 15 minutes. Finally, she had found something during basic training where she could perform above average and stand out in a positive way. I saw that Kelly was starting her last lap. Our whole squad joined her on the track and cheered her on:

"You got this, Carter!"

"Just get to where I am," Rich Rivers encouraged as he jogged backward to lead her forward. She finished her first ever two-mile run at 25:30.

After the test, our scores were posted on the bulletin board at the front of the company hallway. We could see which of our company mates were excelling physically—and thus, helping the company win the coveted physical fitness streamer—and which ones were pulling our company average down. The people who had failed were highlighted in red. There was a whole lot of red on the printed spreadsheet. Whereas in the civilian world group members often

base initial status assessments on cultural status beliefs and the hierarchy remains implicit, in the military our skills and rankings were made public. We could alter our performance expectations for others based on this evidence.[80] We learned later in a brief that 44% of the battalion failed the first fitness test. Those who failed would not receive the commandant's endorsement in the West Point admissions process, which required a 2.0 or higher GPA and passing all of the fitness tests.

The current state of our fitness was a huge concern for the tactical team, the cadre, and the candidates who took over the company chain of command after basic training. In the first meeting of the new candidate chain of command, they discussed physical fitness as a priority for the company—as leaders they were responsible for improving the scores. Rich took this message to heart and started checking in with the candidates in his platoon that were failing. He told Kelly, "Hey, you, you need to pass your fitness test. You're going running with me." Lisbeth responded poorly to this approach when she overheard the interaction, *Who the fuck do you think you are that you're forcing people to run this with you? What are you, the Commandant? I think the fuck not.*

Kelly and Angela Lil Boat, a Black woman from the South, continued to struggle to pass the two-mile run over the year. Both were able to max the other components, but each run they came in around 23 minutes. Angela passed one spring test, but then returned to her previous scores. After each test that they failed, Angela would start crying with frustration and Kelly would shrug, move away from the crowd coming to comfort her, and go back to her room. Angela's grunts during the runs, look of determination on her face, and tears afterward signaled to others that she was trying her hardest, and even though she continued to fail the run, others discussed how they still respected her because she was trying. In accordance with the feeling

[80] See Anderson and Cowan 2014; Berger et al. 1998; Goar and Sell 2005.

rules of the institution, her facial expressions signaled that she had proper *intention* even if she did not yet have the results—no one could say she had a tiny heart.[81]

On the other hand, Kelly's face remained blank during the runs, and she walked away nonchalantly. As a result, there were whispers about her that she was not even trying her hardest. I asked some candidates who were gossiping about those who "don't try" over lunch one day how they could tell who was trying and who was not, and they told me explicitly it was about facial expressions and sounds. I nodded—I also looked for these signs in others and had learned through the year that the only acceptable reason to stop mid-activity was if one collapsed or vomited. Although in other settings and among those who were already physical elites' stoicism during pain was a sign of toughness, for those who were failing tests or falling out of rucks, it was considered a lack of intention or will to succeed. In reality, Kelly was trying but she abhorred public displays of weakness and preferred to only reveal her vulnerability in private.

Back in our rooms, Kelly would tell us exasperatedly after the tests that she was not getting enough time to train:

"I am not here for academics. I can do that stuff. So why are they making me spend all my time in academics when what I need to be doing is working out? Let me leave my room at five am and work out. Let me go at night!" During the academic year, the preparatory school leadership had put restrictions on when candidates could be out of their rooms to exercise because lack of sleep could negatively impact academic performance and the majority of the candidates were here for academic improvement.

Kelly had always been athletic in high school, even being the head of the cheerleading

[81] Intentions are the cognitive processes that accompany bodily action and intention-in-action in particular can be measured through the fluidity of the action and non-verbal cues (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Searle 2010; Stout 2006; Wittgenstein 1953; Wuthnow 2020).

and volleyball teams but nothing compared to the physical activity level of the preparatory school. I was often confused about why some of the candidates had not prepared as much as I had for basic training—I had trained every day following the fitness spreadsheet I found on the West Point athletics website and tried to heat acclimate as recommended. When I had originally found out I would be doing basic training, I started working out immediately. Lily had taken on a physical trainer, and others had gone rucking around their neighborhoods. But others, like Kelly, had devoted their summers to basking in the last few weeks of freedom. I imagined that perhaps if I were joining the Army for the next 10 years, I would have wanted to enjoy some rest ahead of time too.

Kelly also explained to me she thought that her body shape made physical activity for her more difficult than for other candidates—she found that her hips and breasts got in the way when she was trying to run. She was not tall enough to "open her stride" when she ran or rucked. I was told that each year it was typically curvier Black women who struggled to pass the run and the tactical team had a variety of explanations for why this was the case: Was it cultural? Did Black women participate less in high school athletics? Were Black women raised not to get sweaty and mess up their hair? Was it a physical or physiological difference? Was lack of effort or commitment, a lower pain tolerance?

Lisbeth was typically on the cusp of not passing the run, but each time, she finished the test within a few seconds of the cut-off. She was a sprinter and knew if need be, she would power through the last segment. Lisbeth did not have that much patience for those who were failing physical tests—despite the fact she was often close to failing herself. In her perspective, what were these students even doing here? At breakfast after another fitness test that a few candidates failed, she turned to me, "There are thousands of people that apply here who are fit,

and thousands of them are academically good. Why would they choose somebody that's not physically fit but academically fit to go here? It's a military academy! Just send them to a reserve officer training corps at a civilian school where you do more academics than U.S. military." Physical fitness was their jobs and was particularly important to be a West Point cadet.

Lisbeth also noticed that candidates would often talk about the women who failed fitness tests. She did not hear them talk about men who failed and was not even sure who were the men who were failing, but she could easily name all women. She had a hypothesis for why people focused on the women who were failing: the women who failed were not core-sport athletes but the men who were failing were often bulky football players. People had a different type of respect for the physicality of core athletes than for those who did not play sports. The women who failed were just seen as lacking endurance, ability, and a fighting spirit. They were suffering from "tiny heart syndrome." I nodded along when Lisbeth told me this; the men who failed typically had other high-status parts of their identities (e.g., recruited athletes) that could compensate for low performance. No one could doubt that a college-level wrestler or football player who failed the test was still fit—they were just assumed to have a different type of athleticism. But there were no core sports for women at the preparatory school. Moreover, each time a woman failed she was *confirming* the existing status belief that women were physically weaker and the incident become further proof of the bias, whereas when a man failed, he was just seen as an exception and disregarded.

Rich thought that people looked down on those who could not pass the test because it was an indicator of whether a person had basic fitness: "It's not like a hard thing that people sometimes make it out to be." Athena Little tried to wrap her head around why the test was so easy for her, but her friends were struggling so much. She could even walk the two miles, with

little sprints in between, and come in under the limit. Athena blamed the tactical team for the continual failure of some to pass the test. The tactical team needed to help them more because it was a high-stress environment. Candidates needed more guidance.

In the second half of the year, the candidates who had failed the fitness test worked with their company sergeants daily during mass athletics. The senior military leaders told them they would not receive admissions to West Point unless they passed the spring fitness test. They did daily runs, 1000-calorie workouts, and weightlifting.

Sergeant First Class Lee was convinced that certain candidates' difficulties in passing the run was a mental—not physical—block. When he took those who failed the test out on casual runs, they were often able to run two miles in less than 18 minutes without any problem. But when they were on the track with a stopwatch, a mental block emerged. He thought there was something within them that was stopping them that they would have to overcome to be successful in the Army. Captain Edwards, a company tactical officer, felt handcuffed in his ability to help his candidates improve because so much of their day was already taken by academics, military science, and sports; when was he able to get his hands on them to help them develop physically?

When classes ended for the year in May, the candidates that had not yet passed the Army Physical Fitness Test for the spring quarter tried twice a day. There were only five final test failures. A group of us went to go watch them on a morning test and cheer them on. All of them passed sit-ups and push-ups, including several maxing. It was time for the run. One came in at exactly 15:54—the slowest acceptable two-mile time for males—so he passed! We all cheered. The rest came in late. Angela finished at about 21 minutes. Two candidates had tried to pace Kelly, but she was still late. In the afternoon, they failed the test again. They would have to stay

at the preparatory school until they passed the test. They could not return home for the summer vacation.

Angela was upset. When she went to talk to Captain Kennedy about it, he sounded angry with her and went on about what made good officership. It was the ability to push oneself pass one's limits and train oneself to lead the team physically. When she mentioned at home that she would be able to have a personal trainer, he said that it is her responsibility to learn to train herself. At some point, she would need to take agency in her own fitness and development, and eventually, as an officer, she would be responsible for the fitness of her whole unit. As a leader she not only needed to be fit, but close to the fittest or she would not be able to help her subordinates improve.

Ultimately, the commandant let Angela go home because she had passed one test during the year which technically met the requirement for admission. Kelly prayed to God to show her if the Army was the right path for her. She knew the answer to her prayer would be whether she passed the test. On May 8th, Kelly tried again and got 19:24. She was closer but still 30 seconds short. On May 22nd, she passed.

We often mused about the extent to which the ability to do push-ups, sit-ups, and run two miles was connected to the actual ability to perform in combat, but the answer given to us was that it was a way to show general fitness and ability to be in the corps. Kelly told us one spring afternoon when we were hanging out in Sergeant First Class Lee's office that if she were being shot at in combat, she was damn sure she could run a 15-minute two-mile. Sergeant First Class Lee laughed that if she were running two miles in combat something was seriously wrong. All the skills necessary for combat would be measured in branch-specific tests.

The sex differences—but not age differences—in scoring were also the source of significant discussion over lunch and dinner, and we often got into heated debates. There were two major camps. The first camp thought the differential scoring based on sex was unfair: why should one person get a better grade for a lower score just because they happen to be female? Wouldn't they be doing the same jobs in the military now that infantry was open to both sexes? These outcomes were connected to grades, and eventually branch and promotions, so differential treatment was not fair. If the Army really wanted to be equal, then why did they keep differentiating between the sexes? Wouldn't equality come when everyone was held to the same standards? Differential scales were also a double-edged sword because when women did max the test, their performance was discounted because they had only maxed the "female scale," which was meaningless for gaining respect from some men.

The other camp supported the different standards, either because they valued equity—the same difficulty level depending on the person, i.e. 42 push-ups are as hard for a female as 76 push-ups are for a male—or thought that females were inherently physically weaker than men and thus, should have lower standards and be kept out of the combat arms. Our squad mate Saul Alvarez and Lily often argued about this idea. He would say they needed the same standard, and she would go on a rant:

> That's not true. You're going to have no females in the military if you make the same requirements. Yah, there are some people that are unbelievably strong that can be almost the same as a male, but the majority of females are not that great, not as strong, but they have different things that they can offer to the military other than just brute force. Yeah, if you only want 1% of females in the military, it's a great idea to make the same standards. Look at the Olympics—they have different world records for males and female runners.

Saul would shake his head and the debate raged on.

Sergeant First Class Lee and I discussed this dilemma one late afternoon:

> They throw it at us like females are equal. Females are equal. Females are equal. They're the same as you. They're the same as you. But then they give them different everything. So obviously, they're not the same as me and they're not equal, or we would have the same everything. You're telling me that they're lower than me because they have lower standards. I didn't say it. AR-670-1 says it. The Army physical fitness test scoring says Everything else says it. They said for me.

When there was differential scoring, Sergeant First Class Lee explained that he ended up with soldiers that could not complete their jobs in his unit, and then he had to yell at them and give them negative counseling. This was not fair for his soldiers—they were being set up to fail—or fair for him because he had to then yell at them and counsel them for something that could have been avoided if there were equal standards.

Sergeant Compton popped her head into Sergeant First Class Lee's office when she walked by on her way to the gym, overhearing our conversation through the open door. Her perspective was that if females are joining a male profession, they need to be able to meet those standards. "But…" she conceded a little. She was still a little torn if females in *all* branches needed to hold infantry standards. Maybe females in support branches could have lower standards than those in the combat arms? Otherwise, we might lose all the females in the military.

My suitemates and I also often contemplated together if the fitness test itself was designed to prioritize male types of strength: upper-body strength and speed. Areas in which the female body was comparatively stronger—such as abdominal and leg strength and flexibility—that were also important for soldiering were minimized or excluded from the test. Indeed, we learned that the fitness tests once included a test for flexibility but removed it because otherwise competent soldiers were not able to pass it. Who cared if an infantryman could touch his toes!

When I accepted that the military was probably not going to change the type of strength it valued, I reflected on what it would look like to take the different physiology of male and female

bodies seriously but not judgmentally. What would it look like to train the females according to the strength of their bodies? The training might look different but the eventual performance during the test might be the same. Through a sort of unspoken alliance, women tried to coach one another on the best way to perform various tasks based on female anatomy. For example, before the first fitness test, Grace told us because females had stronger chest muscles than triceps, our comparative advantage was to do push-ups with our arms placed further apart instead of the narrower triceps push-ups. Then we could move our arms wider or narrower as certain muscle groups got tired.

Towards the end of the year, the leadership announced that there would be a new fitness test for the corps. In the Army Combat Fitness Test, all soldiers were required to do triceps push-ups so there was no longer a way for women to use their comparative advantages. No more testing the waters either because we would have to go all the way down to the ground and lift our hands between push-up counts. The test was based on new exercises that the Army leadership considered better signals of combat readiness. On the new test, everyone was graded according to the same standard, but the criteria for overall passing were lower. Lily laughed when she heard about the new test and new standard and imagined a group of men soldiers getting together, touching their fingertips like evil geniuses, and saying, "Finally a way to get rid of these little pesky females." The new test felt to her like a trap.

19 Don't Ask, Don't Show

Demarcus Wright eyed Jared, a Black man from another company, in the hallway. Demarcus watched the way Jared interacted with the other candidates, his gestures, and his voice. Demarcus suspected that Jared was gay. Jared had denied it, but Demarcus's parents had told him: "if it walks like a duck, talks like a duck, sounds like a duck, it's a duck." Jared's voice and movements were red flags. Because of those signs, Demarcus decided to keep his distance. He resolved that he would not treat Jared poorly, and if they were in combat together, he would treat Jared the same as everyone else. But he would keep his personal life separate. Demarcus was not comfortable spending time with gay candidates because he did not want to be associated with their lifestyles. If he suspected another candidate was gay, he drew away from them.

Demarcus told me one afternoon that if he had a gay roommate, he would sleep with one eye open. He would ask to be switched because, "the second he puts his hand on me I'm going to knock him out." He assured me that he would not say that publicly because if everyone in the military said things like that the civilian world would freak out saying the military was against "gays." His strategy with a gay roommate would be to talk to him a lot about Jesus because "that'll fix that streak." Otherwise, he'd watch him like a hawk and not communicate more than necessary with him.

Sexual orientation was less physically visible than other identity characteristics among the candidates, although some like Demarcus, gathered that they could sense it from body language and behavior. Just as gender and race were performed and policed, so too was sexuality. Over-gesturing or a high voice could signal that a man was gay. Short hair on a woman could mean she was a lesbian—though there was already an assumption that many women in the Army must

be gay to join such a masculine profession. Demarcus was monitoring who was performing his conceptions of heterosexual and homosexual mannerisms. Yet, sexuality was not always accurately assessed through these external behaviors.

When we sat together on the stairwell cleaning our weapons, exhausted after a full day of military training in the culminating challenge of basic training, a couple of squad mates were joking with me about if I wanted to read their diaries. Rich Rivers moved his head close to my ear and whispered to me:

"You know I am gay?"

I was completely caught off guard. No. I did not know. I had not had an inkling. My mind whirled back to all the times our squad mates had used the word "faggot" or made fun of each other for acting gay.[82] "Suck my cock." "Don't be a Fag." "That's gay" was basically a synonym for saying, "that's stupid." Sexual remarks towards other men and then a "no homo" added on were ubiquitous.[83] I had not said anything because I was trying to keep a low profile and not police language otherwise my squad mates would not be themselves around me. I wondered how Rich had felt in those moments.

"No. I had no idea."

"People will find out once we all become Instagram friends. I wonder what will change."

Indeed, several candidates did find out just a week later. After Rich told Kelly Carter that he was gay, Kelly whispered it to Lily Rose. Lily was annoyed that he had not told her and wanted to

[82] If the tactical team heard candidates using this word or other "unacceptable" language, the candidates would be reprimanded. See Part II, Chapter 43 'Speaking like Soldiers' for a discussion about language use and respect violations.
[83] See Pascoe 2007 for details on how jokes and ridicule, especially about sexuality, are used to enforce masculinity and toughness.

find out a way to get him to tell her too. She strategized, half-joking and half-serious, that maybe she should tell him she was gay or bi and see his response. Kelly said that was a bad idea.

Lisbeth Sokolov found out through Athena Little. Rich had told Athena and then she had told a group of friends, "Don't tell anybody, but Rich's gay," and then it came out to the whole battalion. Lisbeth thought, *Way to go, Athena,* but blamed Rich because it was his fault to trust her in the first place, believing that she would not spread it around.

Rich had been strategic before telling anyone he was gay, however. He had watched from the beginning of basic training how two candidates that were openly gay in their mannerisms were treated and he saw that they were treated the same as other soldiers. He thought it was safe to come out. The words and jokes about sexuality did not bother him at all—he just categorized them with the other types of making fun of people that were so common in army culture. Rich was not a liberal and obsessed with policing language; in fact, he was even conflicted on his feelings about the end of "Don't Ask Don't Tell".[84] For him, it was okay for soldiers to be openly gay if they were still professional and respectful of army culture. But he noticed that there were soldiers who would use being gay to their advantage—if they were treated differently, they would automatically blame it on bias against homosexuality. He also was particularly aggravated when some flamboyant people perpetuated stereotypes about gay men and, as a result, others thought that all gay men acted the same.

There was a prank in the barracks during the fall quarter. Three suitemates knew that the fourth

[84] The Clinton administration issued Defense Directive 1304.26 ("Don't Ask, Don't Tell") in 1993, which directed that military applicants were not to be asked about their sexual orientations. If evidence was found that demonstrated that one, "engaged in, attempted to engage in, or solicited another to engage in a homosexual act or acts," the applicant would be rejected for entry into the armed forces (Department of Defense 1993). The directive was repealed in 2011.

suitemate was uncomfortable with homosexuality because he had never met a gay person before. They decided to trick him into thinking one of his roommates was gay. When they were all in the suite and hanging out, one of the roommates came forward and came out to all of them as gay.

"Oh." The candidate looked shocked.

The prankster said, "Is that okay with you guys?"

The two that were in the on joke responded quickly, "Yeah! Cool man."

The third one did not respond. There was a long silent pause.

The prankster, started laughing, "You know I am just kidding right?"

"Oh, thank God! I was going to ask to change roommates."

When Alice Ramirez, a Hispanic prior in our company, heard about the prank, she was frustrated: *That should not be your mindset. Who cares? We're not creepy people. Why did people always assume that just because people were gay, they were attracted to every one of the same sex? Nine times out of 10 that was not true.*

She hated the stereotypes and generalizations that came with being gay, and knew these stereotypes were keeping people from coming out. It was like if she was afraid to say she was Hispanic because then everyone would think she was illegal. It was an identity that came with negative connotations.

Alice was open about her sexual identity but would not go up to others saying, "Hi! I am gay." She noticed that when some candidates were very public about being gay, that was the first thing other candidates would say about them when she mentioned their names: "Oh, that's the gay guy" or "That's the lesbian girl." She did not want to be primarily identified by her sexuality. She wanted to be seen as, "Oh, Alice, she's the prior," or "Oh, she is the soldier that tutors," or "She's the soldier that is squared away so she can help me be squared away." She

wanted to be recognized for her high-status characteristics.

Whether Alice came out or not, other candidates tended to assume she was gay because of her short, cropped haircut. She thought this was ridiculous. She had cut her hair in her last unit because she was sick of wearing a bun. Just because a woman had short hair or did not wear makeup or was in the military did not automatically make her a lesbian.

After basic training, when we were allowed to sit wherever we wanted for meals, I sat down at lunch at a new table to try to meet some new candidates who were outside of my company and broaden my circle. I introduced myself and my research and one of the candidates, a tall mixed-race man with deep brown eyes, asked me if I had any queer people in my squad.

I said I did not know, not wanting to out anyone.

He said I should study him. He introduced himself as Isaac Peterson and he was about to meet with the teachers to start a Gay-Straight Alliance club at the preparatory school to support the queer experience.

He went on to tell me a little bit about himself. Isaac was raised in a military family and grew up on posts abroad. He spent most of his life in Europe, where he was comfortable exploring his sexuality. When he moved from Europe straight to the southern United States, he was greeted with a tsunami of homophobia. He had never even heard the word "faggot" before. He had joined the football team as a strong athletic man, and suddenly it was all he heard during practice. He noticed that homophobia was particularly pronounced among Black men—almost as if being gay was an affront to their masculinity. I nodded, thinking about the research I had read about whether gay men faced higher social sanctions in the Black community than in other ethnic groups. The findings were inconclusive, but some scholars argued that persistent

discrimination against Black men leads them to adopt hyper-masculine behaviors as a coping strategy, which translated into higher social sanctions against homosexuality.[85] Others pointed to the historical connection between the Black community and the church, arguing that Black individuals were exposed to more anti-homosexual messaging than other groups. There was, however, a consensus that Black gay individuals faced double marginalization from anti-homosexual attitudes in the Black community and racism within the mainstream White gay community (Han 2007; Hill 2013; Jones and Hill 1996). Isaac continued that it had taken him a long time to come out in his new southern home. When he did, he had embraced the complexity of his identity: a half-Black, half-White, man who was bisexual, and religious. It was who he was, and he was proud.

Although he had always been drawn to the military lifestyle, even as a child he knew that because he liked other boys, he would not be able to join because of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." His parents had told him that homosexuality was not allowed at the Academy. He heard horror stories about people being outed and kicked out of the Academy and the Army. It made West Point seem like an evil place to him. With the end of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," he decided to give the military a chance. Still, there were days when he asked himself, "What am I doing here?" But deep down, he loved army life.

Isaac was outed as "that gay guy" before basic training had ended. He had come out to a couple of people and the information spread like wildfire through the battalion.

"Okay, but I am not even gay." He had wanted to tell them. He identified as bisexual but knew that was besides the fact—if other candidates knew he liked guys, they would just assume he was just gay, period. When he tried to tell people he was bisexual, often they told him he was

[85] See, for example, Jones and Hill 1996; Majors and Billson 1993; Pascoe 2007; Ward 2005, 2015; Winder 2015.

just confused.

Some men in his squad would repeatedly call him “faggot.” He found that heterosexual candidates were more likely to help other heterosexual candidates than homosexual ones. This was not necessarily because of homophobia; these candidates were just more comfortable around other heterosexual people. When they did help him, he felt like they were faking it or only because it was an obligation. He noticed that some candidates would ignore him entirely. He did not feel any differential treatment from the teachers or military staff.

Hassan Ahmed, an Asian prior from the South, concurred based on his time in the Army. He had noticed that men were less likely to help gay men out. They were less likely to be their friends or battle buddies. He attributed this to natural responses to discomfort or not understanding the other.

Lennette Aaron, a mixed-race Black and Asian woman from the South who identified as bisexual, nodded along. She shared that everyone would have an opinion about gay candidates because everyone was raised a different way. Some candidates were neutral about it, others thought it was immoral: “Opinions are like assholes—everyone has one.

During the year, I would sometimes hear other candidates complaining about Isaac’s behavior. It was less about that he was gay and had disclosed it to the unit, but that he *showed* it in in his behavior, with flamboyant gestures and mannerisms. He was incredibly strong and athletic, easily maxing his fitness tests, but he had used those gifts for the cheerleading team rather than the more conventionally masculine ventures. It seemed to me that Isaac’s open rejection of conventional masculinity and adoption of conventionally ‘feminine’ behaviors (i.e., low status) made him lose esteem and lowered him in the institutional status hierarchy. Social sanctions for

‘feminine’ behavior in the military seemed to be even higher than in the civilian world, as one squad mate told me bluntly: “The Army is the toughest males. You don’t want to be around guys that are kind of feminine.” Feminine behavior was barely tolerable even when it came to the women soldiers, and even more so when it came to the men. Indeed, except for some religious candidates, the complaints I heard about queer men soldiers were more the deviance from masculine norms. Lesbian candidates were often more accepted than queer men because they were perceived as performing the appropriate military masculinity.

In this vein, Rich’s relationships with the other candidates did not seem to significantly alter once they learned he was gay. He did not talk about his sexuality often or act in ways that violated the performance of hegemonic masculinity. Candidates were often shocked when they found out he was gay because he acted so masculine, so much in line with the ideal soldier. I wondered if Isaac would have acted more like Rich if he would have been more accepted, or if he would have continued to experience more severe sanctions because of the intersection of hyper-masculinity in both the military setting and Black community, as well as the intersection of homophobia and racism both within and outside of the queer community.

20 Overheard in the Barracks

"Transgenders just join to get their operations done for free. They come and just do the minimum amount of time to get surgery"

"Yeah, but people stay here all the time to get their knees fixed and get other operations done. They will even let you get a breast reduction if it is interfering with your job. Let's keep it 100%. And a lot of people are just at West Point to just get an education—what's the difference?"

21 Injuries

When Lily Rose was frantically rushing to leave her room on the tenth day of basic training, she smacked her left ankle on the bottom of her bedroom desk. Her ankle was dislocated. She yelped in pain and quickly popped it back into place. We urged her to go see the medic, but she did not want to report the injury. She did not want to go on "profile" and, most of all, she did not want it to go into her medical record.[86]

The next morning during physical training, Lily was still in a lot of pain from the dislocation, but she was trying to push through and continue to do everything with us. She had a quiet scowl on her face as we did the stretching, push-ups, and pull-ups. She was stubborn once she set her mind to something.

When we got back to our rooms after training, Lily and I sat on the floor and chatted before breakfast. These were the moments I treasured, sitting on the floor near the closet—hidden from view in the protection of the doors which we had to keep open at 90-degrees—when we could just *be*. Little pockets of privacy.

"My dad always really wanted me to come to West Point. He was in the military for a while, but it did not work out, so I think he wants me to sort of finish what he started."

"How did you feel about it?"

"I fought it at first. I was not interested in doing anything having to do with the military. My family was *too* into the military if you know what I mean. I did JROTC [Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps] in high school because he really wanted me to. But then my sister went to the Naval Academy and at her graduation I saw how she was set up for life. At first, it was

[86] Candidates received medical profiles when they were injured that described the physical activities they were permitted and not permitted to do for a specific length of time. Those who had medical profiles were said to be "on profile" or simply called "profiles."

really annoying because I saw how everyone was in awe of her, but then I saw the way she had developed and how she had no college debt and a guaranteed job for five years, and it seemed like a good option. I also met a retired officer at a [community] pool who was really into the military and convinced me I should apply to the Academies. He liked that I was so straightforward—what a joke now, no one here likes that I am straightforward. Anyways, I did not have another school I particularly wanted to go to, and I definitely wanted to get out of North Carolina, so I gave it a shot."

"Yeah."

"I thought I would be so good at it here. When I did the summer military training program at the Air Force Academy, I was literally the best in my squad. I had the highest physical scores, but here, I am the worst. And now this." She gestured to her ankle.

"Why won't you get it looked at? You could go on profile and let it rest."

"My dad explained it to me before: why would West Point take someone with ankle problems versus someone with a perfect health record? Why spend money when you can get someone with perfect health? If I report it, it will be another thing against me. It will make the year stressful. I do not want to go on profile and jeopardize admission."

"Have you dislocated it before?"

"Well, only once. During soccer, I tripped in a ditch. But I made sure it was not put on my medical record. Bad ankles run in my family but my sister's ankles—which are worse than mine—were fine at the Naval Academy so I figured I would be fine here too."

I did not judge Lily for keeping her weak ankles off her medical record. I had heard similar stories from several candidates; one had even faked his way through a color blindness test. When I went in for my medical check for military training, I had prayed that the doctor

would not notice my scoliosis so my record would be clear. I certainly was not going to bring any of my problems to the doctor's attention.

After breakfast, we got our gear together and went to the back of the building to ruck up the ski slope, a one-mile steep hill to the starting point of land navigation. We had learned land navigation skills the day before and now were to set out in the woods as a squad to find longitude and latitude points with only our compasses and a map.

The cadets started out by saying the ruck was not going to be fast and we were going to put the smaller people in front to set the pace. Lily was leading one of the two ranks in the formation up the hill. But around two minutes in, they yelled at her to get out of the way. This seemed counterintuitive to me—emphasizing teamwork and how we will not leave anyone behind, but then pulling someone aside for being too slow within the first few minutes when she did not even want to fall out. Through the exertion on Lily's face, I could tell that she was trying her hardest. But she struggled at rucking normally, and this time, her ankle was swollen. The rest of the company continued to ruck up the hill, while she rode behind us in the fallout vehicle.

Lily joined us back at the top of the slope and sat down with the squad as we plotted the points for land navigation. She whispered to me, "This will be great. I used to be a team captain for the orienteering group at my school—finally something I will be good at."

Nathan Cohen, a White prior in our squad, led the way toward the first point, as he was familiar with land navigation. Our cadet squad leader had wanted Lily to lead but she was always in the back. We kept pushing her to the front. She got frustrated because she thought Rich Rivers, who was trying to explain to her how to use the compass and protractor, was implying that she was stupid. She understood this material and had done land navigation in the past—why did people always assume she did not know what she was doing?

"They drilled it into our heads, only a stupid person would not get it," she told me as we walked through the trees.

I sighed, thinking that, unfortunately, because Lily held so many markers of low-status in the institution—her gender and slim body, her messy bun, her "poopy" military bearing, and difficulty with rucking—she would be perceived as having low competency across military spheres. She would have little influence in group-orientated tasks, like our current land navigation quest, despite her actual skills in this task. I could see the how her low position in the basic training status hierarchy was incompatible with the way she had seen herself and been perceived in the civilian world, where she was top of her class in high school and on the track and orienteering teams. She was now experiencing disbelief, confusion, and frustration as her self-perception did not align with how the group perceived and evaluated her.

We found two of the points, accidentally walked down a cliff through the leaves, rocks, and logs, and then came back together for lunch. I was grateful we had made it back because I was certain at some points, I was going to fall down the steep inclines and get my own injury or get bitten by the snakes they had mentioned.

On our second iteration, Lily and Nathan got into an argument and he called her pathetic. He was sick of her having a bad attitude and she did not seem like she was even trying to keep up with the group. He did not know about her ankle. Later, when he found out about the dislocation, he felt bad about snapping at her. He just got so angry when he saw people who were struggling physically and did not even seem like they were trying to get better. What the hell were they doing here? Go back to the civilian world. Although I was now familiar with the signals of exertion on Lily's face, I knew that others still saw her expressions as angry or apathetic.

Lily was furious but bit her tongue until we got back to our room. "Why does everyone hate me? Even the cadre hates me. You know what I found out today? One cadre member told his company he hates three things: un-cupped, un-squared corners, and cadet candidate Lily."[87] We hypothesized reasons why they might dislike her for the rest of the evening when I helped her dress her blisters. They were bubbling up all over her feet, and some were raw and starting to bleed. When she had mentioned her blisters to the medic, he did not seem so concerned, laughing at how the candidates were concerned about the smallest things and needed to learn to suck it up. After he saw that I was helping her with her feet, I overheard him telling another medic that I was coddling Lily.[88] I felt humiliated—was I really messing up the military socialization process by helping her? Her feet were in such bad shape, and weren't they always telling us to help our battle buddies?

The next morning, we had buddy-team land navigation. Ironically (or perhaps intentionally to make them work together), Lily and Nathan were paired. They worked decently well together, as long as they concentrated on the task. Lily's issued boots were too big, and she kept slipping over stones and roots. Right when they were making the final decent before returning to the group, Lily stepped on another rock the wrong way and fell. She fell directly onto her left ankle, and it popped out again. She shoved it back in again and carried on even though her ankle was shaking. Lily came directly over to Kelly Carter and me when they got back to the group to tell us what happened. She was becoming increasingly concerned. Two dislocations in 48 hours were not good. We urged her to please tell the medic and go to the

[87] We knew that if this had been reported to the tactical team, the cadet would have been reprimanded for hazing and targeting Lily. As will be discussed below, Lily was worried about reporting cadets because she knew they would eventually be students together at West Point.

[88] As noted in chapter on rucking, medics came from other units came to help at cadet candidate basic training. Clashes emerged between the tactical team who was familiar with the West Point developmental model and these outside soldiers who preferred a more coercive approach.

doctor, but she refused.

Lily felt wobbling in her ankle over the next few days but stayed quiet. Three days later, it was shaking nonstop. She was scared and worried it would come right back out when she did the physical training for the day, so she asked the medic to tape it up. We were halfway through all the training exercises when her foot went completely numb. He had tied it too tight. She went up to another medic and asked if he could please look at her ankle. It had ballooned.

"You need to go to the hospital right now."

She resisted.

"Look, your ankle is going to keep dislocating if you don't let it rest. I have problems with dislocation too, and I know from experience."

She acquiesced. She could not go through another dislocation.

They loaded her into the van and brought her to the Army hospital. The doctor did an initial review and put her on profile. Still, Lily did not want anyone to know she was on profile. She continued to drill with us, but when one cadet sergeant noticed that she kept moving to take some weight off the ankle, he let her sit down.

A cadet called the group back together, and she walked back over because she knew not to run with her ankle.

"Cadet Candidate Rose, HURRY UP!"

What the hell? Why am I being pinpointed out of everyone when I am on profile? She did not want to draw more attention to herself, so she started to run over. When she arrived, the cadet looked at her, and then her ankle, and said, "Oh shit, wow look, your ankle really is swollen?

When did I get to this point when everyone thinks I am a slacker? Like I am making this all up. They think I am lying, bullshitting all of the time?

The doctors initially thought Lily would not need to have surgery, but after her MRI they had a different opinion. She called Kelly and me over after the basic writing exam during reorganization week—the week of transition between basic training and the academic year:

"Did you hear the news?"

"No. What happened?"

"Well, they got my results back. I have torn ligaments. They said I could either have surgery or not go to West Point. Apparently, if I don't get surgery my ankle would be totally fine for the civilian world. But if I want to stay in the Army, I need to get it fixed. All the pressure on it from rucking and other activities, it would just get worse and worse." She started crying. "After the surgery, it will take six months to heal." She breathed heavily. "I have such bad luck. This is exactly what I was praying would not happen." Lily, who did not think of herself as a particularly religious person and had not been to church for years, had started praying to God that if God just let her get through this okay, she would start going to church again.

Kelly and I tried to console her: "it's free surgery, physical therapy, and you will have plenty of time to heal!"

More tears. "I can't be positive about this. And you know what? Apparently, at sick call someone said that I was negative. But everything keeps going wrong. How am I supposed to be positive?"

Lily's ankle surgery took place two weeks later. Before the surgery, when she was waiting in her hospital gown, the doctor noticed her feet.

"Can I look at your feet for a second?"

"Sure."

A thick layer of skin was still peeling off the entire bottom of her feet from basic training and the soles and toes were dotted with markings from all the blisters. “This is not okay. Would you like to file a hazing report? You were not properly taken care of.” The cadet cadre and medics had been instructed to check our feet regularly to ensure this did not occur.

“No. Thank you.” Lily knew if she reported anything the cadets would get in trouble, and then everyone would hate her when she matriculated into the Academy. When Lily told us this story later, Athena Little said, “Ugh. I so wish I was in your body so I could march down there and report them.” I felt vindicated. I had been right to help her with her feet after all.

Lily’s mother came into town for a few days to take care of her after the surgery. When I met her mother, she told me how worried she was about Lily. West Point was recruiting students based on language that emphasized that soldiers had all sorts of strengths, intelligence and others; yet, in basic training, the leaders were acting like the only thing that mattered was our physical strength and that we should all be prepared to go to infantry. That was false marketing. Lily was small and her body would not be able to take the wear and tear of infantry life. If they did not want soldiers like her here, then they should have told her earlier because she had many other scholarship opportunities.

After her mom left, Lily had to rely on the goodwill of other candidates to help her do basic tasks around her room and in the cafeteria. Her mother was concerned: how is she supposed to shower? Who is going to help her carry her tray in the cafeteria? Lisbeth Sokolov helped Lily for the first week or so, carrying her tray, tidying up her room, helping her with hygiene, and even cutting off her old blister skin. One of the first days after the surgery, when Lisbeth was helping Lily walk down the hall, the newly appointed candidate sergeant and said, “Fix your hair” and walked away. Lisbeth was upset. She had thought that the candidate sergeant

was coming up to help her with Lily, but no, instead she was "basic training" mode.

The constant togetherness of Lily and Lisbeth created tension, they had a blowout fight, and soon Lily was on her own to manage. Lily did her best to manage on her own because she felt like she was a burden when she asked for help. She was cautious about how her squad mates would perceive her. Nevertheless, on her squad feedback form, one squad mate rated her performance as poor and, in response to the question on how she could improve, told her to "fix your ankle." Lily stormed over to tell me: "What the fuck? I have bad ankles. I fixed them the best I could. That was so ignorant. Yeah, I can fix other things about myself. I can fix my running time, but not something I am born with."

Throughout the year, Lily was often called "broken," which was how candidates referred to almost anyone who was on profile. If a soldier was not 100% useful to the military, they were broken and needed to be fixed. There was even what was colloquially called a "dead man's profile"—a soldier who could not do physical activity was considered the equivalent of a dead man. In a profession where the ability to physically contribute to the team was deemed essential, injuries were seen as a sign of inherent weakness. A breakable body was not a military body. Officers and sergeants from the infantry bragged to me that infantrymen never went on profile, even with severe injuries because it was not part of the culture to show weakness. They told me with pride that they had never been on profile for their entire careers. Sergeant First Class Lee chose to ignore fractured bones and torn ligaments and muscles rather than having to sit on the sidelines while his unit was training.

These ideologies transferred to many of the candidates who began to see those on profile—who were not visibly recovering from surgery—as lacking the discipline to push through their pain and suck it up. When a candidate was on profile for a prolonged period or

repeatedly went on profile, whispers would spread around the preparatory school about them. They were seen as intentionally trying to get out of training by making up excuses. Black women, in particular, expressed feeling that other candidates and the authorities who were monitoring their pain did not believe them, in line with research on how Black individuals' pain is often discounted or ignored by healthcare professionals (Hoffman et al. 2016).

Profiles were even seen as being contagious—if candidates saw that another could get out of training by saying he or she had an injury, then they would also say they were injured. Profiles were often separated from the group and hidden during physical training so that others would not see them lounging around and get the idea that they too might be able to get out of the hard work. Yet, those, like Lily, who adopted the Army mentality around pain and ignored the sharp sensations in her ankles for fear of going on profile and losing status, ended up with severe injuries and required surgery. Claire Row also ignored the increasingly acute pain in her hips for months and eventually required reconstructive surgery in both joints.

Lily waited anxiously to be medical cleared for the Academy. It took almost until the very end of the year for the official news to come. She had to repass all the fitness tests and prove to the trainers and doctors that her ankles were no longer an impediment. She was no longer broken and would not be a liability for the Army. She received her admissions letter.

At the end of the year, I ran into one of our cadet cadre from basic training and he asked how we were all doing. I told him that Lily was finally medical cleared after her surgery. He looked at me strangely: "Oh, so she really was injured? We all thought she was faking it."

22 Swimming

In our last week of basic training, we took a bus down to the West Point pool for our swim test. Swimming proficiency was a graduation requirement at the Academy, and so the preparatory school staff wanted to gauge our levels right away. I learned that many prepsters who had matriculated into West Point failed these swim tests at the Academy and were separated as a result—it also happened to be that the ones who were failing were majority Black.

I was nervous about the test because we had four minutes to swim 150 meters. The cadets kept assuring us that it was plenty of time, but I felt like it would be tough—just another way that my physical limits were being tested during basic training. In the pool area, everyone stripped off their physical training uniforms. Suddenly we were surrounded by our half-naked classmates. A White prior-service candidate had a huge cross tattooed on his shoulder, and two Black candidates were wearing big silver crosses hanging on their chests. Who knew what hidden symbols of piety were lurking under the uniform? I thought back to Reception Day when a cadet had yelled at a candidate to take off his cross necklace because the institutions would be giving them new necklaces—dog tags and lanyards to track our progress through the day. Still occasionally crosses hung out visibly on top of a uniform (intentionally or unintentionally) so I knew that many candidates were wearing them alongside their dog tags. Army and religious identity intertwined together, and simultaneously vying for ultimate influence.

I stood with Chelsea Melton and Grace Ives, who kept whispering about the men's bodies. "Look at his shoulder muscles," Chelsea whispered, and then remarked, looking around dramatically, "Who said that?" laughing. I did not hear any of the men making similar comments about the women, but this was probably just because I was huddled with the women, or the men had been warned that this would be considered sexual harassment. We all stood there together,

women in identical black one-piece bathing suits and men in their matching trunks, looking like multi-ethnic twins.

As we stood in line, we could see our peers swimming. Some candidates were swimming like experts, some like capable swimmers, and others were struggling. The pool was 20 meters long, so it would take three laps (six lengths) to complete the test. Those who failed to complete the swim test in under four minutes would be put in the remedial swimming class. Candidates who knew they could not swim did not have to try. They could step off to one side and would automatically be placed in the remedial class. Carlos Estrada decided it was worth a shot to see if he could doggie-paddle the distance, but he ended up going under and a tactical officer, who was also a life guard, jumped in to get him out of the water. As the "non-swimmers" sat on the bleachers watching the rest of us, I noticed that they were overwhelmingly Black, with a few Asian, Hispanic/Latin-American, and White candidates. They were also majority recruited athletes, mostly football players.

Grace swam like an expert, flipping underwater each time she turned around. She finished at 1:50. When it was my turn, I gave them my name and jumped in. I started with freestyle and went down and back. By that time, my body was exhausted. I "gassed myself"—a new phrase I had picked up during basic training. I breast stroked the rest of the way, with a freestyle sprint at the very end. I finished with a minute to spare and was very relieved. It had not been so bad after all.

Kelly Carter excelled at the swim test. She was a lifeguard in high school and was an expert swimmer. She was on an emotional high. "This was the one thing I did good during basic training!" she told me with a smile. She had finally passed her first physical event. She smiled humbly afterward when people asked if she passed but did not spread around her impressive

score.

I went back to change in the locker room with Barbara Fenton. She was irritated that she had failed the swim test because her leg cramped up. She was a lifeguard in high school but now had to do remedial swim. She started telling me how she did not want to serve a country that has treated her people, African Americans, so poorly. She remarked how even at the preparatory school, people never brought food to her room when she was "on quarters" sick but that they would do this for the White candidates. She explained, "I would prefer to go to Air Force. I don't want to have to apply myself for this country." She wanted a free education but did not want to overexert herself.

In the middle of our conversation, the cadre started yelling at us, "HURRY UP. THE BUS IS LEAVING."

When we went back outside for formation in front of the pool, Lily was grinning. She told me that she finished the laps in a little over two minutes—a time that was better than most of the men! She was not the weakest anymore and wanted to tell all of them how well she did. I saw her eagerness to spread around her score as a way to (re)gain some of the status she had lost over the course of basic training, a way to make her place in the hierarchy more in line with how she saw herself and how she was assessed in high school.

The buses were, in fact, not leaving. We ended up waiting for over an hour. The chaplain used this time to tell us the word of the day: "Hope." He explained, "Leaders are dispensers of hope. As future leaders, you are the dealers of hope. You need to have hope to give out." Since we had so much time, he asked the candidates if they had any questions for him.

"Do you think an atheist would be a successful chaplain?"

"It might be difficult because chaplains require endorsement from religious entities, but it

is possible because a chaplain not only represents those who are religious, but also those who are not religious. They provide the right to practice and the right not to practice."

In response to other questions about dealing with people with other values and religions, he responded: "The Army makes you uncomfortable a lot, so you have to rely on God. Yes, we are all called to the Army, but have deeper values as well."

I saw Renee Edmonds nodding. She was reading a book on God and how to use Him to better respond to different issues and emotional states, which was helping her immensely during basic training.

The chaplain encouraged the candidates to explore their religions and learn about other traditions while at West Point:

> Now is the time to explore what you believe and what others believe. All services are open. You are here to grow in body and mind and reflect about what faith is or is not for you. Faith and spirituality are either major parts of your life or will be for the soldiers that live around you. As leaders in the Army, you will want to understand the people you lead. It will help you lead better.

Finally, the buses arrived, and we were able to go back and shower and change back into our non-aquatic uniforms.

The "non-swimmers" gathered a few weeks later down at the Academy pool for remedial lessons. The group was almost all non-White except for one White man who grew up on a farm. There were two Asian candidates— Lisbeth Sokolov and one man from another company. About 25% of the class was women, almost matching the demographics of the preparatory school. I wondered about the role of regional differences (suburban, city, and rural), financial inequalities, and cultural differences that contributed to swimming ability. I reflected on what I knew about pools as historical sites of racial discrimination and tension.

Although North American cities began building public pools in neighborhoods in the late 19th and early 20th century across communities, neighborhoods that were predominantly Black were markedly excluded from these efforts. Then the pool-building spree in the 1920s and 1930s corresponded with the introduction of racial segregation at pools throughout the United States (Wiltse 2009). Even in locations where there was no official segregation, White community members often enforced unofficial segregation through violence—riots and physically beating Black swimmers who used the facilities to discourage attendance. When pools were fully desegregated in the 1940s and 50s, White Americans moved away from municipal pools to private pools, either in their homes or private club settings where they could continue to exclude Black swimmers.[89] By the end of the 20th century, the government had deprioritized public pools and they were closed down across the country, leading to conditions wherein Americans who could not afford private pools had even less access to swimming.[90]

The historical lack of access to pools due to racial discrimination combined with the more contemporary lack of access to pools for those living in less-resourced neighborhoods has led to stark disparities in swimming ability among American children. A 2017 study from the USA Swimming Foundation on children aged four to eighteen found that 64% of surveyed Black/African-American children reported no or little swimming ability, compared to 45% and 40% percent for their Hispanic/Latin-American and White counterparts respectively (USA Swimming Foundation 2017). Black/African-American children and their parents were also three times more fearful of drowning than White children and their parents; a figure that is compatible with the 2014 Center for Disease Control's finding that Black children (aged five to 19) are 5.5

[89] Scholars have connected White American's fear of sharing a pool with Black swimmers to fears of contamination through sharing water (beliefs that Black individuals were "dirtier" or diseased) and fears that in the physically and visibly intimate setting Black men might take advantage of White women (Wiltse 2009).
[90] See Wiltse 2009 for a detailed history.

times more likely to drown in swimming pools than white children (Gilchrist and Parker 2014). Moreover, the USA Swimming study found that 79% of children in families with household income less than $50,000 also reported no to little swimming ability.

When I asked the candidates about prior swimming experience, I found that many candidates in the class had no access to pools growing up or did not receive swimming lessons. One candidate told me he had taken lessons as a child, but his family stopped when they could no longer afford it. Lisbeth and Alexa McArthur, a first-generation Black immigrant whose family settled in the South, were in the class because they had both had near-drowning experiences as children and had feared the water ever since.

A few weeks into the course, Carlos and I sat together on the bus ride down to the pool. He told me:

> I'm doing really good in swimming, like for a Black person. The stereotype is that all Black people can't swim, which is only true because we are not exposed to it or we don't have the resources. But I'm like, shit, I fucking I flew airplanes six times in JROTC [Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps] in high school, so what if I cannot swim?

He was frustrated that Black cadets were not graduating from West Point because swimming was a graduation requirement when they had accomplished so many other amazing feats in their lives. Why was it so important that members of the land force could swim? Some military and civilian staff also questioned why swimming had to be a requirement at West Point when it largely negatively affected Black cadets, causing numerous separations each year.

Whereas few people had qualms with separating from the Army those who repeatedly failed fitness tests, dropped out of rucks, or were medically disqualified, many thought it was unfair that those who struggled with swimming would be forced to leave West Point. Swimming ability was not one of the skills that soldiers directly connected with combat ability because the Army was the ground force. There was not the same direct relationship between swimming

ability and competence to contribute to the mission. As such, those who were poor swimmers did not lose status in the institution, and those who were strong swimmers did not gain status—which was unfortunate for those like Lily and Kelly from whom swimming was one of the few physical realms in which they excelled.

Each lesson when we arrived at the pool, the class was split into two groups: those who were not comfortable entering the water, and those who could move in the water but were not able to complete the swimming test in four minutes. It seemed the women in the group were a bit more comfortable in the water and the majority went into second-level group. Lisbeth and Alexa stayed with the first-level group.

The first class covered safety getting in and out of the water, putting our faces under the water, and "bobbing"—jumping off the bottom of the pool and back up without holding on. The first remedial swim test was five bobs. Afterward, some candidates told me they already felt more comfortable in the pool. Once the candidates were competent in bobbing, we began to review treading water and finally various types of strokes.

The teacher tried to help the candidates relax in the water and make more efficient movements and breathe. I found that when non-swimmers tried to swim, it looked like they were attacking the water. Their bodies tensed up with terror. They pushed hard against the water, forcing it away, creating large splashes. The candidates were extremely strong and athletic, so the force they exerted was intense, but water did not respond well to these attacks. The inability to "muscle through" swimming as one could muscle through rucking, fitness test or other physical activities frustrated those who had already adopted military ideologies. One sergeant exasperatedly said one afternoon as he tried to coordinate between swim classes, sports practice,

and military science classes, “Why can’t they just learn to swim already, dammit!” I interpreted the message as: "shouldn’t they be able to fix this deficiency with the right mental toughness?” Mental toughness was the answer to almost everything at the preparatory school, but it was little use against the water.

Over the quarter, there were monumental improvements. Those who started out as stronger non-swimmers were now swimming laps relatively easily. They were now focused on endurance and breathing. Those who started out worried to go into the water were now mostly comfortable treading water. Lisbeth was starting to have fun in the water. She told me laughing, “it’s ironic because I’m probably one of the best swimmers in the remedial swim class. What a title! Best swimmer in the handicap swim class.” This was a huge accomplishment for her because before she was terrified of the water but now, she enjoyed swimming.

Alexa was still struggling halfway through the quarter. When we arrived at the pool, she took her spot at the front of the pool, the closest to the instructor and lifeguards. She wrapped a blue buoy around her waist and lowered herself into the water. I came in next to her. When the teacher asked us to practice bobbing and treading water, she stayed on the wall. She would mimic bobbing but just barely put her head under the water.

When we had to practice backstroke off the wall, she made it a few seconds and then grabbed onto the lifeguard’s neck to support her. I came over to swim near Alexa, and she told me about trying to float and how she would just sink. I looked at her legs, and it looked like she was fighting the water, and I told her that. We practiced for a few moments on the wall moving slowly in water. I said it was like dancing, and she told me that she was a dancer, so I told her to dance. She started moving more gracefully and more slowly in the water. She stopped resisting it. In the next class, we reviewed thinking about swimming as a mindfulness exercise and

dancing in the water. She had forgotten to put on the blue buoy at the beginning of class, and I got her to work without it for the first half. She would gain enough confidence to take her hand off the wall for a few seconds.

Although I could not attend the next class, she bragged to me ecstatically the next time she saw me, “I got off the wall and was swimming! Facedown in the water with fins and a board!” She said she could not wait to go back into the water and practice more. Alexa had faced one of her biggest fears and let go. I thought to myself that was what the preparatory school did—it pushed soldiers past their comfort zones. For some people it would be swimming, others rucking, schoolwork, or lack of sleep. They would find a soldier’s weakness and make them overcome it. Though the ideologies of muscling through and mental toughness were useless in the pool, the learned grit to keep preserving despite fear, discomfort, and repeated failure were essential.

By the final class of remedial swim, many candidates were now able to complete the six laps in under four minutes. They looked smooth swimming back and forth. Some candidates continued to use their muscles to “muscle through the water.” They kicked hard, but this also made them tired really fast. They came out exhausted and cramping. Raphael Lewis, a Black man from the South, muscled through and lay curled up on the ground after finishing his test. Other candidates gathered around him and were worried, but he said he was okay, just tired. Raphael committed himself to continuing to improve him swimming and taking lessons before starting at West Point. Some did not finish six laps but were able to do at least a lap and a half with backstroke or front crawl. This was a huge accomplishment because many had been afraid to even enter the water just a few months earlier.

23 Religious Bodies

The obstacle course commenced our first military exercise during basic training. Our squad was excited to go out into nature and have time outside of the building. It also happened to be the Jewish fast day of Tisha B'Av, which commemorated the destruction of the first and second temples, so I was fasting. I had mentioned to my squad leader and sergeant that I would be fasting, and they said that the training was mandatory so I should eat and drink if I needed to. If fasting was too difficult or did not allow me to accomplish the training goals (our mission), I should not fast. Still, I was determined to meet the demands of both my military and religious authorities.

During the lunch break, I sat with Nathan Cohen and Hassan Ahmed, two prior service candidates in my company, as they ate their 'Meal, Ready-to-Eats' (MREs). Nathan explained that he used to fast for Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur, but if training fell around those days, he would just eat because he could not train when he was hungry or thirsty. Hassan, picking at his pasta with meat sauce, shared that he had tried to keep Ramadan during his first basic training, but his chain of command did not make accommodations for separate rations:

> I really pushed for it. I spoke with the Muslim chaplain, and not even he was able to get me separate rations. I feel like there was laziness on the paperwork on their behalf because there were people in the clinic who were missing meals because they had to be at the clinic at a certain time and they were getting separate rations, but I wasn't able to for my religious reasons. That might have been due to the poor leadership that I had over there, but the Army kind of forced me to let go of that piece. I feel like not getting to do Ramadan and all those traditions started to make me care less and less.

They offered to give Hassan Halal MREs for his meals, but he did not think the high calorie packed, long-term stored, sometimes nauseating meals were healthy to eat every day for the entire Ramadan period. He had also asked to receive food without pork when he first joined the Army because he kept seeing bacon in all the food options, including vegetables. He brought it

up with his chain of command, but he was not given alternative accommodations to buy his own food. He sighed and told us that eventually he just "sucked it up" and just ate whatever food the Army gave him.

He laughed a bit sarcastically, he was now "doing all the don'ts that they say in Islam." When he enlisted in the military, he was very religious, adhering to all the East Asian Muslim practices that were integral to his family life. Now, three years later, he ate bacon, drank alcohol, and got tattoos. He had recently received a full sleeve of tattoos on his arms. When he went home on vacations, he only wore long sleeves to cover the tattoos that spanned his arms, hoping his parents would not notice that he had culturally and religiously let go of their culture. By the time he got to the preparatory school, he no longer felt comfortable receiving religious accommodations. When they offered him Halal MREs for his time in the field, he said no because he had been eating pork and not fasting during Ramadan for so long; it was too little too late.

The military's attempt to achieve ultimate authority over candidates' bodies in many ways was reminiscent of how individuals speak about God— an authority that is often perceived as having absolute surveillance over individuals and demands specific ways of conducting life. Before starting basic training, I had wondered what would happen to religious candidates who had two authorities vying for control over their bodily practices.

I soon discovered that religious and institutional dispositions often lined up for candidates, especially regarding submission. Soldiers physically embodied submission through positions of attention, parade rest, and saluting, just as religious practitioners embodied submission through prostration, kneeling, bowing, or other movements during prayer. There

were sacred texts in both the military and religion that were to be repeated with veneration regularly, and strict rules for vocal modulation between silence, whispering, and full, spirited praise depending on the space and time. *HOOAH* was a sort of amen. Not taking more than three steps outside without a patrol cap reminded me of religious regulations around headgear, such as the *yarmulke,* which Jewish custom says that Jewish men should not take three steps with their heads uncovered. Religion had its own place within the institution, with designated times for worship on Sundays and the availability of chaplains. Indeed, historically all soldiers had to attend services on Sundays before this practice was disbanded because soldiers should have a right to *not* practice religion.

On our way back from the obstacle course, the cadre told us when we returned to the barracks, we could either go to religious services or relax. It was Sunday so there would be a Catholic mass in the basketball gym and a Protestant service in the auditorium. A Greek Orthodox priest was also available to meet with Greek Orthodox candidates. A few of us decided to go to Catholic services. Two were Catholic and the rest of us just wanted to see what the service was like and escape the cadets for a while. I sat next to Chelsea Melton, who identified as a deeply religious Catholic.

The Catholic mass felt like other Catholic masses Chelsea had attended growing up in her semi-rural, mostly White neighborhood in Alabama.[91] We read the set of the readings for the church and the priest gave his homily. The priest was a colonel and he spoke about his experiences in the military and showed us some artifacts from the field. His robes were made from an old combat uniform from Afghanistan. He showed us the field kit he made to lead mass on deployments, which held the essential components of the services. Chelsea was able to relax

[91] I visited Chelsea's church during our home visit.

during the service and it gave her a chance to think about things other than the urgency of basic training.

She noticed a teacher and her family in the audience. She saw the baby and started to think about her niece and nephews back home in Alabama. Her family was extremely close, and she had spent significant time in high school with her nieces and nephews: *I'm gonna miss out on so much.* She realized that if she took this route in life, she would not be close to them geographically and would miss many life events. Yet, she loved everything about basic training: getting "smoked," the discipline, the yelling, the camaraderie. This had been her goal for so long as she had seen her older sister excel at a military college. She did not wish she was home, but she just wished that her family could be here.

The service was very different from the Catholic mass at Athena Little's home church. Athena's home church was in a small chapel with stained-glass windows outside of Dallas, Texas. The congregants were mostly Black and would wear whatever they felt like to the service, some in jeans and sneakers, others dressed in dresses and suits. Athena loved going to Sunday mass at home, wearing a flower dress, and sitting beside her sisters and parents. Her father was not Catholic but was happy to let his wife lead the religious upbringing of the children and attended the services alongside them. The church always had a comfortable atmosphere and the service started with people shaking hands, hugging, and greeting each other with the saying, "may peace be upon you."[92] There was a choir in the front next to the priest who lead the rest of the participants in passionate clapping and singing the verses of praise. Athena had known most of the families and they had been so thrilled for her when they found out she was attending West

[92] I visited Athena's church and attended services during our home visit.

Point. In comparison, this mass in the gym felt foreign and almost sterile: *is this White Catholicism?*

The protestant service taking place down the hall was full of energy and singing. The pastor started the service with a slide show game called: "Yeezus or Jesus" and the candidates had to guess if the quotes were by Jesus or Kanye West, who had an album called Yeezus. Then the chaplain started music from the speakers and projected the lyrics onto the wall so everyone could sing along. The candidates sang, swayed, and many raised their hands in prayer.

Grace Ives felt at home. Her family church also took place in a large space and was full of music and ecstatic praise. There was a full band at the church and a choir that led the congregants as they sang along with the large lyrics projected on a giant screen.[93] Her family was extremely active in the church, attending all the events, and contributing to the community whenever possible.

During his sermon, the Protestant chaplain explained, "Faith and family are my priorities. When you are in the Army, don't forget about those." *Yes,* Grace nodded, *family and faith are my anchors.*

Kelly Carter had decided not to go to services, choosing instead to have a relaxing shower. She was Methodist and typically went to church at home, but she was exhausted a needed a break. In the middle of her shower, she heard pounding on her door to come out. She jumped out of the shower and rushed to get dressed, annoyed: *I thought they said we had some free time.* When she burst into the hall, they lead her out to behind the building, where there were tables set up with overflowing treats. The academic faculty had baked cupcakes, cookies, and other delicious treats for the candidates. The candidates who went to religious services came out

[93] I visited Grace's church and attended services during our home visit.

at the same time, and we all sat together eating snacks, chatting freely, and meeting candidates from other companies for the first time. I saved my snacks in a napkin to use to break my Tisha B'Av fast at sundown.

Hassan stayed in his room. He found it awkward that all the services were geared towards Christians: *Cool, I'm Muslim.* He was not going to go to these events just to get food, as some other non-religious candidates did. He was not surprised because in his prior military experience almost all opportunities for religious practice were for Christians. It made sense to him—most of the military population was Christian so it would be geared for them.

The next week Nathan said we should remind our squad leader about Jewish services for Friday night. Our squad leader arranged for us to have a ride down—there was no conflicting mission that evening. The Jewish chapel was buzzing with activity. We met the Jewish chaplain, who promptly told us to "Relax:" there was no need to stand in the position of attention, we should feel at home. We went to the services, which were a wonderful mix of Hebrew and English. I learned that the Army prayer book had been compiled by rabbis from all the major denominations. It was likely the only prayer book from which all Jews, regardless of denomination, prayed together. After services, there was a delicious meal of sushi and smoked meats, and we were able to speak a bit with the cadets who were doing their summer training down at West Point. It felt like an escape from basic training and that I was back in my real life with my religious community. I savored every minute of the normalcy. On our trip back up to the barracks, Nathan told me that he did not usually go to Jewish services during the year, but he always went when he could during basic training. He laughed that everyone went to religious services during his first basic training—even those with no religion—because they could fall asleep in the back rows without fear of the drill sergeants and get some good food.

In the academic year, there were several prayer breakfasts that were filled with words of inspiration and praise for soldiers on their holy missions. Often the prayers ended in "we ask this in His name" and sometimes "Jesus" would slip out—though overall the chaplaincy corps was trying use more ecumenical prayers. During lent there was always fish available on Fridays. These accommodations, events, and Christian clubs made many of the candidates feel that religion and the military were perfectly compatible—weren't the religious values of honesty, respect, and self-sacrifice the same as the Army values? Yet, conflicts over action did occur, particularly for candidates who were not Protestant.

During the first week of basic training, we learned about soldiers' rights to religious accommodations. A military chaplain came to brief us on the topic:

> You made a commitment to defend the United States Constitution with your life. But a lot of soldiers don't know what the constitution says. The First Amendment is that the United States cannot pass an official religion or prohibit religious practice. The founders of this country did not want our country to just have one religion. People can worship the way they want. In the U.S. Army, we will not push an agenda or a religion. We have a variety of faith groups. There is one thing that trumps that right to religious freedom: the mission always comes first. Some soldiers have deeply held religious values (X), but the Army wants you to do (Z). When it comes to the mission versus religious rights, there comes a time when religious rights have to be relinquished to the mission. If the mission is to complete land navigation and you're dorking it up so it goes long, finishing land navigation comes before attending religious services.

He then clarified that religious accommodations are possible. There are MRES to help with dietary restrictions. Two Sikh cadets at the Academy were now allowed to wear turbans and have beards. Commanders oversee religious accommodations and "their responsibility is to keep you safe. If a head covering is a hindrance, they will ask you to remove it. You have to understand in the military you are going to have to have thick skin—it's not personal."

I learned that the question of what was "mission-dependent" was open to wide interpretation. One week during basic training, my cadet first sergeant told me I could not go to Jewish services because there was an important brief I had to attend—attending the brief was the mission. My strong emotions surprised me. I was furious and heartbroken at the same time. I had been so looking forward to that oasis of normalcy and spirituality in what felt like a maelstrom of never-ending shouting and corrections, where I could never just *be.* It was the most upset I had been all basic training. *How dare they tell me that I cannot go?*

If I had wanted to make it a larger issue, I knew I could have advocated that the accommodation be brought up to the legal commanders—our tactical officers—who may have afforded me the right to go. When I spoke later with the chaplain about this occurrence, he told me that it was illegal for soldiers in a basic training setting to be refused religious services for more than two weeks. Hassan remembered that in his basic training they told him he *could* go to religious services, but he would have to arrange his transportation to the location that was over two hours away—how a new enlisted soldier was supposed to organize this on his own was beyond him. Nathan's pass was rejected for the Jewish high holiday weekend but when he told the tactical team the reason he was requesting pass and that it was for religious observance, it was approved.

My experience with dietary accommodation paralleled and diverged from Hassan's in various ways. On Reception Day, a cadet recorded any dietary restrictions we had and asked our religions. When I mentioned being Jewish and only eating vegetarian, they arranged for me Kosher MREs without me having to ask. A Muslim soldier was given Halal MREs. Yet, in the dining facilities during basic training, each plate had meat placed next to the vegetables. When I tried to signal that I would like a plate without meat, a cadet told me to be quiet and keep going.

Eventually, I gave up and just gave my hungry squad mates the meat—which made me quite popular—and ate a lot of peanut butter sandwiches. Lily Rose quickly gave up trying to be a vegetarian.

Nadav Butler, who held his veganism as a religious principle, was very hungry for the first days until he was able to get through to his squad leader and cadet chain of command that this was a religious need. The leadership talked to the dining staff who gave him peanut butter and jelly sandwiches at first and then started making him vegan meals. In the field, he was given vegetarian MRES. He would pick and choose from the limited options that did not have dairy or egg products, again mostly relying on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to supplement his diet. At one point he was eating six peanut butter sandwiches a day. When we later reflected together on our experiences, he told me felt that the chain of command had done their best to accommodate him even though they were not familiar with his practice.

After basic training, I communicated to the dining staff that I ate vegetarian, and they no longer gave me meat and started to tell me when the items that looked to just be vegetables (such as rice, or green beans, or swiss chard) contained meat stock or pork products. I was shocked how many seemly vegetarian options were meat-based and I proceeded with caution. They went over and beyond to make me feel comfortable and ensure that my needs were met. I was able to benefit from the vegan meals made for Nadav and the dining staff introduced veggie burgers as a meat-free alternative for the grill. I was thrilled during lent when all the options were meat-free on Fridays to accommodate the Christian candidates who were observing the period. If only Christians always were meat-free!

I often spoke to Sergeant First Class Lee about Judaism and religion because he was fascinated and wanted to learn more. He tried to learn about his soldiers' religions and liked to

greet them on special holidays. He often greeted me with a "Shabbat Shalom" on Fridays or even "Happy Purim" or "Happy New Year" on other holidays. Sergeant First Class Lee did his best to accommodate all his soldiers when they had holidays, advocating for them to take off time according to their holiday schedules. He was fine with his Muslim soldiers stopping to pray and would do his best to keep other people from disturbing the soldiers, telling his unit to be quiet.

Over his time in the Army, Sergeant First Class Lee had seen a variety of accommodations and conflicts between religion and army mandates. He had a vivid memory of when a chaplain instructed soldiers to point their rifles to the sky to have God bless them before going into combat. A Wiccan soldier just stood there with his weapon pointing down, refusing to raise it up. Sergeant First Class Lee found that the extent to which the chain of command would accommodate religious needs depended heavily on commanders. He had one commander who was very religious and would stop and pray before every operation. Yet, the same commander would not allow a Wiccan soldier to go into the woods on a holy day for a few minutes to pray. He noticed that some commanders felt it was against their own religions to let someone else practice theirs—which he thought was very wrong and not in the spirit of the Army.

Over the year, I felt the institutional authorities worked to support candidates' religious beliefs (or lack thereof) by providing alternatives and accommodations when possible. However, it was clear to me that religious accommodation threatened institutional routines, uniformity, and, therefore, created disorder. When individuals advocated for their religious needs, it made them stand out and diverge against uniformity—a symbol of challenging unit cohesion and good order and discipline. Individuals who requested religious accommodations were rebelling against institutional authorities in the sense that they were demanding that some control over their bodies (food, movement, and time) be given back to religion. They denied that the military

was the single authority to which soldiers should submit. Although this type of deviance was typically palatable for authorities because of First Amendment rights, it was still an inconvenience and a sign that one was not fully committed to the profession. Ultimately soldiers would have to show that they were willing to sacrifice their religious beliefs and practices for the good of the unit and profession. Otherwise, they would have to leave the service, as Sergeant First Class Lee explained to one of his past soldiers who refused on religious grounds to pull the trigger.[94] If Hassan had refused to accept the decision that he would not be given alternative rations, or he had refused to train on Ramadan, he would have had to leave the military. If I had said my fast for Tisha B'Av was more important than the obstacle course, I would have lost all respect from the authorities, and perhaps if I were actually an enlisted soldier, received an Article 15 for insubordination.[95] I was allowed to fast as long as I could complete the mission. Religious practice and accommodation were fine if they were not too disruptive and were only done in times and spaces where this type of disorder and individuality could be tolerated.

[94] See Moskos and Chambers 1993 on conscientious objection.

[95] Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice gives commanders the authority to determine a service member's innocence or guilt and administer punishment for minor offenses that do not require judicial hearings. These minor offenses include disobeying orders, underage drinking, and disrespect to superiors. Soldiers can receive a "company grade Article 15" or "field grade Article 15," which have varying punishments.

24 Changing

“Taylor!” Athena Little rushed over to me with a wild look in her eyes on a Sunday evening a few weeks after the end of basic training.

“Taylor, you need to write this down. Cadet Candidate Little is having a mental breakdown. I’ve got to get off this post. I can’t keep doing the same thing every day. I am going out of my mind. My parents keep asking me what I am doing, and I am like, ‘THE SAME THING, EVERY DAY!’ They think I am really unhappy here, but I am not. I am happy, I just need to do something different”

Her eye twitched with her emotion and she made a few funny faces: “I think I am changing. I am changing. My body is changing but my mind is not, or my mind is changing, or my body is not. Some part is stuck. I am becoming someone new; this place is changing me.”

There was crackling laughter and shrieks echoing in the barracks hallway. Everyone seemed to be losing it a little bit, or perhaps just having fun.

25 Pass

The weekend for our first pass finally arrived on Labor Day weekend. After classes on Friday, we went back to our rooms to get ready. Jasmine Washington blasted music and started to get ready. She started with her hair, dividing it into sections and straightening it one piece at a time. Renee Edmonds came in to help her.

Once her hair was long and straight, she moved on to her makeup, making dramatic cat eyes with gold eyeshadow, eyeliner, and mascara. She finished with a light brown lip gloss and then slipped into her outfit for the night. Skinny jeans and a fitted top. All through the hall, I could hear other candidates getting ready. Many of the women were thrilled to put down their hair, put on some makeup, throw on fitted clothing, and feel like "themselves" again. Chelsea put down her long golden hair and waved it around her shoulders like a shampoo model. *I am back.* Lily was surprised how much she was enjoying doing her hair and makeup—at home, she would never get dressed up to go out. Now it was the highlight of her month.

When the time to leave post came, we gathered down near the tactical team offices to sign out. We looked at each other in awe, sometimes hardly recognizing each other.

"What is that you?"

"Wow! You look so different."

"Oh my gosh, you are a girl."

These words and phrases echoed around. Whereas in our uniforms the performance of gender identity was constrained, back in civilian clothes, the candidates took advantage of the opportunity to *perform, communicate,* and *confirm* these identities.[96] To combat the hyper-

[96] See, for example, Butler 2011; West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987.

masculinity of the military setting, several women became hyper-feminine, more so than back in their civilian lives. Those who rejected conventional feminine norms around dress were also given the opportunity to communicate their alternative approach to womanhood to the group in their civilian clothing.

I had to do many double-takes, as the faces and bodies I was so used to seeing in the same uniforms and with no differentiated hairstyles or makeup, came towards me in multi-color. My squad mates laughed and said now I really did look like an adult woman. In my uniform, I had looked just like another eighteen-year-old unisex soldier.

As we sized each other up, we also took in new symbols of wealth. In uniform, it was harder to tell who was from wealthy or less-well-off backgrounds. In civilian clothing, wealth oozed off some candidates. They were wearing hundreds-of-dollars sneakers, designer clothing, or special jewelry. Of course, there were candidates from less-well-off backgrounds who spent all their new money from the preparatory wages[97] on clothing and shoes, and those who were super wealthy but choose to dress modestly, so it was not a fool proof way of gauging background. Still, I could detect even understated signs of wealth by recognizing certain designers, brands, or trends. I thought back to the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and how he argued that children are socialized to take on class-based practices even in dress. Clothing and fashion had specific group-based tastes and logic, which served to both communicate class positions and group boundaries. When we went to the parking lot to get into different cars to go to the shopping malls or movies, some candidates hopped into Lexuses and Range Rovers, further clarifying their class positions. As we walked towards the parking lot, someone pointed out to me that even though a certain candidate dressed understatedly and did not talk about her

[97] Candidates were given a small monthly stipend. Prior service candidates received an income equivalent to their wages based on their previous rank (e.g., sergeant, corporal, private).

family's financial situation, he now knew she was "loaded" from her type of car. Candidates without cars got rides with others or called Ubers.

Each time we had weekend pass, some candidates went to New York City for the weekend, staying in hotels or Airbnbs. Others' parents sent them tickets to fly home. Some went out one of the days and stayed in the other, or just would go out for a quick trip to the mall or a movie. There was a group of candidates that always choose to stay at the preparatory school—where they would have free meals and free accommodations and could get ahead on homework. Who had the kind of money to stay in a hotel every weekend anyway? Those who stayed imagined that the parents of the ones who went out must be paying for the accommodations or sending money to the candidate every month. The ones that stayed, like Raphael Lewis, were often sending money home. Raphael sent his single mother the majority of his salary each month to help offset some of her and his siblings' expenses. Not only could he save money by staying at the preparatory school on weekends, but he could also earn money because the candidates who left would pay him to take over their shifts on weekend duty.[98] Sam Anderson, a White prior from the West Coast, would spend the whole weekend sitting at the duty desk earning hundreds of dollars. Sam's family was no longer impoverished so he did not have to send money home—indeed, they had moved from a doublewide into a large window-filled home on top of a mountain—but it was important to him to have savings.

When we did leave the preparatory school—which we all inevitably did because no one was allowed to stay on campus over winter break—candidates experienced no longer being held to military appearance standards in a variety of ways. Candidates often described "feeling like a person again." When they said that to me, I wondered: if one is only a person when they are in

[98] Candidates were periodically assigned "desk duty" in the company hallway or in the entrance to the preparatory school on the evenings and weekends. They would stay in this position for their allotted time and monitor the area.

civilian clothing, then what are they in uniform? This sentiment reinforced for me the extent to which appearance and clothing are vehicles for identity expression. When choices for appearance and clothing were not available, identity was constrained to the extent that the candidates no longer felt like people. It seemed that, at least in Western culture, personhood was deeply intertwined with the freedom to perform the identity of one's choosing. Similarly, candidates who were women mentioned feeling like they looked like "a woman again" in civilian clothing. If they were only women in civilian clothing, what were they in uniform? When the performance of "womanhood" was restricted, gender identity became vulnerable and blurred. Only upon regaining the ability to perform their approach to "womanhood" through dress and grooming did gender identity stabilize. [99]

Lily remarked that she felt like an entirely different person in civilian clothes: she felt prettier and fit in. She was not surrounded by buff women that made her feel inadequate, but rather people who looked like her and admired her shape, skinny and small. Her slim figure transformed from being weak and a signal of low status in the military realm to attractive and a signal of high status in the civilian world.

When she was on pass, Lisbeth Sokolov felt that she could blend in and be a "normal" person. She had anonymity in civilian clothing—no one knew her or expected anything from her. Lisbeth thought this was ironic: it was a type of fitting in by being different. The uniform was meant to make people blend and become a team, but it just made her feel like an outsider. When Kelly Carter put on her civilian clothes and let down her hair, she described feeling, "great. Free. Released." She felt like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. In civilian clothing, she felt free; in uniform, she felt captive.

[99] See, for example, Butler 2011; West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987.

Rich Rivers and Fernando Castro, a first-generation Hispanic immigrant whose family settled in the South, mentioned to me that when they were out in the civilian world people would recognize them as soldiers based on their hair—they could no longer just *blend* in. Rich knew that this recognizability meant he had to be more responsible in the outside world: if he got into trouble, everyone would associate it with soldiers as a whole. As such, those whose soldierly appearances went beyond the uniform could not fully escape the expectations associated with the military even in civilian clothing. Fernando did not mind being recognized as a soldier. He was proud when people thanked him for his service just based on his haircut: "Like we're fighting for their lives."

There were other candidates who wanted to flaunt their military identity: their soldier identity was a source of pride and integral to their new self-image and thus, they wanted to make sure it was on display in the civilian world. Some wore West Point logos when they were in their civilian outfits. When civilians found out they went to West Point, civilians would offer congratulations and awe, and sometimes buy them meals. A group of football players was taken on a shopping spree when a civilian recognized the West Point logo on their collared shirts. Many continued to wear their dog tags out when they wore their civilian clothing to signal and receive confirmation of their military identities to the outside world.

I learned that for some Black candidates being in civilian clothing was more complicated. When Demarcus Wright was not recognizable as a soldier, he was also more anxious around White police officers.[100] Whenever he saw them, he would walk in the opposite direction. He had some bad experiences with White officers over the past few years when his family had moved to Northern California. His father, a Navy officer, had been posted there so the family had moved

[100] See, for example, Alang et al. 2017; Alexander 2020; Anderson 2022; Aymer 2016; Clair 2020; Cleve 2016; Smith Lee and Robinson 2019 on the criminalization and over-policing of Black men, especially in White spaces.

across the country and resettled in an upscale, mostly White neighborhood. Demarcus loved hunting and one afternoon he went over to his friend's house to see if the friend would like to go with him into the woods behind the houses. He was holding his hunting pellet gun held in a non-hostile position, but he had not been able to find the gun sleeve that morning so had left the home without it. He returned home when his friend did not answer the door. A half-an-hour later, Demarcus went to go to the house again to see if his friend was home and, on his way, he saw the friend running towards him.

"The cops are looking to kill you." Someone had called the police on him. The cops were scanning the neighborhood looking for a Black man with a weapon.

A gardener, who was an older Black man shouted at him, "the police are looking for you. You better get out of here." Since Demarcus was closer to the woods now than his house, he sprinted into the woods and hid there for a few hours. He had set up some practice booby traps in the woods earlier in the summer and knew he would hear the police coming if they were nearing him. The police never found him, but the event shocked him to the core because he knew deep down, that they would not have hesitated to shoot him on the spot.

The police were called on Demarcus several other times as he lived his life as a Black man in a White neighborhood. When he went on his long morning runs, he would often hear a car behind him and turn to see a police car trailing him. When he went bowling with friends, a police officer would arrive and watch him from a distance. At the park when he was doing pull-ups, he would notice police cruisers. Demarcus also heard stories from his uncles about racist encounters with the police. In uniform, Demarcus felt that race did not matter. He believed racism was solved in the Army.

Athena Little explained that when she takes off her uniform, she is still just a Black

woman in America. That was why it was not easy for her to fit into this environment: "I am a Black woman in America. You know what I mean? Just erase my life and everything before that just for this? No! I am not doing that. Now White people can do that because this is their system." She could not pretend that everyone was equal when she knew this equality would disappear as soon as she was out of uniform and back in the civilian world.

When a group of political science professors from the Academy came to give a panel on current events, Marcell Artist, a Black prior from the South, asked the panel what they thought of policing in America. He shared that he did not feel safe as a Black man in America when he was not uniform. He had grown up in a rural area in Georgia that he had described to me as a 20 on a one to 10 racist scale. The panelists avoided answering the question. Later at dinner, Marcell explained that the Black bodies were more palatable for Americans when they are in uniforms. In his uniform, he was seen as a leader and had even been assigned to top positions both in his prior service unit and at the preparatory school. But out of his uniform he was just a scary Black man. The uniform had the ability to assuage the fears of the White population about the Black body. The uniform meant that the stereotypical aggression and violence associated with Black men was directed toward a force that White Americans approved of. I nodded along as Marcell spoke. When someone saw a Black man in uniform expectations about him and his behavior were entirely different from when they saw a Black man outside of uniform. The statistics on killings of Black unarmed men by the police were proof enough to Marcell that snap judgments about civilian Black men were that they are violent and threatening.[101] The uniform assuaged and redirected this threat toward the enemies of the country.

Yet, the stereotypical image of the "enemies of the country" in the most recent wars, in

[101] See, for example, Alang et al. 2017; Aymer 2016; Duncan 1976; Smith Lee and Robinson 2019.

turn created difficulties for Hassan Ahmed and other Muslim or Arab candidates. Hassan loved being in uniform because he went from being called a "fucking terrorist" to a patriot. He relished in having a soldier identity and being in uniform because he could show people from his past that he was serving his country. He was both protecting and protected when he was visibly identifiable as a soldier.

Some candidates felt that the military behaviors had been inscribed onto them such that they acted the same in and outside of the institution. Although pass was a time when lack of bodily discipline was permitted—if one still adhered to the Uniform Code of Military Justice—many of our bodies automatically performed military behaviors without conscious effort. Soldierly bodily practices and dispositions were inscribed on us to the extent that even outside of uniform and the preparatory school, we were still docile to institutional authority.

When Fernando went home for Labor Day, he found himself repeating the bodily movements he did in uniform. When he entered a building, he immediately removed his hat like it was patrol cap. When he realized what he was doing, he had to deliberately pause and remind himself that he was not in uniform. Now he felt like he was a "soldier 24/7." Even in civilian clothing, he was still symbolically in uniform because his military ID was in his pocket, and he was held to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Brandon Phillips, a White recruited athlete from the South, also carried himself in a different way even in the civilian world to "live the Army values." He told me that he felt like a soldier no matter where he was or how he was dressed. Similarly, Raphael now always felt that he had something to represent to the world as a soldier, whether he is wearing the uniform or civilian clothing.

Adam had similar experiences of repeating military behaviors in the civilian world. Even

when he was out of his uniform, he still was more aware of his surroundings. When he was in stores and noticed items were out of place on the shelves, he fixed them. Attention to detail was a new disposition for him that spanned settings. When exiting a building, he would instinctually reach for his patrol cap and was always surprised when it was not there. He found himself cupping his hands randomly for no specific reason.

One time when Adam was walking with his family to the mall near their home in rural Minnesota, he stopped in the middle of the parking lot and pulled out his phone to look at it. His dad asked him why he stopped, and he responded: “I don’t know. It’s a habit to stop and look at my phone." We had been instructed to never walk and be on our phones at the same time. Several candidates also mentioned to me that they stopped when on the phone even in civilian clothing and it felt strange to them to see people walking and talking on their phones. I often stopped abruptly in the middle of the sidewalk, in parking lots, or even while crossing the street to look at my phone. Walking and texting or talking was no longer a natural practice. Stopping to use our phones was now the taken-for-granted action.

Adam was also so accustomed to only wearing shorts without pockets in the physical training uniform that when he wore shorts in the civilian world, he still stuck his phone into the spandex of his boxer shorts. During spring break, he was wearing his cargo shorts, which had pockets all over them, but he still put his phone into the bottom of his boxer shorts and then pulled the phone out in front of his girlfriend. His girlfriend asked him why he was putting it there, and he said, “I have no idea.” This action had happened automatically without thought. She started laughing. He smiled at me when telling the story, “I have those small things that just naturally I do without thinking about it. The small things that you do every day here in the military, I kinda just incorporate into my civilian life, and I just accidentally do it. And I don’t

even realize I do it until I'm just like why am I doing this?" The new behaviors, even the smallest and seemingly insignificant ones, had become ingrained in Adam and part of his automatic behavior. After requiring deliberately trying to do the correct action for months—and being yelled at when doing it in incorrectly—the process took place without any conscious mental work.

Chelsea also laughed as she told me about the several new actions she continued to do when out in the civilian world. When she was wearing sunglasses and was about to go inside, she would take them off because she associated them with her patrol cap. She was so accustomed to removing her headgear that she felt an instinctual urge to take off her sunglasses. Something *felt wrong* if she wore anything on her head inside. She also would automatically reach for a pencil on her sleeve and was a bit startled when it was not there because she was in civilian clothing. Overall, Chelsea was happy with these changes to her demeanor—she felt that she acted more professional now when she was moving through the world. She told me she walked with a better posture from standing in the positions of attention and parade rest, and a bit more stride in her step. She felt she moved with more pride and confidence—she had muscles now, she received a paycheck, she was an adult.

Kelly and Lily both noticed that they walked faster now even when they were in civilian clothing, likely from the cadre continuously yelling at us, "WALK WITH A SENSE OF PURPOSE CADET CANDIDATE," or "HURRY UP CADET CANDIDATE," or "WHAT ARE YOU A GRANDMA? MOVE FASTER."

Athena fought as hard as she could to resist the militarization of her body becoming her new normal because she knew this would mean she would have changed mentally too. Athena often told me she felt trapped in a paradox: to change the system she had to know the system.

She had to get in and then change it. But if she let herself become part of the system, would she still be her own person? Or would she slowly become the same as the other soldiers around her? Then she would no longer be a source of change. She saw those around her accepting little things and noticed that she was as well. It was emotionally exhausting for her to constantly be fighting internally.

To me, Athena's struggle illuminated the power of control over movements: can one outwardly share the movements of others while internally fighting the system? Will the body eventually start functioning on its own in the new ways below the level of conscious thought? As the body comes to symbolically and automatically show submission, will mental processes also yield to the power of the institution? The literature, the stories of other candidates that I had heard, and my own experience all pointed to yes. As we transitioned from controlled cognition to automatic cognition to enact these behaviors, the practices and the associated dispositions became ingrained in our bodies and brains. It is incredibly difficult to fight against and challenge embodied dispositions of which one is no longer aware. Indeed, over time, as Athena's body and outward behavior complied with the system, she started to fight it less and less, perhaps due to exhaustion or that things no longer seemed *so strange* and *foreign* to her. The world around her became the new normal.

Yet, mental and physical changes from military socialization were not permanent. I started to compare being away from the military environment to airing out a dirty shirt. I felt that being in the military environment was like wearing the same shirt every day—even though in reality I would change daily, or I would have been in trouble for a hygiene violation. In my metaphor, each day a person wore the shirt, the stronger the shirt would smell. The scent became more entrenched in the fabric. Every day I spent at the preparatory school, my body ingrained the

new ways of walking and talking more deeply, and they became taken for granted. The longer I was in, the stronger the "scent" became but I had trouble smelling it. Family and friends could no longer understand what I was saying because I would use so many acronyms. I started calling people around me sir and ma'am and said things were "squared away" or "jacked up" and that I was "trackin" information. I would obsess about the details of my hair and any wrinkles in my civilian clothing as if they were a uniform. I would stop in the middle of the street or parking lot when I got a text or to take a phone call. I noticed that I was standing in the position of attention or parade rest naturally when in important situations (such as talking to a professor) or at synagogue. I spent all the Jewish Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, prayer in the position of attention.

But these changes did not last forever. If one takes off the shirt and airs it out, at first the smell will stay strong but over time it will start to dissipate. If one put back on the shirt right away, after just a day or two, the smell will resume its full force and stay fresh. When I left the preparatory school for just a day or two, the socialization stayed with me on my days of post. I repeated the behavior while I was away, and I entered back in with a smooth transition. Candidates similarly seemed to transition seamlessly from weekends away on pass to the workweek. However, if one takes the shirt off for a while, slowly but surely the smell starts to fade, and it is startling to put it back on. Coming back to the institution after weeks away from winter vacation or spring break, was often a bit startling for the other candidates and me. It would take a day or two to get back into the groove. Rich would start to mentally prepare himself for coming back a couple of days beforehand so would be less of a shock. If he did not do this, he found he struggled to get back into the right mindset. Some candidates would have a sick feeling in their stomachs as they went back through the gates, feeling their freedom slip away.

After longer breaks, I would find myself forgetting to remove my nail polish before arriving (and panicking to quickly take it off right before changing into uniform), or not automatically taking my patrol cap out of my pocket when I went outdoors. I had to consciously and deliberately remember actions that were just a few weeks ago taken for granted and automatic. Inevitably, the tactical team would be harsher on us the few days after breaks because we had all become so "complacent and lazy." Those who out-processed or were separated from preparatory school went home with some bodily and mental changes, but over time resumed their prior habits, bodily practices, and language. Still, at times, even years later back in the civilian world when they moved in ways that were once part of the military life—like running, backpacking, or push-ups—the memories and dispositions would come flooding back—"Move faster, Winfield!" "Do you have a tiny heart?" "Pain is just an illusion."

Part II: The Officer Mind

How we learn to
Problem Solve
Communicate Effectively
Lead Others
Act Honorably
As the Commandant told us,
"Your Most Important Weapon is The Six Inches Between Your Ears"

The development of an officer mind is integral to the preparatory school program. The candidates are not only joining the military as soldiers; they will also be commissioned officers after graduation from West Point. Whereas enlisted soldiers pledge to lawfully obey the orders of those appointed over them, officers pledge to faithfully discharge the duties of their office to which they are appointed. Officers oversee the strategic decisions and ethical cultures of their units.

In this section, I ask: what is essential for officers to *know*? How must officers *think*? How should officers *behave?* How do the styles of thought and values the institution aims to inculcate during "officerization" align or diverge with candidates' existing intellectual and moral frameworks?

The foundation for an officer mind is set during basic training through conversations about the honor code and character, and lectures on honorable living. We learned that candidates should not lie, cheat, steal or tolerate those who do, and that leaders of character seek to discover the truth, decide what is right, and demonstrate the courage and commitment to act accordingly. Authorities told us repeatedly that our character, honor, and moral courage would ultimately be what made us good officers. Refusing to tolerate the misbehavior of our peers now would prevent those peers from acting inappropriately as officers and risking the safety of their units.

Authorities urged us to have the moral courage to act and worked to restructure our moral-ethical schemas.

We learned that beyond a commitment to honorable living, officers needed the intellectual abilities and mental habits to make informed decisions and problem solve during stressful situations. The classroom was a laboratory to test and develop these habits in us. Whereas military authorities had conditioned us to automatically follow orders and not talk back during basic training, in the classroom, teachers instructed us to think critically and ask questions. The automatic responses of "no excuses" or "yes, sir/ma'am/sergeant" were not desirable to teachers as they needed to gauge if we understood the material and to know the real reasons behind incomplete assignments. Teachers worked to instill in us what they called "habits of mind"—problem-solving, perseverance, independent learning, empathetic imagination, and transformational agility. They explicitly told us that by struggling through complex problems during math, we would learn the skills to solve problems on the battlefield. By working in groups in science, we would learn how to work with interdisciplinary teams in combat. Through reading diverse perspectives in books and listening to the stories of our classmates from different backgrounds, we would learn how to better lead diverse teams. Academic leaders encouraged us to not only focus on the content but to also pay attention to *how* we were learning and *why* these habits of mind would help us later as military leaders.

Given the diversity of the student body, cross-cultural conversations were common in the classroom. Some teachers intentionally included readings on hot topics to generate debates and give us the opportunity to communicate our life stories and opinions. One primary objective was "clear communication:" as officers, candidates would be required to clearly communicate their perspectives and speak with those who held differing viewpoints. Another objective was to

challenge the existing assumptions we had about the world because many candidates were coming from homogenous communities. Teachers wanted to complicate our worldviews so we would learn to seek out the evidence behind our opinions and perhaps see that there are other valid perspectives. These conversations helped us to learn about those from different backgrounds and how others may see the world; for example, discussions about how Black and White individuals may experience policing differently. However, some teachers shied away from these conversations, particularly when they became too heated or linked the problems that existed in larger America to problems in the military or the preparatory school. Some White candidates also felt the conversations were biased or one-sided and did not trust the validity of certain opinions. Black candidates who brought up racial inequalities during the discussions sometimes felt disillusioned and shut down, as even those of similar racial backgrounds rejected their words.

Candidates who excelled in academics were often those who had struggled during basic training and with developing a "military body." They went from being at the bottom of the battalion rankings to the top during the academic year. They similarly rose in the status hierarchy, as the hierarchy evolved to incorporate new information as intellectual ability became connected with competence as an officer. Tensions rose between those who were academically savvy and those who were physically savvy as they vied for the top positions in the status hierarchy. These tensions lead to questions about what makes a better officer: was it physical strength or intellectual aptitude? Both groups questioned the validity of the others' continued stay at the preparatory school and if they really had what it takes to go to West Point. They leveraged their own relative academic or physical strengths to define their worth and belonging within the institution.

The extent to which the acquisition of the 'ideal' officer mind was possible or desirable to candidates depended largely on their background characteristics and existing identities. Most of the candidates were sent to the preparatory school for academic remediation. Those from high schools with poor funding or inadequate resources faced the Herculean task of trying to fill the gaps in their education while keeping up with the pace of preparatory school life. Whereas in high school a teacher might cover one topic a week, at the preparatory school, teachers covered multiple topics in one day. Those with solid high school educations were able to concentrate on reviewing the material and applying it to new more complex problems. But those who were learning the material for the first time struggled to stay afloat. Some candidates noticed that the quality of high school education was highly intertwined with race, as those who came from "White schools" (whether they themselves were White or Black) seemed to have stronger academic foundations and were placed in the higher-level classes at the preparatory school. Candidates who were not able to fill their gaps quickly enough faced separation from the school.

Conversations about the Equal Opportunity Program and moments when candidates felt they were experiencing discrimination generated debates about "all I see is green" rhetoric and whether the military really was a great equalizer. Some leaders and candidates resisted the tendency to see race or other differences between soldiers. They said they "only saw green," not the person behind the uniform. The Army was a merit-based society where performance and hard work were all that mattered—not racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious, or class identities. For others, an "all I see is green" mentality was not only wrong but also offensive because it ignored all the structural challenges and discrimination women, LGBTQ+, and non-White groups had to overcome in the military and America. West Point did not have its first Black graduate until 1877 (75 years after its official founding), and he went straight into a segregated unit. The armed

forces were not fully desegregated until 1954. Women were only allowed into the Academy in 1976. “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” ended in the last ten years. Even after integration, the military remained largely segregated along gender and racial lines, with White men as a large majority in the combat arms. “All I see is green” and “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentalities ignored individual and generational discrimination. Those who eschewed this rhetoric were concerned that ignoring soldiers’ backgrounds led authorities to subconsciously discriminate against soldiers who looked or acted differently than dominant groups. They argued that despite the military’s expressed commitment to diversity and inclusion it had done little to adapt its training model to better meet the needs of soldiers who were not White, middle-class, heterosexual, and Protestant men. They saw the linguistic style, culture, valued activities, and clothing styles of the preparatory school still reflecting the White upper/middle-class.

Lectures on honorable living brought to the surface questions of language-use and reporting improper behavior. Despite the prevalence of swearing among the military leaders, during basic training authorities told us that certain language was off-limits because it was disrespectful. No candidates, including those who were Black, were allowed to say the n-word. Black candidates were split on this policy. On one hand, the word was not professional and had a disrespectful history. On the other, who were these White people telling Black candidates that they could not say a word that they had reclaimed? Yet, over time many in the second camp acquiesced that it was indeed disrespectful speech because it could make other soldiers feel uncomfortable. They connected it to sexually inappropriate jokes or remarks—if they said it, they could not expect White candidates to not say it, and if the White candidates said it, the word would have a derogatory meaning. Authorities told us again and again how as leaders our speech would directly relate to the actions of our soldiers.

An institutional emphasis on reducing sexual assault and harassment was evident from our first day at the preparatory school when we learned about the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program (SHARP) and the commandant told us explicitly that our existing values and behavior would no longer cut it as appropriate standards. Leaders had reorganized the barracks to separate the sexes, there were policies against opposite sexes being in each other's rooms, and every night candidates rotated through monitoring the barracks for sexual predators. Leaders emphasized that there would be no toleration for sexual misconduct and those who harassed or assaulted others would be sent home immediately. There were similar lectures on equal opportunity: the leadership would not tolerate discrimination against others based on race, gender, or sexuality.

Conversations on SHARP continued for the entire year with regular sensing sessions and "Stand Down Days" focused on the topic. For some candidates, the separation of the sexes and the nightly supervision was evidence that women were a liability for a unit—they were a distraction, and their presence would lead to assault. Therefore women should stay out of combat arms. Others felt that SHARP favored women's positions and that a man could be "SHARP'd" for just looking at a woman wrong. When cases did come up, they typically believed the woman was making it up or over-exaggerating. These attitudes manifested in intense backlash when women did report cases during the year. Those who reported harassment or assault, and those who supported them, were shocked when other candidates did not believe the victims and aligned themselves with the alleged perpetrators. Despite support from the institutional authorities when these incidences occurred, due to peer backlash, many decided they would not report again in the future.

Reporting itself, whether for SHARP violations, inappropriate jokes, cheating in the

classroom, or other misbehavior, took on increased salience as candidates grappled with the no toleration piece of the honor code. Candidates drew lines between when it was appropriate and inappropriate to report others, and the steps one should first take before going to an authority figure—e.g., approaching other candidates one-on-one first and telling them to change their behavior or report themselves. Racial, ethnic, and gendered dimensions came to the surface as candidates considered cultural perceptions on "snitching" and how those from similar backgrounds should stick together and help each other out rather than going straight to the "White man." Those who were reported for honor or respect violations entered mentorship programs with institutional leaders to help them adjust their behavior for the future. It was common for those who went through the mentorship program to come out with a new commitment toward ensuring honorable and respectful living in the preparatory school.

The stories that follow first delve into lessons learned in the classroom and academic life at the preparatory school, and then transition to larger questions of army values, respect, diversity, and inclusion. In each story the 'ideal' of the officer mind is held up against the reality of our lives and histories that shaped and limited possibilities for the successful adoption of this identity.

26 First Day of School

On the first day of the academic year, we woke up early for formation and breakfast. We stood in the early morning light, preparing ourselves mentally for the new part of life at the preparatory school. There was a nervous energy in the air. Kelly Carter, a Black woman from the Midwest, and Lily Rose, a White woman from the South, were thrilled to be starting the academic year and to be moving into their area of strength. No more struggling; they were entering the realm in which they would excel. Athena Little, a Black woman from the South, was happy to have school as a reason to pause military training. She could now start working towards her real goal: a college degree. Demarcus Wright, a Black man from the West Coast, was nervous; unlike Athena, he wished preparatory could stay in the military mode all year. Angela Lil Boat, a Black woman from the South, braced herself: *Time to start the hard stuff.* In basic training, she could figure out how to get by, but in academics, there would be no hiding. Given that most of the candidates were sent to the preparatory school for academic remediation, the true battle was about to begin for most of the battalion.

We made our way to class before eight o'clock. We had three 90-minute classes per day, except for Wednesday which was just math and study periods. The first class I attended with Athena was the lowest-level math course. There were three levels of math at the preparatory school: precalculus, precalculus with an introduction to calculus, and calculus. Candidates were placed based on their high school math courses, grades, and performance on the math placement test during basic training. I thought back to how Lily had returned to the barracks after her math placement exam to tell me she had been so exhausted that she could barely keep her eyes open—how the hell were they supposed to gauge her math skills from that test? Kelly had laughed and said in her room candidates were falling asleep all over the place, but the teachers felt bad and let

them sleep once they had finished. Now it was time to find out how effective those placements were after all.

There were nine students in the class—six men and three women. Two White men sat in the very front of the classroom in the center, with two Black men on either side. In the next row, sat a Black man and Hispanic man, and in the last row sat the three Black women. I was immediately struck that the way the candidates were seated reflected general status beliefs about who would be the most competent in the classroom—with those closer up and central expecting and expected to have more influence. As I took in the classroom, in many ways it felt similar to any other civilian classroom. There were individual desks, inspirational posters on the walls, and students. Yet, each student was in a camouflage uniform and combat boots.

The first order of business was to select a section marcher. The section marcher oversaw classroom organization, attendance, assignment collection, calling the room to attention at the start of class, and dismissing the class. The instructor, Ms. Becker, a White woman with a civilian background, commented when explaining the call to attention, "I know I am not in a green suit, but you will do this every day because this is a part of military culture." We got up, stood at attention, and the class officially began. Our motions mirrored a military formation and brought some ceremonial aspects of military life into the academic classroom. We were embodying submission towards our teachers just as we had embodied subordination towards the military authorities.

Then we went over the course guide and memorandums in detail. The memorandums were written as military documents, including mission statements and detailed policies and goals for each class. We learned that each quarter candidates whose grades fell below a certain threshold would be put on the Academic Improvement Program and required to go to office

hours during additional instruction each afternoon for a number of hours based on their grades. The lower the grade, the more office hours required. It was purposefully not called probation or disciplinary program—the goal was to get us in the habit of meeting with teachers and asking for help before it was too late. A candidate needed at least a 2.0 to receive the commandant's endorsement to West Point.

We spent the rest of class discussing the honor code. I remembered when our squad had gathered us in an academic classroom just like this one during basic training to talk about why following the honor code was essential for soldiers. Our squad leader had emphasized to us:

> 'A cadet candidate will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do.' What does it mean? Lying is a direct reflection of your character. Majority of people have lied at some point in their lives. What will you do if you miss formation? If you did not shave? You might get smoked now but it is better for you in the long run to tell the truth. The worst thing that can happen is that lying becomes a habit. We try to inculcate telling the truth, so it becomes an instinctive reaction. When faced with tough decisions or when you are in high-stress environments, you will be able to go with your automatic reaction. Honorable people have gut reactions. Get into the spirit of the honor code. Embrace being truthful. And for the part about toleration: take ownership of the institution and the honor code.

We had discussed the honor code for another hour together, with each of us sharing stories about people in our lives who had shown honorable or dishonorable behavior. During the conversation, I thought about how the institution was trying to inscribe a new moral-ethical schema on us. Moral-ethical schemas typically form during childhood, as children explicitly and implicitly learn what behavior is tolerated in their communities and what is good/right and bad/wrong. These schemata become so ingrained that they lead to automatic, emotionally laden snap judgments and moral intuitions about what is acceptable behavior. It seemed to me that the preparatory school authorities wanted to uproot our previous automatic cognition about moral-ethical behavior so they could start from scratch on our minds, and ultimately, reshape our gut reactions to what is right and wrong. Leaders emphasized that behaviors that may have seemed

innocuous in the civilian world, like white lies, had life-or-death consequences for soldiers. They first brought our awareness to what may have been taken for granted in the past so we could start monitoring and controlling previously unconscious behaviors, and then introduced a new schema for behavior, the cadet candidate honor code. When we returned to the barracks after the meeting with our squad leader, Athena had turned to me:

> You know what Taylor? I think this place was designed to make the perfect White man and to tame his desire to do bad because if you think about it: White men lie, they cheat, they steal. They stole this whole damn country! Who made this place? Who made the ideas here? Whoever made the honor code like, I think they just wanted to tame the White man in the beginning, tame his desires and make him a better person. And I think it's good to live by that, but it's hard. These crazy-ass White men who made this shit up, they knew what they were doing. If you look at it closely, it does make sense. It is good to live by those values.

Back in the academic in the classroom, Ms. Becker explained that other universities had honor codes, but the expectations were higher at West Point: "Here we are very careful. Do you understand?"

"HOOAH," the class responded. The message was clear—civilian moral-ethical standards were inadequate in the military sphere.

When turning in assignments, we had to write a statement that the work is our own work or name other sources and candidates who helped with the assignment. We went over an example: "Cadet Candidate Little assisted me with question number 13 on the math homework because she reminded me to use the Pythagorean Theorem." These statements had to be typed up according to American Psychological Association style guides and stapled with a cover sheet to the front of the assignment. The teacher reiterated, "You will start a habit now because anything else will not be accepted down the hill." Violation of this policy, even accidentally, meant disciplinary action. The policies were designed for creating habits, instincts, and gut reactions

toward honorable living.

Ms. Becker then connected these policies to the mission of the preparatory school. In all the classrooms, our teachers would be developing us into leaders of character. I had first learned the term "leader of character" during the first week of basic training. It was a piece of knowledge that we had to memorize verbatim from the knowledge book. I could still recite it now: "A leader of character seeks to discover the truth, decide what is right, and demonstrate the courage and commitment to act accordingly." When we were instructed to go over the line again together as a battalion, a senior leader told us bluntly:

> I don't care how good a football player you are, how smart you are. In the end, it's about what kind of leader you're going to be. That stuff in the middle, that character, that hits every piece of that, is what matters. Because in the end, that's what type of person you'll be and leader you're going to be.

Ms. Becker continued that her vehicle might be mathematics, but she was going to make sure we were prepared to act with integrity and professionalism. It was her role to help ensure the integrity of the entire program; we were not only going to be thinking about character in the military training, but it was also going to be a part of everything we do. She would be asked each quarter to assess our character and expected us to show her our officer potential. *Wow,* I thought to myself, *the institution is truly all-encompassing in its mission to immerse us in and police a new culture of character.* Based on the studies I had read of individuals being (re)socialized in new enclave groups (Davidman 1991; Tavory and Winchester 2012), I imagined it would not take long for many of us to absorb this mentality for ourselves, embody it in our actions, and even begin to enforce and police it in others.

She concluded as we gathered up our books to move on to the next classroom:

> You're going to have to put a lot more effort into academics than you put in the past. You need a new mentality because this is a job now. You are employed by the United States government. By the way, thank you for your service, making this choice to serve the

country. This is your job: working and being a student.

The section marcher dismissed the class and Athena and I walked down the hallway to science. The science classroom was a large open room with tall, silver metallic tables arranged like islands around the space. We settled on stools at a table towards the front of the room and looked at our teacher, Mr. Collins, a Black military veteran. The class was called to attention and the first thing Mr. Collins, asked us was: "How many people in here want to be a scientist when this is all done?"

No one raised their hand.

"I get it. But guess what? This is a prerequisite for you to graduate. This is one of your missions and you have to treat it that way."

He explained that in his career as an army officer, he was often given missions that he did feel he had enough resources to complete. As officers, "they want us to do our stuff even if they're not giving you any resources. You got to execute regardless." Mr. Collins said that earlier in his career he thought this was unfair and hated it, but it was reality. We would have to accomplish our mission with whatever we had even if we felt like we did not have enough time. Our mission in his classroom was to pass the science curriculum.

Throughout the day, in each class, the instructors stressed that we must attend every class, come prepared, be attentive, and submit assignments on time. There would be no toleration for lying or cheating. This was part of being at a military academy and the classrooms were aligned with military values of punctuality, accuracy, attention to detail, and character. We were now soldier-scholars.

27 No More ‘Yes Ma’am’

Ms. Riley, a White Math teacher, was frustrated. The candidate she was trying to work with kept saying, “yes, ma’am” to her and she could not read that as a teacher. She needed to use his body language, his vocabulary, and the way he spoke and interacted with her to discern if he was understanding what she was saying. All these verbal and nonverbal cues were essential to her as a teacher, and they seemed to have been erased for some candidates during basic training. “Yes, ma’am” meant nothing.

“Please use other language to tell me if you understand.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Ah!

“Does, ‘yes ma’am’ mean, ‘yes, ma’am, I understand’? Is ‘yes, ma’am,’ ‘yes, ma’am I heard you, but I don’t know what you said’? Is it ‘yes, ma’am,’ ‘Okay, just shut up’?”

The student grinned when Ms. Riley got to the last option.

“Is that what you’re trying to tell me? Is this bad? ‘I don’t want to listen to you anymore.’”

The candidate started to loosen up.

The “no excuses” reply could be equally as frustrating. When a candidate failed a test, she wanted to know *why* it happened so it would not occur again.

The first time Ms. Riley had this conversation with her students at the beginning of the year it was hard for them to transition out of just responding “no excuses” immediately because they had been trained to say it during basic training. It had only taken three weeks for this reply to become an ingrained and automatic response. When she sat down with students who had failed their first exam or had not done their homework, she told them:

> Tell me, even if it starts to sound like an excuse, because we need to get to the bottom of what happened. In order to get to the bottom of what happened, I have to hear your reasons. I know they've been telling you all summer long, 'no excuses,' but I actually now need you to give me your excuses. Just give me what happened.

As a teacher, she needed those excuses to help them improve: "I need you to tell me, 'I forgot to study.' Then I can say okay. Why did you forget to study? And I can help you develop." While military socialization was useful for making students respectful, diligent, and disciplined workers, it could also be a barrier when she needed students to relate to her as a teacher and not as a military commander.

When Ms. Riley told me about these experiences, I wondered how deference to teachers due to military socialization may exacerbate existing class-based inequalities in interacting with authorities. Whereas middle-class parents and schools encourage children to negotiate with and advocate for themselves with teachers (and authorities writ large), research shows that working-class families and schools encourage children to follow directions and act deferentially toward those in power (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Calarco 2018; Lareau 2002). These patterns create class-based inequalities for even students within the same school. There was also the added dimension of stereotype threat for Black candidates from working-class backgrounds, wherein those who *knew* others expected little of them were afraid to ask questions and confirm for others that people in their social group had limited knowledge.[102] I imagined that candidates who were already disinclined to ask for help, negotiate extensions, and express their needs due to their upbringing now, after basic training, were even less likely to advocate for themselves with authorities. The academic faculty's efforts to encourage "help-seeking behavior" in the candidates were competing with powerful class-based and military socialized behaviors.

[102] See, for example, Steele and Aronson 1995; Wakefield, Hopkins, and Greenwood 2012.

28 Critical Thinking

Mr. James, a White English teacher with graying hair, asked the class why they thought it was important to be a critical thinker in the military. Athena Little was thrown off guard. *Excuse me?* She raised her hand:

"No. They tell you what to do all the time. Why would the military want to teach people to think when you literally do what they tell you all the time? Why would they want people to think differently?" The whole idea was ridiculous to her: the preparatory school wanted her to obey immediately and not question in the military realm and then think critically in academics? Over the past month, she had spent every waking moment being asked to conform to the leadership's orders about what she wore, ate, and how she was allowed to move and speak. Captain Kennedy and Sergeant First Class Lee had stressed to her the importance of bodily intuition—knowing what to do immediately without having to think about it. Now she was supposed to undo all that training in the classroom?

Mr. James responded in his typical calm, yet enthusiastic manner:

> Yes, Cadet Candidate Little, the Army does want soldiers to listen to authorities and follow instructions; but as officers, you will be tasked with making strategic decisions for your units. You will need to have the ability to think critically about different situations and take action. There's a reason that the two different oaths of enlisted and officer are subtly different. The enlisted oath is to obey the lawful orders of those appointed over you. But the officer oath does not say anything about obeying orders, it is to, 'faithfully discharge the duties of my office to which I am appointed.' So, to move to an officer mindset is to move to the idea that it's not really about orders—it's about a larger more abstracted duty and to be able to visualize and understand that duty and conceptualize it in ways that are not obvious to all and faithfully discharge those duties. You need critical thinking to grow that kind of perspective. You need to get to know yourself and how you see the world and plumb the nature of ethics and morality.

Basic training had been about being a good soldier and follower. The academic year was all about becoming a good officer and leader. In many ways, this seemed to be a transition from

working-class to middle-class mentalities (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Calarco 2018; Lareau 2002). Enlisted soldiers, like children from working-class backgrounds, are socialized to follow directions, keep opinions to themselves, and act deferentially toward authorities.[103] On the other hand, officers, like children from middle-class families, are socialized to express their opinions and work alongside and with authorities. Of course, officers still must behave respectfully towards and submit to their chain of command, but they are ultimately beholden to the Constitution. The interconnectedness between the officer mind and an upper/middle-class mentality was logical because the officer corps was historically comprised of those from upper and middle-class backgrounds. In contrast, the enlisted corps was made up of those from working-class backgrounds. The requirement for officers to have a college education may also contribute to different cultures in the ranks. Indeed, some studies have shown that maternal education is more influential than social class in shaping these differing mentalities (Weininger, Lareau, and Conley 2015). Ethos developed in higher education was critical to the cultivation of an officer mind.

[103] See, for example, Bowles and Gintis 1976; Calarco 2018; Lareau 2002.

29 Habits of Mind and Transformational Agility

I walked down the academic hallway, past teachers' doors covered with cartoons with academic puns, motivational quotes, and a list of books they were currently reading. Several doors were open and when I glanced in, I often made eye contact with the teachers who were curious to see who was walking down the hall midmorning in a combat uniform. It was not yet time for additional instruction, when the candidates would flock to their instructors' offices eager for some extra help on assignments. The teachers smiled at me and continued with their work.

Halfway down the hall, I knocked gently on the outside of the academic dean's door frame. When she was in and available, she left her door open so teachers or anyone who needed her could just give a small knock and enter to ask her a question. When she heard the knock, she looked up from her computer and gave me a wide smile.

"Come on in, Taylor," she said in her usual gentle and friendly tone. She stood up from her desk, straightening her black dress and cardigan, and walked over to the chairs that were around a small coffee table in the corner of her office. She beckoned me over and I took a seat, taking in my surroundings. Two of her office walls were covered with whiteboards full of ideas for projects. Another wall housed a long row of bookshelves overflowing with volumes on pedagogy, leadership, and developmental psychology. There was a long, panoramic window on the wall behind her desk. I took in the view—the rolling mountains that were once lush from the summer rains, and then vibrant with the deep earth tones of fall leaves, were now covered in thick, white snow. The sky was a light blue with a few fluffy clouds and the sun was shining brightly, betraying the cold temperatures. Whenever I came into her office, I always spent a few moments looking out the window in awe and admiring the changing seasons. This really was a beautiful place, even if the candidates did dramatically refer to it as a prison.

"So how is it going, Taylor?"

We would meet like this often, sitting in her office and talking for hours about the current academic program, what candidates struggled with, where they excelled, and her goals for the future of the program. She was always eager to hear about any of my thoughts or reflections and would ask for my opinion about her ideas for curriculum development.[104]

During our first meeting, she shared with me that the preparatory school academic program had experienced significant development over the last 20 years. The original curriculum centered on standardized testing preparation and the candidates would take the SATs and ACTs three times a year; however, they found that even with higher standardized test scores, matriculated candidates struggled at the Academy. Over time, the curriculum transitioned to focus on a deep study of English and math. English and math were the key components of the West Point curriculum, and the hope was that a remedial year would bring the candidates to the level required to meet the Academy's standards. There were constant conversations between the academic departments at the Academy with the associated departments at the preparatory school to facilitate a fluid transition between programs. The dean was incessantly working with the faculty to try to improve the curriculum to better prepare the candidates for the next stage in their academic journeys. Whenever we discussed any remediation for the candidates, she was careful to remind me that the candidates were considered "high potential but not yet qualified," and there was nothing inferior about them as compared to students at the Academy—the candidates just needed a little more time for growth. She abhorred the stereotypes that lingered with the candidates who matriculated into the Academy that they were somehow lesser than the direct

[104] Other faculty and staff were also eager to hear my emerging findings and any feedback for the organization. Authorities had granted me permission to enter the institution with the hope that I could help them address challenges related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

admits.

I learned from her that the preparatory school academic program had expanded to include a center for enhanced performance in the early 2000s. The dean added the science curriculum when a task force from West Point found that matriculated candidates were struggling to balance the academic load on top of military and physical requirements at the Academy. The task force recommended that the preparatory school add additional courses so that candidates would be accustomed to juggling more responsibilities. They had to be prepared to complete multiple tasks each day and learn the time management skills to accomplish them all. When she had told me this, I laughed internally, exasperated, thinking about how utterly exhausted I was trying to balance preparatory school life and I was not even a 'real' candidate. Many of us had learned early in the year that coffee did not cut it in the fight against the fatigue from the mix of waking up early for formation, a full day of classes, physical education, military science, and mass athletics—by the time the evening came around for homework, exhaustion hung in the air. Candidates had taken to energy drinks or "dip" (dipping tobacco) in the battle against fatigue. They had to find what gave them that buzz or a recharge to keep powering through the schedule.

I mentioned to her on that occasion how I thought it was a bit of a paradox: trying to get the candidates adjusted to managing many competing responsibilities but concurrently wanting them to be in optimal mental states to absorb the academic information and grow intellectually. She nodded and sighed. Indeed, that was the core challenge. The senior leadership tried to manage the candidates' level of exhaustion by not letting them leave their rooms too early in the morning and restricting reasons why candidates could be pulled out of their rooms before class, but teachers still saw that candidates were falling asleep regularly at their desks. There was a constant competition for time between the academic, military, and physical spheres of life at the

preparatory school, and most hours were usually spoken for so there was little time for the candidates to recharge. The enhanced performance course was designed to help candidates with study skills and time management in addition to other material on mentorship, social sciences, and how to integrate lessons from the academic sphere into the military and athletic pillars.

Today I was eager to talk about how the academic curriculum was designed to develop what I had come to call the "officer mind:" the mental skills and mindset an officer needed to have to be successful as a military leader. I had heard these skills and mindsets tossed around often in the classroom.

Just that morning in math class, I had been building my "problem-solving," "perseverance," and "independent learning" skills. We had started class at the blackboard as usual to solve practice problems. Consistent with the traditional West Point "Thayer Method," in which students were expected to do the reading ahead of time, we had to come prepared to do problems on the board.[105] Each of us had our own little segment of the blackboard and all around me, I could hear the clicking of the chalk on the board as we worked through each problem and described each step. When one of us came to a dead end, we would look at each other's boards to try to figure out where we were going wrong. Mr. Jacobs, a tall, White man with salt-and-pepper hair who was a military veteran, designed his lectures around watching us do problems incorrectly. This was how he supplemented the material we had studied the night before in the textbook. He had told us he was not interested in teaching the material directly: if he did, we would just forget it immediately. By going through the struggle to learn it ourselves directly from the textbook, we would remember the problem-solving techniques more vividly and be able to pull from them again in the future. Instead of memorizing like robots, if we could think about

[105] See Ender et al. 2021 for information on the Thayer Method and West Point pedagogy.

what we were doing and *why* we were doing it, then we would be able to derive the solution again and solve new problems.

Already a few months into the year, I had realized an overarching goal of math class was not only to learn the content but also to learn habits of mind. Teachers were constantly making the connection that learning to problem solve in innovative ways in the classroom would help us on the battlefield. As future officers, candidates would be forced to solve new problems quickly and effectively. They would need to know different ways to "attack" problems and have the persistence to keep trying new pathways when certain avenues were blocked. They might have to learn new information quickly and effectively to save lives. Mr. Jacobs told us explicitly that when an enemy is attacking, an officer could not just sit there, fold his hands, and say, "I don't know, I don't get it." When the enemy is attacking, the officer needs to figure it out quickly—what she knows, what she does not know, and the right questions to ask to the rest of the team. This is what we could learn during math class.

Ms. Merrell, a White teacher with a civilian background, explained that science also had an underlying motivation to get us to work together in teams to solve problems as a group. We used Process-Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning, which used a student-centered, group-learning strategy for learning and problem-solving. We worked together in small teams to answer the questions in our workbooks. Each person on the team had a particular role—recorder, spokesperson, task manager, and traveler. Once the team had answered the questions to the best of its ability, the traveler would go and compare answers with other teams. The system emphasized the importance of communication, teamwork, and critical thinking when responding to challenges.

Mr. Collins told us it would be incredibly beneficial "downrange" to have experience

solving complex challenges in the science classroom. Candidates would encounter situations in combat when they would be given incomplete information and would have to find an answer based on that information. They would regularly have come up with a plan to solve tough problems. Mr. Collins reminded us often, "You can apply this to anything. Because you're going to be faced as a lieutenant with a lot of complex decisions on issues. Right after graduation as a second lieutenant, it's quite possible that you can be deployed downrange." Likewise, Captain Kennedy once told us in military science class:

> Do you guys ever think you will do chemistry, math, or any of these things as officers? We are teaching you how to be problem solvers, you can solve complex problems with competing values. So, when you are in Syria or North Korea and we hand you a plate of shit, you can make decisions easily, and not lose sleep.

The habits of mind we were learning as students would become essential as military leaders.

I brought myself back to the present moment with the dean, asking her the question that was on my mind: "How do you see the academic curriculum tying into officership? Is there a connection between what you are teaching the students now and what they are going to be doing in four to five years from now when they commission?"

Her face lit up. A smile spread across her face and her amber eyes gleamed—now we were on to her passion, theories of knowledge. I knew of her love of theories of knowledge from the several times she had addressed the battalion, encouraging us to dive in and think like mathematicians and scientists. She told us explicitly that her goal was not for candidates to only learn the material, but for them to learn new habits of mind. As officers, candidates would be working with multidisciplinary teams to solve complex problems. They would not have to know everything but would need to have an appreciation and understanding of what different disciplines bring to the table in terms of how to address a challenge. That was why West Point

was half math and science and half liberal arts. Officers needed to have the skills from both. She gave us the example of the glia of the brain—it was the glue that kept everything together. The preparatory school would help us develop glia—ways of connecting knowledge and new ways of thinking—rather than just new neurons. She told the battalion she was telling us all of this because she wanted us to be aware of our knowledge as we were learning it—to be able to be on the dance floor and watch ourselves dance from the balcony at the same time.

The first time I had heard her speak on this topic during basic training, I was surprised and impressed at the high level on which she was speaking to us, and the focus on forms and styles of knowledge versus content. It reminded me of what I had learned from the sociology of knowledge about thought-models: clustered approaches to thinking (in terms of content, form, and details) that emerge from socialization in certain thought-communities (Mannheim 1927; Winfield 2021b; Zerubavel 2009). Content is *what* one thinks about, form is *how* one thinks and builds arguments, and details are the specific word choice and metaphors one employs. Thought-communities include larger social groups (e.g., nationalities, religions, and political parties) and more specialized groups (e.g., physicists, sociologists, or soldiers). There may be subgroups within thought-communities that have their own nuances in their thought-models—in this case, enlisted soldiers versus officers.[106] Individuals learn thought-models in their own communities tacitly through observation and practice as well as through explicit instruction.[107] Thought-models also have an ingrained emotional component as individuals may experience certain arguments or words as *feeling wrong* or *strange,* even without being able to explain why.[108] The dean seemed to be asking us to try to become aware of our preexisting thought-models ("being

[106] Elites in thought-communities mark boundaries—implicitly or explicitly—on what is considered valid thinking and dictate which content, forms, and details are deemed conventional and authentic to the group (Bourdieu 1969).
[107] See, for example, Lizardo 2016; Winfield 2021b; Zerubavel 2009.
[108] See, for example, Ignatow 2007; Turner and Stets 2005; Vaisey and Lizardo 2010.

on the balcony") so we could uproot and replace them with learning-styles that were more conducive to officership ("on the dance floor"). As I listened, I wondered if the zombie-looking, half-asleep candidates around me were absorbing what she was saying, or if they were just using it as a time to have a nap with their eyes open, which some of them had bragged to me they had learned how to do. Now I had the chance to learn more about her thoughts on these topics and explore what was the "officer thought-model," or in short, "the officer mind," now that I was a bit more alert.

She paused for a moment and then responded:

> Education gives us the ability to think on the fly so we can problem solve and adapt. That is how higher education leads into the officer mind. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were termed the captains' wars because these officers were forced to think on their feet and make decisions in an uncertain battle terrain. We had this one visiting officer say that his order was to disrupt the enemy. Like what the hell is 'disrupt the enemy'? That is the intent. Figure it out. You have to create officers that can take instruction, understand intent, and execute. You have to deal with all the personalities as well, which is a whole other layer. You have to cultivate a culture of trust and preparedness and all sorts of things way before you ever get there with your troops. If you're working with a multinational force, you have to figure out how to create trust with people that are from different cultures than you—how to lead people who are like you and those who are very different than you.

I nodded, taking it all in:

"Yes, that makes a lot of sense. If you were to choose certain habits of mind that you would like to cultivate in the candidates that you think will directly impact their abilities to be competent officers, which ones would you choose?"

She chuckled and asked if she could change her mind later. I assured her it was not written in stone, maybe just dirt that we could scribble over later:

> I think it is most important for people to be transformationally agile. Learning agility is not sufficient. Learning agility is the ability to learn very quickly, and a lot of high performers have that ability. But I think what's much harder is to transform yourself, which is to, you know, take some belief that you feel really strongly about and be open minded enough to challenge that and to transform it. So not only the information that

> learning agility provides, but a transformational agility. I think that is really important for an officer to have. Then there's so much to emotional intelligence and social intelligence and cultural intelligence too.

Her goal was to infuse the curriculum with opportunities for the candidates to become aware of their preexisting thought-models and assumptions and grow in their openness to learn from those with different backgrounds, both from reading material and discussions. She pulled a book by Robert Keegan on Constructive Development Theory off her bookshelf to explain to me the science behind her thoughts. Most candidates were still stage-two learners—they saw the world as black and white and wanted authorities to tell them what was right and wrong.

The dean continued that academics needed to push the candidates outside of their comfort zones so they could move to more advanced emotional and intellectual stages. In this way, she believed the program could not only help the candidates improve academically but also transform them into future leaders.

I left the meeting feeling inspired by the potential of higher education and curious to investigate how these goals actually manifested in candidates' day-to-day lives. I knew from educational sociology that schools are not just a place to learn to add, write, and analyze—they are sites of cultural reproduction and socialization where pupils learn what tastes, cultural knowledge, and bodily practices are required to be considered a 'smart person' (Carter 2005; Martin 1998). In the preparatory school, we were also learning what it meant to be a 'smart officer.' I thought back to my experiences in the classroom so far: were the candidates transforming? Was I transforming? Or were we still stuck in old behaviors and habits? Was black and white thinking only becoming more entrenched due to the military hierarchy where we had to obey authorities? And how, if it all, did race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual identities inform the process of 'successfully' adopting the officer mind?

30 The Mason-Dixon Line

When I first sat down for dinner after mass athletics—still sweaty from our afternoon workout and ravenous from the exertion—I sat with some teammates from the infantry club. We were sitting on the right side of the dining facilities, the area where most of the White candidates ate. I had once heard someone even refer to the central walkway of the space as the "Mason-Dixon line" because it was so segregated: White candidates sat mostly on the right side and then Black candidates mostly sat on the left side. Of course, there are some mixed tables, but the mixed tables were more in the middle. When I looked across the dining facilities, I often thought about the book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* The author, psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum (2017), argued that as racial identities develop in adolescence, Black students are drawn to others who can understand and validate their experiences with explicit and implicit racial bias in school.

On the television suspended from the ceiling, there was a flash on the screen indicating breaking news. There had been another mass shooting. The subtitles indicated that the news anchor was talking about gun control and the conversation at our table followed suit. One teammate who was reading from the television erupted passionately, "Look at all of the gun violence in Chicago! And look at their gun laws—they are stricter! There are more burglaries because people know the people at home will not have guns."

I decided to probe him a bit, "So what do you think about the mass shootings? Would gun control have helped at all?"

"Nah, most mass shootings are from gang-on-gang crime, and the other ones are because of mental health problems. Mental health is the major problem that the country needs to focus on."

"That makes sense. Do you think there should be background checks for mental health issues when people get guns?"

"Nah, that won't make a difference. We just need to have a massive national campaign for mental health."

The conversation carried on for a while longer, and then my teammates finished their meals and got up to leave to do some homework. Athena Little and Kelly Carter had just arrived, so I walked over to the other side of the cafeteria to go sit with them.

Athena looked up at the breaking news on the shooting. She happened to be facing the television with the more conservative news channel. Each television was broadcasting a different news or sports station: "Of course, they are blaming it on mental health. If it's a Black person involved, it's just because they are violent. But when it's a huge shooting, they blame it on mental health. The problem is not mental health! It is gun control. Stop letting these people get guns!"

I was struck by how less than 100-feet apart parallel conversations were happening about the same topics but with wildly different perspectives. After basic training, we had sat as a squad for meals for a bit but as time went on, I noticed that candidates had self-segregated. When I asked some candidates why they thought the battalion had segregated, they explained that people wanted to sit with those they felt they had more in common with, either in terms of sports team or background. Black candidates mentioned just wanting to sit with people they felt comfortable with and whom they could be their full selves around, who understood their language, their jokes, and their hometown culture. A few months into the year, the conversations in the dining facilities were often siloed and in mini-echo chambers. It was only in the classroom we were forced to talk to each other.

31 Empathetic Imagination

I arrived in English class for Athena Little's presentation on why robots should replace police and judges. She had given me an overview of her speech that morning over breakfast; it was about how we should use robots for the police force, lawyers, and judges because robots are not biased. She was worried about sharing certain information—like that Black people experience more police brutality—because there were a lot of White candidates in the class and she did not want to, as she put it, "be too much." As we walked over to the class together, she remarked, "Why is society so afraid of Black men when White men are the ones shooting us up all the time? I am gonna be preaching and I am gonna be going crazy!"

The candidates had to memorize their speeches and they could not gesture or move at all when talking. The purpose was to help them practice being thoughtful with their movements and communication styles. It made me think of the line in basic training, "Why are you talking with your hands, candidate? Stay in the position of attention." The candidates mirrored this basic-training-esque restraint and positions when they gave their presentations. It was a creative expression within the confines of bodily discipline.

When it was Athena's turn, she moved to the front of the class and took a deep breath. She explained that she was bringing up an issue that was currently plaguing the country: "The country has proven time and time again that Black lives do not matter."

My eyes scanned the room for other candidates' reactions. I saw two White candidates shake their heads. They shook them again when she said that robots should take police officer jobs. When she started to give examples of why, I saw them nod. She shared the difference between claims and evidence and how our human flaws are putting people in jail: "We could program the robots to be fair because we are not fair to ourselves."

"How are you going to program them to be fair?" a classmate asked.

"Even though our founding fathers were racist, they wanted us to be equal." I saw the White candidate I was watching jerk slightly when she said that the founding fathers were racist. One shook his head when she said that juries are stupid. She explained, "because they think like you do."

Another candidate asked about gender and mood. Were these not also components of bias? Why was she just talking about race?

"I think the race is the biggest factor right now. But socioeconomic class does matter. I was looking at it in black and white"

I was close enough to overhear one of the White candidates whispering to the other, "of course she is." Other White candidates from across the room were making eye contact. Several put up their hands to ask questions.

"If Athena makes the robots, wouldn't they be biased again?"

Mr. Tedesco, a White English teacher who was a military veteran, was also scanning the room to see how his students were responding. He knew that in his classroom he had middle-class Black students who were the children of military officers, White students who were prior enlisted who had joined the military because there was no other way out of poverty, first and second-generation immigrants, students from the projects and trailer parks, the children of multimillionaires, students from rural small towns and big cities all over the North, South, East, and Western United States, and Guam—the only thing the students all had in common was that they had wanted to join the military, but even that could be a stretch since motivations varied widely. It could get messy because for some of the students, it was the only place where they were meeting people outside of their backgrounds. He wanted to see how he could strategically

utilize this messiness and discomfort to create new knowledge from the interactions. These conversations would encourage the students to think about bigger picture concepts that were taking place outside of the institutional walls, in this case, asking themselves: what is the purpose of the police?

Mr. Tedesco spoke up, “The idea here is that you would be able to determine justice on a societal level rather than an individual level. This is a can of worms, which is really exciting. The laws themselves are biased. The laws themselves can be racist and sexist. “

Athena chimed in eagerly, “Yes, and then comes us to enforce and create the laws.”

Another White candidate spoke, “If you put robots in places of cops and other positions, wouldn’t people have the ability to hack the system and change the result?”

Mr. Tedesco responded, “Can’t you bribe a police officer or jury with money?” I was surprised that no one seemed distressed by the idea of bias in general in the justice system. The conflict mostly came regarding if it was a racial issue.

Another question: “What would happen to reasonable doubt?”

Athena responded, “We would probably change the standard of proof.” Athena wrapped up the speech and her respondent took over:

“Cadet Candidate Little’s presentation, whether you liked it or hated it, whether you agreed or disagreed with her, is a very provocative topic and it is a very interesting idea that opens a lot of questions.” The comment was supportive, but I could not help but think that it was perhaps a way to diffuse, silence, or contain the conversation, as if it was too dangerous to let leak outside of the classroom.

Another candidate raised his hand, not ready to leave behind the debate just yet, and asked, “why don’t we replace all government officials with robots then?”

Mr. Tedesco responded excitedly:

> This is a really fascinating topic, and I am glad someone tackled it. Remember, as officers, you will need to give compelling arguments when you write orders, present speeches, and articulate your point of view. This is the point of the English curriculum here at the preparatory school and down at West Point. Whether you are writing a paper, giving a speech, or a brief you are always *arguing* with someone even if that person is not in the room. Great job, Cadet Candidate Little for bringing us such a complicated topic today.

As we exited the class, I overheard a White candidate say to another in a joking manner, "That was some major controversy!" They were both smiling and seemed in good spirits. Despite the differing opinions in the class, the candidates seemed to have engaged fully and respectfully, trying to bring their own perspectives into the debate.

Athena and I debriefed her presentation at dinner:

> My dad wants me to stop talking about race in America. He was mad about my speech. 'They are gonna think you're a rebel,' he said. He really was so mad. And coming from him? He's the rebel. I think I will need to cool it. I don't want to be like Angela Davis. People act like they're in la-la-land here. You can forget you live in America.

Over the course of the year, I was surprised to find that the classroom provided fertile ground for cross-cultural conversations about questions of race, class, gender, privilege, and inequality because we were forced to interact with people from different backgrounds. There were candidates from a multitude of socioeconomic, political, regional, racial/ethnic, and religious backgrounds all sitting together in the same room in the same uniform. It was unlike most other educational establishments in the United States, where most students come from similar social locations because residential segregation by class and race and the decisions of those with more resources to pursue private schooling.[109] Even among schools with more diversity, ability

[109] See, for example, DiPrete et al. 2011; Massey, Rothwell, and Domina 2009. Racial segregation tends to be the most resistant to change, as even middle and upper-class Black and Hispanic families are more likely to live with in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods than near White families of the same income level.

grouping and streams often create in-school segregation, further undermining cross-cultural interactions.[110]

Though the military is often considered a natural experiment on the effects of de-segregation, I had learned it was common for soldiers to be segregated into branches, tracks, and specialties based on identity characteristics. Combat arms versus non-combat arms and the enlisted versus officer corps were made up of largely different populations in terms of gender, race, and class. Even at the preparatory school, integration was a challenge because candidates typically preferred to socialize and spend time with those from similar backgrounds.[111] The classroom seemed to me like a tremendous and rare opportunity for cultural exposure and to push us out of our comfort zones in ways that were almost unparalleled in the United States.

As a sociologist, I was familiar with the "contact hypothesis"—which posits that prejudice between groups will decrease when groups work together in pursuit of a common goal, with stronger results in institutions that sanction and encourage intergroup contact (Allport 1954).[112] In these contexts, the boundaries between in-group and out-group blur or disappear. A meta-analysis of over 500 studies on intergroup contact found that these interactions typically do reduce prejudice, with a stronger effect in studies where participants were not allowed to avoid the interactions and for those who interacted in structured programs (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Still, more recent studies are divided on whether the reduction in prejudice not only applies to those in the immediate interactions but also to out-group members more broadly across settings (Finseraas et al. 2019; Mousa 2020). Researchers have also suggested that intergroup

[110] See, for example, Carter 2005; Gamoran 1987; Lucas 1999; Mickelson 2001; Oakes 1985.
[111] Legal scholar john a. powell (2002, 2008) argued that "true integration" is distinct from desegregation and assimilation. True integration requires more than just putting people together; it requires integrating structures and norms. See also Carter 2012; Lewis and Diamond 2015.
[112] See also Brewer 1996; Gaertner et al. 1996.

contact functions differently for in-groups versus out-groups, and may work for some identities, such as religion, but less so for essentialized identities like gender and race that are marked through physical characteristics and are default social categorizations (Tzeng and Jackson 1994). Others have found that institutional support for intergroup contact when there is unequal status or competition can actually increase animosity between groups (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Sherif 1966). Over all, desegregated settings have yielded far less benefits than social scientists predicted, likely because these settings are typically not truly integrated (Carter et al. 2017; powell 2002). I was curious about how intergroup contact at the preparatory school would compare to the findings in the mostly experiment-based studies and how dynamics would play out on a micro-interactional level. I wondered if the teachers were intentionally trying to utilize the diversity for student development, or as the dean had put it, transformation.

When I brought up my fascination with the diversity of the classroom with Mr. Tedesco, he laughed, his green eyes crinkling behind his round spectacles, and said that the preparatory school classroom was a social experiment. The candidates were thrown together and forced to interact with others whom they normally would not meet in the civilian world. One of the dynamics he thought was the most interesting to watch play out was between Black candidates from middle-class backgrounds and White students from lower-class backgrounds—there were tensions between racial privilege and class privilege. This could lead to interesting conversations about how people can be simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged in different aspects, and the validity of the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality. He had his students debate the belief that anyone could accomplish anything through hard work.

Mr. Tedesco saw the classroom as a time for the students to experience new ideas and new cultures because many were coming from very homogenous communities and held very

homogenous opinions about how the world works, which they learned from their parents, teachers, neighbors, or pastors. It was as if the candidates had been programmed with one perspective for the last 18 years and now was time to crack open their worldviews and show them that there may be other valid ways of looking at the world. During our conversation, I thought back to what the dean had told me about transformational agility; it was critical for the candidates to learn to identify their own beliefs and assumptions about the world and their place within it, to question the evidence behind these worldviews, and develop a critical way of approaching topics to avoid just accepting blindly what they had learned growing up. What could be better for this process than having to interact and communicate with others with different life experiences for hours every day?

First and second semester, all the English classes used the *They Say/I Say: Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* reader to discuss what makes a good argument and how to respond to others' perspectives.[113] The essays spanned discussions of immigration, race, gender, and sexuality in America. I was surprised that the teachers were not holding anything back in getting us to talk about relevant and contentious themes, which often included divisive topics in the contemporary political landscape. During basic training, we had been told that as members of the armed forces, candidates were no longer allowed permitted to publicly engage in political debates, so I had assumed that institutional authorities would shy away from and discourage political discussions internally as well. It was a mistaken assumption.

Some candidates were not pleased with the readings. They questioned their teachers—asking "why is our textbook so liberal?" as they came across so many essays on identity and

[113] See Birkenstein and Graff 2018.

minoritized groups. Where were the essays on White, straight, and conservative people? Were the teachers purposefully trying to stir up tensions in the classroom? Mr. Connors, a White teacher with a civilian background who liked to joke around with his students and play the devil's advocate whenever possible, would respond that the point of the readings was to expose us to viewpoints we likely did not hold or had not seen before and to complicate our own perspectives. This seemed to placate the unhappy students.

Mr. James liked to highlight that these essays were an intentional way of cultivating empathetic imagination: the ability to understand the perspectives of others and put oneself in their shoes. He tied it back to his experience as a combat-arms officer—which was hard to imagine for a man who seemed so soft-spoken and jolly—and share that one day this skill could help us better understand our own soldiers or put us in the boots of our enemies. An empathetic imagination could also help us develop a comfort with the unknown, a comfort with being uncertain, and there was nothing more confusing or uncertain than the battlefield. He assured us that reading and hearing differing perspectives, even if uncomfortable or strange, could lead us to be better officers. I nodded along thinking about how even the classroom was like a boot camp for "officerization." The institution was applying pressure to reshape our minds in all aspects of preparatory school life. The use of examples from the military realm to enforce examples in the classroom served to further inculcate us with an officer thought-model.

The readings in English and research projects in the enhanced performance class sparked conversations in which the candidates could share their own life experiences. We could hear the stories of another living, breathing person rather than just reading from the pages of a book. Many teachers encouraged us to share our stories because, as they put it, stories are a tool for

learning, making connections, and being able to better understand each other. The more we shared what we thought and believed, the more opportunities there would be for others to jump in to question us and correct faulty assumptions. At the beginning of the year, there were several times when one candidate made an assumption about a group and another would chime in to say something along the lines of, “well, wait a minute, you’re wrong here. It’s not that group of people who do this or say that or act in a certain way.” Candidates would take the initiative to correct each other and call out others’ stereotypes.

One topic that came up often was policing in America and feelings towards the police. Ms. Joseph, a White English instructor with a civilian background, noticed that White candidates were often surprised to hear that their classmates felt uncomfortable in certain neighborhoods because of the color of their skin. When the subject of policing came up in her English class one fall morning, a Black candidate shared, “when White kids see cop lights outside, their approach is, ‘Look, the cops are here, let’s go talk to them and find out what’s happening’ but when Black kids see cop lights, they run.”

Ms. Joseph turned to ask another Black candidate, "Is that your experience?"

"Yes! You just grow up knowing that if you see cop lights, you go home. Right away."

A White candidate nodded his head enthusiastically, his eyes big like he just had an epiphany, "Yeah…you’re right…we would go outside to see what was happening!”

Ms. Joseph took the opportunity to connect the discussion to what occurs when people grow up with different mindsets. A lot of it was learned behavior, she explained, because people must act differently in our country based on the color of their skin. However, when a candidate suggested that some people may miss out on opportunities because of the color of their skin, Ms. Joseph was quick to try to diffuse that notion. She reminded us, “it might have been the color of

your skin that helped you get here because we're a diversity program." I heard an underlying message in her words: problems might exist *outside* of the institution, but there was safety and a more equal society within the walls. Her perspectives mirrored individualist approaches to anti-racism, in which it was rooted in changing individual behavior and maladaptive mindsets (Dweck 2008), rather than addressing systemic issues in the legal and policing systems (Alexander 2020; Clair 2020; Cleve 2016). In individualist approaches, it is more difficult to see how these systemic issues may permeate even the most ostensibly meritocratic institutions like the Army.

During Black Lives Matter protests, Mr. Tedesco found that some of his students, particularly White candidates, had never even considered the idea that the police were not there to help people. It was outside their experiences, outside the movies they watched, and outside the stories they heard from their families. But other students, mostly Black candidates, had intense negative reactions when they saw police. Police were not their friends. Now these two groups were sitting right next to each other in the classroom and their gaps in experience was a fruitful place for conversations. He asked us in class: "Are the police here to help you or are the police here to help people that don't want you around? Are they here to remove you or hurt you?" Whether the police saw them as the problem or as the person with the problem was a major area of divergence among his students. Some candidates came away from the conversations working to reconcile their previous beliefs with new knowledge.

Yet, there was not always wide consensus or new epiphanies in the classrooms during these conversations. At the beginning of the year, Athena was surprised to discover that during these discussions other Black candidates were not always her allies. She noticed, not for the first time, the difference between the Black candidates from Black neighborhoods and schools, and

those who grew up around White people. When we were discussing police brutality with Mr. Tedesco, Athena mentioned how the police will arrest folks for just being Black and another Black woman snapped back, “That’s not true.”

Athena responded, “Girl, you are from an all-White neighborhood, you don’t understand.”

When we sat down together at lunch after that class with Marcell Artist and Lennette Aaron, who were both Black candidates from the South, Athena explained to them what happened. Athena reflected, “they don’t get it. They are totally delusional about what our race is going through. They just don’t act like me.” Marcell nodded. The other day he had asked in English if one of the characters in their book was Black because he was only allowed to work on the bottom of the ship in the oil section and was described as the fastest and the strongest. When he said that, there was a lot of ‘ooo-ing’ and ‘ahh-ing’ in the class that made him feel bad. Then a half-Black candidate said, “Why do you always have to make it about race, Cadet Candidate Artist?”

Marcell was upset because he was not supported by someone of the same race and that people always ‘ooo’ and ‘ahh’ when he tries to speak about these issues or diversity in general. Other candidates did not seem to notice underlying themes of racism, so Marcell thought it was important to bring them to the surface. Lennette brought up that it probably made the other Black candidates feel insecure and uncomfortable; they did not want to deal with what came up for them personally during those conversations, particularly Black candidates from White neighborhoods. They wanted to be able to camouflage their differences and just fit in. Black candidates who were trying to conform did not agree with drawing attention to racial differences because it made their conformity more difficult. Athena and Marcell nodded. They were three of

the handful of candidates who were from predominantly Black neighborhoods.[114]

The idea that some Black candidates would try to minimize racial differences made sense to me from a status framework. Shared status beliefs in the United States were that non-White individuals were less competent, and therefore, they were afforded less influence in group interactions. Thus, it was understandable that some Black candidates would want to draw attention to their high-status characteristics and act contrary to any negative stereotypes ascribed to them; they would want to showcase that they could easily and non-confrontationally fit in with high-status groups. As status research reveals, when low-status members do defer in a group, they are respected, seen as reasonable, warm, and good-natured, and benefit from the status "halo" of being associated with a high-status groups like West Point students (Jackman 1994; Ridgeway 2014, 2019:94; Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2017).[115]

Candidates from predominantly White schools and neighborhoods may have also been more accustomed to White, upper/middle-class tastes and practices and did not view the preparatory school culture as 'White' but rather as neutral and natural. Even those from predominantly Black high schools and poorer neighborhoods, like Raphael Lewis, may have picked up these habits through the media, advanced placement classes, or Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. Educational sociologist Prudence Carter (2005) referred to students with these characteristics as "cultural mainstreamers"—individuals who embrace institutional ideologies and cultural practices and have the "bodily-know-how" to do so successfully. At the preparatory school, "cultural mainstreamers" often identified as Black, Hispanic/Latin-American, Asian,

[114] Adolescents' radically different experiences in majority-Black neighborhoods and schools as compared with majority-White neighborhoods and schools are well-documented in the literature (Carter 2012; Massey 1993, 2007; Willie 2003). Being Black in 'Black spaces' is a different experience than being Black in 'White spaces' (Anderson 2022).

[115] These studies show that this process perpetuates status inequalities because it encourages lower-status group members to go along with the system for personal benefit.

Indigenous, or mixed-race but did not experience conflict between these identities and the military identity because they viewed educational and military culture as racially and ethnically neutral.[116]

On the other hand, candidates who felt that their ethnic and racial identities conflicted with institution culture were acutely aware of racialized behavior and less likely to try to (or be able to) downplay these identities to gain status. Carter refers to these students as "noncompliant believers." "Noncompliant believers" embraced the value of education, but their embodied practices were in contrast to the practices that educational institutions associated with being 'good students,' either because they lacked knowledge of dominant practices or because they deemed those who conformed as "acting White."[117] Or as Athena once called them, "Uncle Toms"—Black men who are obedient and servile to White people and had betrayed their cultural community.

It was the "cultural straddlers" who were able to successfully negotiate between performing normative institutional practices while simultaneously showcasing their distinct ethnic and racial identities. I found that for "noncompliant believers" and "cultural straddlers," cross-cultural conversations in the classroom and chats with like-minded peers over meals made their racial identities even more salient.[118]

---

[116] For more information see Carter 2005; Fordham 1988; Sellers et al. 1998.

[117] The phrase "acting White" was adopted when former slaves and freed Black populations needed a way to refer to Black individuals who did not affiliate with the slave experience or passed for White in exchange for high status and social success (Carter 2005; Fordham 1996). The popularity of the phrase grew again in the mid-20th century as poor Black communities viewed Black individuals with new wealth as "sell-outs" (Carter 2005; Frazier 1997).

[118] I found these candidates were drawn to peers who had similar life experiences and ways of performing their racial identities. These relationships gave them a sense of belonging as part of a community that understood their experiences with discrimination in and outside of the preparatory school. However, these relationships also further attuned them to other instances of discrimination. which sometimes exacerbated negative emotions and a lack of sense of belonging in the larger institution.

Catherine Poli, a White prior from the Northeast, was also uncomfortable during these conversations but for a different reason than Athena. Catherine was in Mr. Franklin's center for advanced performance class. Mr. Franklin, a Black teacher with a civilian background, aimed to create a "safe environment where people can say and feel what they want to feel" in his classroom. He provided space for his students to discuss whatever was on their minds and also do academic research projects on 'hot topics' like immigration and mass incarceration to gain facts on these issues. Mr. Franklin intentionally invited conversations about stereotypes, misconceptions, asking his White students directly: "Have you had contact with Black people before? What were your experiences? What is it like being around so many Black people here?"

When race came up in class, Catherine felt there was a clash around "the diversity factor," as she put it to me. She saw the Black candidates as swearing there was mistreatment, but that was just their bias. During one advanced performance class, when her Black classmate spoke about how the Black community is mistreated by the police, Catherine did not know whether to believe him. Was it true or was he was just regurgitating what was portrayed in the media? Her classmate kept saying over and over that Black folk were targeted and more incarcerated than Whites, but she wanted to see his evidence. Wasn't the purpose of doing research papers on these topics to gather real evidence to support their opinions? When he mentioned that a rapper said it, she concluded it was all biased. Catherine had noticed that most of the White candidates in the class stayed silent during these conversations. She realized that White candidates' perceptions of the laws and lived experiences in America were different from the Black candidates' perceptions. It felt like an "us versus them" situation. *Why does everything have to be turned into a race issue?* She tried to stay quiet because she did not want to get into an argument, and she also did not think it was her place to say anything as a White person.

Sam Anderson, a White prior from the West Coast, was equally disgruntled. He thought these digressions into hot topics were “tangents” and “unfortunate” and a sign of poor teaching. The teachers should keep the class more directed. Sam was intrigued, however, when his English teacher shared a story about a Black candidate who was not able to make it to the Academy because she had grown up learning to hate White people. The teacher had tried to help the candidate get past it but the woman had been taught that “White people were out to get her.” Sam saw it both ways: he encountered White soldiers who thought Black people “were a plague” and Black soldiers who disliked White people.

Malcom Cole, a Black candidate from the South, was often frustrated during the conversations about race and policing, particularly around Black men in prison. When he heard a White candidate say, “Well, if they would just stop doing crimes, then they would get a job,” Malcom responded, “Dude, the fact that they can’t get a job one way or the other is the point. That’s why they’re doing it.” He did not respond any further because he knew there was no benefit to getting into an argument: “Whatever, you do you.” The other candidate kept pushing the point with his friends, who all agreed. Malcom just tried to calm himself and not think about his loved ones behind bars.

In the third quarter, cross-cultural conversations erupted around the Civil War. The English department had decided to integrate history into the curriculum because matriculated candidates were struggling with history courses at the Academy. Several teachers had decided to teach Civil War literature, which sparked significant debates. Some candidates shared their view that African Americans should get reparations, just as Native Americans received reparations and Jews received reparations after the Holocaust from Germany. The conversation delved into a discussion of slavery and how there were probably more slaves in the world today than there

were ever in the United States.

During these conversations, Ms. Joseph noticed that Black candidates were happy to share their perspectives, but the White candidates seemed stuck. They kept repeating, "I don't know what you want me to tell you." Some kept arguing that they did not have ancestors who enslaved people. In some cases, their ancestors were poor sharecroppers and worked alongside the newly freed slaves. White students would just say, "I never did that. My family didn't do that. Why should I have to pay? I don't know what to tell you. It wasn't me. It wasn't my family."

Ms. Joseph explained to me that she saw these conversations as loaded because for some non-White candidates it was their first time being the majority in the room and having White people to talk to about these topics: "They feel empowered because they have the numbers and they unleash everything." At the end of the unit, she told me she had decided that the conversations, particularly ones around reparations, "did more damage than good with unity because students who were not minorities felt threatened by the aggressive nature of the conversations." I was struck by the words "unleashed" and "aggressive"—both of which made my mind flash back to the way several Black candidates were perceived during basic training in terms of their military bearing. It was the image of an emotional, angry, and threatening Black person, whom the White, rational, and objective authorities needed to constrain. I asked her how she knew the White candidates felt threatened and she said she could see it in their faces. She would not teach Civil War literature next year. Mr. Collins, a White English teacher who was a military veteran, told me he did not have any hard feelings or controversy come up when teaching about the Civil War. He had tried to complicate the discussions by having his students read a book about Black slave owners.

By the end of the year, I remained intrigued by the potential power of cross-cultural conversations in the classroom. But I also recognized that there were limits; some candidates would just shut off completely and disengage, particularly if the discussion was too distant from their own life experiences.[119] I also had the impression that there were often boundaries on what was appropriate to discuss. We could have critical discussions and cultural exchanges but ultimately the conversations would have to be reigned back in to emphasize the role of hard work or the Army's focus on diversity and inclusion.

The Army was often presented as a type of escape pod through which one could leave behind racial tension and poverty and find a better world. It was dangerous to connect the problem from 'out there' in the civilian world to 'in here' in the military. If the conversation was perceived as 'too radical' or 'too threatening' several teachers would shut it down for fear that the divisive nature of the debate would interfere with the Army's objectives for unity and the "all I see is green" mentality. The conversations were tolerated when they brought us together, not when they were seen as tearing us apart. Since teachers ultimately controlled discourse in the classroom, they were able to determine which topics, language, and opinions would be tolerated—sometimes restricting the voices of those like the "noncompliant believers."[120] Some teachers intentionally avoided bringing hot topics into the classroom because there was already so much material to cover during the preparatory school year. They could not afford for these tangents if they were serious about preparing students for West Point—grammar, writing style, and other skills needed to take priority.

For intragroup conversations to be effective, teachers had to masterfully moderate the

[119] See also Carter et al. 2017 on how, if not conducted properly, these conversations can increase resistance to addressing inequities.
[120] See van Dijk 1993:259–61 on the dynamics behind discursive control.

discussion, push us to question our assumptions, and create a safe atmosphere for constructive disagreements—quite a challenging feat. There also needed to be some trust between the candidates, and some knowledge of each other on a personal level, beyond just appearance-level characteristics.[121] It was much easier to listen to and consider the opinion of a person whom one knew well and perhaps had been through the trials and tribulations of basic training with or played alongside on the sports field. There needed to be a personal connection before one would consider a contradictory opinion. I noticed that as I got to know certain candidates as squad mates and teammates, and I knew more of their life stories and personality traits, I was even pushing the limits of my own preconceived beliefs about the world that had seemed so set in stone before coming to the preparatory school. Political issues that had seemed so clear cut before, became more complicated and messier. One White candidate from a very conservative family and school told me his experiences speaking with other candidates from different backgrounds completely altered his political orientation. Raphael shared how interesting it was for him to be around those from other ethnicities, and how the experience gave him a new perspective and outlook on life. Personally, I found that I could no longer disregard certain opinions as simply being 'wrong' or 'immoral' because I knew and cared about the people who held these opinions and now understood *why* they held these beliefs. I had to listen to competing perspectives not only because I was a researcher trying to better understand the experiences of the candidates, but also because they were the perspectives of my squad mates and teammates, people who had become important to me. We did not have to agree, but I was pushing the limits of my empathetic imagination, looking more closely into the evidence behind my own beliefs, and learning to be a bit more comfortable with uncertainty.

[121] See research on intragroup contact and when it does and does not work to reduce bias (Brewer 1996; Finseraas et al. 2019; Gaertner et al. 1996; Mousa 2020; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Tzeng and Jackson 1994).

32 Gaps

"I'm good at math, I really am, but my high school teachers were terrible. I am like did you fucking teach me? It makes me mad when I see a lot of White kids that are better at certain things. Well, not better, it is just literally a gap because I started here and they're already there." Athena Little motioned levels in the air with her hands. She had started down by her hips and the White students had started above her head.

It was a rainy October morning and Athena and I were walking back to the barracks together after precalculus to drop off our backpacks before lunch. I attended classes with her often, to learn more about the academic curriculum and see how she engaged in the classroom. Athena had pointed out to me as we passed the other math classrooms on our walk that the demographics looked different from our class. Had I noticed that calculus was made up of mostly White candidates, and even the middle-level math class was far more mixed racially than precalculus?

> They're not better than me, cuz I can easily get up there, but I need to learn it first because I can do nothing that I don't know. Just makes me mad. I am in precalculus, and I wanted to be there because I knew my school didn't prepare me. But just being in the lowest math—even though I am doing good, don't get it twisted—it just makes me mad because I feel like another statistic, like another Black person behind. It wasn't our fault; it was our schools' fault. I just get mad when I see other kids who it just like comes naturally to them, but I know it's because of their backgrounds. And it makes me really mad.

Athena was frustrated with her own high school education. She felt ill-prepared for the preparatory school math curriculum and that she had to work twice as hard to catch up because she had a cracked foundation. The gaps between her and other candidates sometimes felt enormous, but she was confident she would bridge them quickly. She refused to be another statistic that would legitimate detrimental racial stereotypes.

Athena was not the only candidate who picked up on the difference between their high schools and the preparatory school. Candidates wondered how they were supposed to catch up with their peers from well-resourced high schools when they did not even know the fundamentals. Some still had shaky understandings of basic algebra and fractions. Math was the class where differences were most striking, but several candidates were also struggling with science and English. They were, in the words of one teacher who was a retired officer, "fighting in a firefight on all 360 degrees."

I learned that given the wide disparities in resources and investment in public schools across the United States, candidates came to the preparatory program with dissimilar educational foundations. Most candidates were at the preparatory school because they had been deemed by the West Point admissions committee as academically at-risk but with high potential. There were plenty of candidates, like Kelly Carter, who were sent to the preparatory school for other reasons (athletic or medical), but other than these exceptions, the candidates were there because they needed academic remediation and the admissions committee thought that they had the potential to fill their educational gaps. Several teachers mentioned to me that they felt over time the gaps were getting larger, and the incoming candidates had further to go to catch up. Mr. James told me bluntly, "we are trying to make up for the inequities of our so-called American education system in nine months." He liked to imagine himself almost like a doctor on House, M.D. but instead of mending holes in hearts in the Emergency Room, he was repairing massive holes in education under an intense time crunch.

Teachers often discussed with one another patterns they noticed in the candidates based on background. One was regional: they could see stark differences between students who had come from the southern and northern United States. One teacher found that these regional gaps

were closing over the years, but, as long as public schools were funded by property taxes, students from wealthier areas would have better educational outcomes than those from less well-off areas. The teachers' observations aligned with the literature on educational inequalities in the United States, in which Black, Hispanic/Latin-American, and Indigenous students, as well as those from poor backgrounds, have less access to key educational resources, like textbooks, computer labs, skilled teachers, small class-size, and quality curriculum. Geographic and tax-based school systems worsen existing racial, ethnic, and class segregation in the United States. A report from the nonprofit EdBuild found that in 2016, school districts that served predominantly non-White students (what they call "nonwhite school districts") received $23 billion less in funding than predominantly "white school districts" with the same number of students (EdBuild 2019). These white districts enrolled on average 1,500 students whereas nonwhite districts enrolled an average of over 10,000 students. The nonwhite districts also received on average $2,226 less per student than the white districts.

Ms. Chase, a White Math teacher who was a military veteran, cautioned me that despite the statistics in the greater United States, the teachers had to be careful not to take a "cookie-cutter" approach: there was a wide range of candidates coming from different states, different backgrounds, and different socioeconomic statuses. Not all the candidates were coming from poor neighborhoods or broken homes—indeed most were from middle-class families. She had plenty of students from all racial groups that were very wealthy and came from solid homes. She hoped the majority would stop being blanketed in with the minority. Teachers often told me that they had learned over time to stop making assumptions about candidates' backgrounds based on their appearances—the large Black football player could be coming from a family with a general officer, the quiet Black woman's family had a private jet, and the White prior had been

homeless. There was really no way to know.

I nodded along, thinking of the existing literature on how students can experience differential treatments based on social groupings in school due to explicit and implicit bias. Studies have consistently shown that teachers have higher performance expectations for White students and those from the middle class than for students from Black and working-class backgrounds (Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson 1987; Carter 2005; Ferguson 2003). White teachers, in particular, were less likely to recommend Black students for placement in gifted programs and had lower projections for their abilities to finish high school and college.[122] Surprisingly, there was some evidence that in Catholic schools—which had high ethical, moral, and behavioral standards for all students—students from all backgrounds did better.[123] The preparatory school in many ways felt like a Catholic school with its strict discipline and high moral-ethical standards, and I suspected it too would lead to better outcomes for Black students than regular civilian schools.

Mr. Tedesco told me how proud he was to work for an institution that was designed on the premise that even within the working class there are people capable of being good officers. There was an ethos that within a different environment some individuals could have excelled; so, the institution was going to give the candidates this ideal environment for 10 months, taking care of all their basic necessities and even providing a salary, to allow for optimum growth. Yet, it could be a bit complicated. He found that some teachers could take on a "White savior complex" where they imagined the institution as saving students from their bad academic backgrounds and deficient cultural systems, which he thought was very colonialist. He saw a pervasive idea that

[122] Having a Black teacher can neutralize these effects. See Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge 2016; Nicholson-Crotty et al. 2016.
[123] See, for example, Bryk, Lee, and Holland 1993; Payne 2008:117–19; York 1996.

the candidates arrived broken if they came to the preparatory school, particularly the Black candidates. That these students had nothing to offer but should be wiped clean like a computer server—"wipe them and load them with good software as if all they had ever needed in their lives was to go to a good, White school." He paused for a moment to clarify. Of course, no one really used this language or metaphor, but he noticed this savior complex lurking all around the institution. I saw Mr. Tedesco's perspective aligning with critical education theorists who view education as intimately intertwined with power. Contrary to traditional perspectives that view education as neutral and apolitical, critical theorists see it as imbibed with the cultural tastes and codes of the dominant groups, in the case of America, Anglo-Europeans.[124] This system of values then perpetuates a "cultural pathology myth" for those from other backgrounds (Carter 2005:166).[125]

As Athena spent more time at the preparatory school, the differences from her high school continued to shock her. Her high school was poorly funded. Textbooks were handed down for years, the facilities were crumbling, and desks were covered in graffiti.[126] Here she had brand new textbooks, the rooms were bright white and clean—she even got to use an electronic smartboard and was given a laptop! The teachers were passionate and available. She now understood why her White peers were so far ahead of her back in Dallas. They learned everything! Whereas the teachers at her school were teaching for the test because funding was based on test scores, at the other schools, teachers were teaching for a deep understanding of the

[124] See, for example, Hale 1991; Hilliard 1978; Kincheloe et al. 2017; Spencer, Swanson, and Cunningham 1991. and Cunningham 1991

[125] Asian Americans may experience different outcomes when they are perceived as "model minorities" (Lee 2015; Wong et al. 1998)

[126] Athena told me about her high school during our interviews and I visited the school during our home visit.

material. Her school was focused on survival; the others had the luxury to allow for exploration and creative pedagogy. She concluded it was a difference between going to a "Black school" or a "White school." She laughed telling me, "Here I just feel like a smarter person. I really hate saying it, but it's really true, White schools kinda are better."

When I asked her what made this a White school even though it was majority non-White, she expounded: there were many Black students at preparatory school, but Athena was only one of a handful that went to a majority Black high school. From speaking with Kelly, she had learned that most of the Black candidates in Calculus had gone to private high schools, or at least lived in White neighborhoods. They were used to having good teachers. Her high school was 95% percent Black and a high percentage of the student body lived in public housing projects. There was basically no funding gathered from property taxes. Students talked back to the teachers taking up precious class time, there were always fights, and students would skip out on class to go do drugs. She assured me, "we were smart, but we didn't have the resources that other schools had. White people, I don't know what the hell they do, they just have some good-ass schools. I hate that I am saying this, but it is just true. It's so sad." I thought it was interesting that she had stressed so many of the structural issues that lead to resource inequality at schools but in the end attributed it to the individual characteristics of "White people." Yet for her the lesson was simple: at the preparatory school—a "White school"—she was learning more than she could have imagined.

33 Privilege Walk

On a chilly evening in February in the Open Forum Club, we did a privilege walk. We had just finished eating pizza—one of the incentives to come to the club—and Captain Kennedy introduced the activity. He would read out a statement and we would take a step backward or forward if it pertained to us. He had learned the activity during the training for his M.A. in Organizational Psychology at Columbia, a degree that many tactical officers received before starting their positions at West Point.[127]

We got up from our chairs, cleared a bit more space in the center of the room, all lined up at the halfway point of the classroom, and Captain Kennedy began:

> If you are a male, take a step forward.
> If there are times in your life when you skipped a meal because there was not enough food in your house, take a step back.
> If your parents worked more than one job, take a step back.
> If there were people in your school who looked like you, take a step forward.
> If you are White, take a step forward.
> If you grew up in a completely urban setting, step back.
> If your family had health insurance, step forward.
> If you had bookshelves in your house, step forward.
> If you feel good about how the media portrays your culture, step forward.
> If you have been a victim of discrimination due to your gender, race, religion, or sexuality, take a step back.
> If you were passed over for employment, take a step back.
> If you grew up with a parent or guardian that was incarcerated, take a step back.
> If you grew up in the USA, take a step forward.
> If you had access to art and music, take a step forward.
> If English is your first language, take a step forward.
> If your parents are divorced, take a step back.

By this point, the group was nearly entirely segregated by race.

> If your parents are supportive of your decision to be here, take a step forward.
> If both your parents have a high school degree, step forward.
> If both your parents have a college degree, step forward.
> If you had pools or beaches available to swim in growing up, step forward.

[127] The activity was based on sociologist Patricia Hill Collin's matrix of domination (Collins 2002; Lucal and Ender 2005)

If you attended a private or charter school, step forward.
If you felt unsafe walking alone at night, step back.
If you were read to as a child, step forward.
If you relied on public transportation, step back.
If your house employed servants or gardeners, step forward.
If you had access to computers, step forward.
If you had high-speed internet, step forward.
If you were given an allowance, step forward.
If someone has spoken for you when you did not want them to do so, step back.
If anyone in your immediate family struggled with substance abuse, step back.
If you lived in an area with high crime and drug activity, step back.
If you were asked a question on behalf of people who share an identity with you, step back.
If your parents told you could be anything you wanted to step forward.
Now take a look around the class. What are your thoughts?

A Black candidate who was in the middle of the room shouted back to Malcom Cole, "dang dawg, you're back-back."

The candidates were mostly congregated in the middle of the room, with some in the very front and some very far behind. The exercise was showcasing the impacts of cumulative advantage and cumulative disadvantage in a highly physical and visceral way. Childhood experiences adding up to one's "place" in the room. My mind jumped to the literature on how individuals typically do not just experience discrimination or unequal outcomes in one sphere of their lives—they experience a combination of forces on micro, meso, and macro levels. For example, a child born into a low-income family has a higher chance of being born with a low birth weight, which often has negative consequences for developmental health (Conley, Strully, and Bennett 2003). She also is more likely to be in a single-parent home and experience parenting styles that disadvantage her in navigating institutional settings as compared to her upper-class age cohort (Lareau 2002; McLanahan and Percheski 2008). If she lives in a low-income neighborhood, her neighbors are also likely facing economic hardships and the community may not be able to invest in important resources like parks, libraries, and good

schools (Massey 1993). Because she is a woman, she will be seen as less capable of performing certain tasks and might receive lower wages than her colleagues who are men, as well as have fewer opportunities for promotion (Ridgeway 2011). If she is Black, Hispanic/Latin-American, Asian, Indigenous, or mixed-race, and perhaps an immigrant, she may face other barriers in the labor market and discrimination in micro-interactions (Gonzales 2011; Pager, Bonikowski, and Western 2009; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). All of these factors will produce more stress in her life, and be detrimental to her health (Geronimus et al. 2006; Williams and Sternthal 2010). Of course, not all individuals follow the same trajectory and experience cumulative disadvantages—it is not a sealed destiny—but there is a strong correlation of these events in the life course.

Captain Kennedy held up a wastebasket he placed at the front of the room, where we were stepping toward, "This is the American dream. This is access. This is doors being open for you, the high life. Take your shot at the American dream."

He gave us each a piece of paper to crumple and take a shot into the wastepaper basic from our current location. The candidates who had taken the most steps were able to just place the paper directly into the basket, whereas candidates, like Malcom, who was at the other far end of the room, just dropped the paper to the floor because he knew there was no way he would make it. Those in the middle tried to throw. Some of them made it in and others missed.

Captain Kennedy explained, "For some of you, your experiences in life brought you all the way over to basket so it was a clear shot; for others, you made it into the basket with a good throw; for some it was a mix of hard work and luck. How does it feel to be you right now?"

A White candidate in the front commented first, "I still had to work really hard to be here. Yeah, I didn't have to deal with substance abuse, and I mean, I grew up in a good town in Texas and both my parents had jobs."

"Of course, you did, and you should not feel guilty about where you came from. It's just important to acknowledge different experiences." Captain Kennedy turned to Malcom to ask how he was feeling.

Malcom shrugged, "This is no news for me. I've always been highly aware of this."

I thought about how meritocracy— the belief that individual achievement through talent, hard work, and a character alone should shape opportunities and rewards—is baked into American ideology as the "land of opportunities" (Kluegel and Smith 2017:52). This ideology seemed to be particularly powerful in the military, which sees itself as a great equalizer and a force that recognizes pure performance. Scholars have shown that meritocracies remain deeply embedded with status inequalities (Castilla and Benard 2010; Ridgeway 2019). Although institutions like the military that use public and explicit evaluations help reduce the impact of status bias, social identities still do influence even the most explicit and clear evaluation programs and influence later judgments and behaviors in self-fulfilling ways. [128] I figured this was part of the reason why I repeatedly saw candidates from high-status groups receiving the top preparatory school awards.

The connotations of status in terms of worthiness and esteem then *legitimate* unequal outcomes for those of different social groups because of perceived "merit"—because those who are high-status in the group are perceived as deserving of and earning their positions, their greater access to valuable resources and positions of power are seen as fair (Ridgeway

[128] Public and explicit evaluations provide socially valid signs of competence that lead team members to challenge existing performance expectations, raising the position of low-status candidates and lowering the position of high status candidates (Anderson and Cowan 2014; Berger, Ridgeway, et al. 1998; Goar and Sell 2005; Ridgeway 2019). However, as research on value differences in White and Black officers' narrative evaluations reveals, explicit and public evaluations do not erase status bias and inequalities (Johnson 2001).

2019:5).[129] High-status people 'look right' and 'look the part' in positions of power and in receiving awards because their position accords with larger shared status beliefs about who is competent due to legitimacy bias (Ridgeway 2019:116–19).

In a meritocracy, it is more difficult to address inequalities in outcomes because they are seen as natural and fair as a result of innate capacities (Castilla and Benard 2010; Ridgeway 2019). People justify social inequality as a result of the differing merit of those who make up different social groups. Individuals are also incentivized not to recognize status or legitimacy bias because this recognition often leads to negative emotions for both those from high-status groups—who may no longer feel they deserve their positions or rewards—and low-status groups—who are more aware of the discrimination that thwarts their achievements (Major and Kaiser 2017). Through these mechanisms, status beliefs can perpetuate and legitimate inequalities into the future even within the most ideologically meritocratic institutions like the military, in what is called as the "paradox of meritocracy" (Castilla and Benard 2010).

We then reflected on the experience as a group. Barbara Fenton, a Black Hispanic woman in our company from the South, said she was surprised to see candidates she thought were from similar backgrounds as her either way in front or way behind her. She had grown up in an upper-middle-class area in Florida surrounded by White retirees. Money was never tight, but her parents tried to make it seem like it was tight to encourage them to start working as teenagers. Barbara also noted there was no diversity in the front: it was very male and White. There was more diversity towards the middle, but it was almost all Black candidates in the back of the room.

[129] This process relates to durable inequality because when status hierarchies develop in workplaces, schools, government and health institutions, and other organizations that distribute valued life resources (income, education, healthcare) those who are perceived as low status gain less access to these resources, which later reinforces to shared social beliefs about their lower competences in an achievement orientated society like the United States.

Another candidate mentioned that the question about having access to books surprised him, he had taken for granted all the books in his house and his family's commitment to education. One commented that despite all the differences, all the candidates had made it to the preparatory school and were in the same room together—shouldn't that prove something? This was an equal opportunity place.

Captain Kennedy responded, "I don't disagree that anyone can make it. Take what you said about everyone making it—do you think there was a difference between you getting the paper in the basket versus others?"

"Yeah, it was a lot easier for me."

"You slam dunked it. The people behind you were hitting the rim. The people back here," pointing toward the back of the room, "they didn't stand a chance. If they were really good, they got it close, but it was a lot harder. The people back here were defeated. Cadet Candidate Cole threw it on the floor and others around him threw it anyway knowing it wouldn't be close. This is literally a metaphor for life."

Brandon Phillips, a White recruited athlete from the South, followed up, "Yeah but the one good thing about this country is that in almost every school, there are people trying to help people who may not have a shot. We are all here because someone helped us, but we have to carry it the rest of the way."

Another White man who was on Brandon's team jumped off: "Look—businesses want motivated people not just people with privilege. My grandma came here from Europe with nothing. Immigrants work a lot harder. This doesn't just have to do with race."

A Black candidate, who was standing in the middle of the room, piped up:

> I kinda disagree, even though businesses want motivated people, that is kinda luck. I say that because Malcom is in the back. We all made it here, but Malcom had to work harder.

> People in the back had to work harder. Not that people in the front didn't have to work hard, it's just that people in the back had more obstacles and had to work harder. I don't want my children in the back. That is a driving force for me. I am going to work hard. I can provide my kids with stuff so they can be closer. The people in the back are the exception, it wasn't a given. I didn't even hear about West Point until the end of my high school career, I wouldn't have come here if I had made different choices about the classes I took. Me being here is an exception. I got here by hard work.

The conversation continued and turned towards affirmative action.

> Lisbeth Sokolov chimed in:
>
> I have to think of this from two standpoints. From a personal standpoint, I think it's fucked up because I really wanna go to this school but they're rejecting me because of something I have no control over. Or it's one aspect of me that they don't want. But then from a statistical standpoint, if I were the commandant of West Point and I was accepting all these kids, I would say, 'Well, alright. We can't just have a school of White kids; you know how bad that looks? Alright, let's do this percentage Black, this percentage Asian American, this percentage of Mexican or Hispanic.' Statistically, from not a personal viewpoint, they're doing it for a good reason, because you want a diverse army and you want an army where kids from all colors are like, 'I wanna go in there. Cause they got Filipinos there.' But from a personal view, I would say it sucks ass. You have no control over it, so what are you gonna do? Apply to another school.

Sam Anderson whispered to me under his breath:

> This is probably an unpopular opinion, but I think in how strongly the school pushes for affirmative action, they take it too far. They identify, or they recognize, that there are still systematic racisms throughout the United States that put, essentially, minorities at a disadvantage. And so West Point will admit lower quality students that are African American, Asian, Hispanic, or whatever over having a higher quality White male. That is leading to lower quality officers in the corps.

I had heard Sam's sentiment expressed many times from White men candidates, particularly those who were priors with working-class backgrounds. Existing scholarship suggests that these beliefs can stem from feelings of anxiety about maintaining one's social positions. Social psychological studies show that White individuals were more likely to have a physiological stress response when applying to companies with pro-diversity or affirmative action policies versus those with neutral policies (Dover, Major, and Kaiser 2016). Those with multiple high-status characteristics (White, middle or upper class, men) tend to be shielded from these threats

responses because they had cumulative status advantages on which they could rely, whereas those who were advantaged in one sense (White men) but disadvantage in another (working-class) were more sensitive to threats to their social positions (Hochschild 2016; Ridgeway 2019:146; Williams 2017).

Sam shared that his perspective was affirmed when a White sergeant from the tactical team told him that there was a wide racial gap in applicants for the candidate chain of command. Even though the preparatory school was majority Black, nearly every leadership applicant was White. The sergeant explained that they sometimes had to force Black candidates into leadership positions to: 1) ensure there was not an outside appearance of an only-White candidate chain of command; and 2) build up the Black candidates' confidence in their leadership abilities. This idea frustrated Sam and tarnished his vision of the candidate leaders: were his peers selected because they earned the positions or because the institution could not have too many White candidates in charge?

The debate continued back and forth. At the end of the hour, Captain Kennedy brought it back together:

> One of the reasons that the prep school exists is that everyone at the prep school for whatever reason—not just race or money—has something they need help with. We are here to give you support and get you closer to that garbage can. You shouldn't be ashamed of wherever you are in the room. I guarantee everyone had to work really hard to get here. The point is we can all take a minute and talk to each other and try to understand where we came from. How can we have empathy for the people in the back of the room and the front of the room? We all deserve to be here, but it is important to understand there are barriers. Hopefully, the exercise was helpful to open your eyes up a little bit to society. Let your emotions diffuse a bit because it is still raw, and then talk to someone.

Malcom and I walked back to the barracks together. We discussed how these activities are really meant for privileged people to open their eyes, as those without privilege had known this the whole time—no surprises, no wake-up calls, just life.

34 Top Performers

During the evening study period, some candidates studied alone in their rooms, some went back to the academic classrooms to use the smart whiteboards, and others studied together in the company day room. The barracks felt like they had transformed from a basic training site into an academic campus almost overnight. Now candidates were always doing homework or worried about coursework. I tended to spend the academic study periods sitting alongside the candidates, writing up my field notes for the day, or giving academic help if someone was struggling. The dean had given me permission to help the candidates if they were struggling because all the candidates were encouraged to help one another—it was part of building teamwork and camaraderie—and the teachers could use the extra support.

This early October evening, I started the study period with some teammates from the infantry club in the company day room, where they were sprawled out on the coaches and floors, lying on their stomachs, working in small groups. After a while, I decided to go see what was happening in the rest of the barracks. I walked down the hallway—stepping over candidates who were studying with their legs outstretched—back to our suite.

Kelly Carter was sitting at her desk working away calmly and methodically, like she did everything else. The assignment did not require much of her brainpower, so she had *Dear White People* on Netflix running in the background. She had a big pink fluffy blanket wrapped around her shoulders. Several candidates had brought comfy blankets and pillows in their civilian suitcases on Reception Day and those who had not, had quickly ordered some online, as the issued blankets were itchy, and the pillows were flat. It was these colorful items that made the bare-walled and sterile rooms feel a little bit more like home. We were allowed to have one picture frame on the bedside table, and we could put whatever we wanted on the desk bulletin

board, but everything else had to be kept uniform, neat and orderly. Civilian blankets and pillows had to be stashed away whenever we left the room because the barracks always had to be ready for inspection; yet these small comforts in the evenings could make a big difference.

Academic life at the preparatory school was going smoothly for Kelly. This was the domain where she knew she could excel; it was her comfort zone. Math had always been a part of her life. Her grandfather was a math professor, and her grandmother had a Ph.D. in education. Both her parents had thrived on science and math in high school. Neither had been allowed to play team sports growing up—her mother swam, and only one Black student was allowed to play baseball at her father's high school and someone else was better than him—so sports were not an important part of her household. Whereas other people she had grown up with had been pushed to look for success in sports, her family had encouraged her to invest in her studies. She was taught that academics, not sports, were the key to getting a good college education. Her method had worked; she had received several full-ride scholarships to schools across the country. Even at a military academy, she continued to believe that math—more than military science or any military knowledge—was going to be the most important for her future success.

The preparatory school curriculum was of similar caliber to Kelly's advanced placement courses in high school. She had gone to a private Christian school that bordered middle-class suburban neighborhoods on one side and public housing developments on the other. When she had started at the school the population was mostly white students. Over time, her school diversified because of a voucher system that would pay for private education for students in areas where the district education was failing. Her parents had paid out of pocket for her to attend private school since kindergarten, and when her father explored the idea of maybe using the voucher system because the local public school was indeed failing, they discovered they

would have to send her to the failing school for a few years to receive the voucher. By that point, they figured Kelly was so accustomed to private school life that the local school would be too much of a shock and interfere with her educational trajectory. Even as the school diversified, Kelly was still one of the only Black students, in particular Black young women, in all the top classes. She graduated first in her class and was the Valedictorian.

Now Kelly was getting get As and Bs without much effort. The academic load on top of all the other aspects of preparatory school life was irritating, but the material itself was not hard for her. Each week in the academic year, she was able to move up in the ranking of the battalion. She had gone from being ranked at the bottom during basic training, to inching up towards the top.

I left Kelly to enjoy her show and finish up her work and went back out the door. As I exited, I could see across the hall into Angela Lil Boat's room through her open door—our doors had to stay open during the study periods. She was hunched over her desk, head in her hands, trembling slightly. She seemed to be crying softly. Lily Rose had pulled up a chair next to her.

I knocked on the door frame, and she looked up. "Hey. Are you okay?" I asked.

"I just don't get it." She paused. "I've been working on this homework for hours and I am not getting anywhere." Her voice trembled. "I have so much other work to do too."

"Is there anything I can do to help?" I asked.

"No. I am helping her," Lily asserted in her blunt tone. Lily had finished her math homework a few hours earlier because all the material was familiar from her high school Calculus class—it was basically all review—so when she saw Angela struggling, she decided to see if there was anything she could do to help. Lily was doing her best to keep Angela calm and

explain how to solve the equations.

I left them to it, and continued my rounds, coming upon Lisbeth Sokolov who was chipping away at her homework in the hallway. It was not hard for her—she was pretty sure her curriculum in high school had been more difficult. She had already taken Calculus, Physics, Chemistry, and Advanced English so all the material this year was a review. The problem was the workload; there were just so many assignments every day and she was so tired and burnt out. I sat down next to her on the floor, and we worked away in silence for the rest of the study period.

When we gathered back together for company cleaning time before lights out, Lily rushed over to us. She wanted to show me that she had texted her dad saying she was helping other students. She was proud of herself,

"I know I am not good at the military stuff. But I am really good at school. A lot of people here are really stupid and slow, and I am smart."

Lisbeth, who was still sitting with me, chuckled, "Wow, Lily, you're so humble."

Lily joked back, "Yep, I am the smartest and the most humble."

Like Kelly, Lily's experience at the preparatory school had done a 180 at the start of the academic year. The candidates who were struggling in basic training were now on top. Lily liked to laugh to me, "who are the ones who need help now?" She decided that even though she felt other candidates had not helped her with the physical aspects during basic training, she was not going to hold back on helping others now that she was working from her strengths.

As we swept, I asked Lily why she thought she was able to do so well academically at the preparatory school. She told me that it was because of her drive to go to West Point. During her junior year of high school, she had spent the entire summer studying for the SATs and ACTS for

two hours every day. She had taught herself a lot about math and grammar, so she figured she was now doing better than those who had not made the same kind of effort. I could not help but ask her if she thought there was a difference between her high school and other candidates' high schools, having had so many conversations with Athena about educational inequality and knowing that Lily was from quite an upper-middle-class area.

"Well…," she explained that she had gone to a large public high school that had almost 5,000 students. Overall, though, she thought that her high school was probably harder than the other candidates: "Maybe their schools didn't offer as many opportunities as my school did? We had a lot of AP programs and good teachers there. So maybe I had more opportunities to become better academically?"

Lisbeth laughed that her Asian genes made it easier for her to do well academically here. Then a more serious look passed over her face and she told us that she felt pressure to do well because her parents always reminded her how they had emigrated from a destitute country and gave up everything in their own lives to give her an opportunity.[130] This inculcated into her that it was important to be humble and hard-working. She wanted to be a role model for her siblings.

As the year proceeded, Lily often expressed to me that she had difficulty understanding why some of the candidates had so much trouble grasping the material. When Kelly was present during our discussions, Kelly would add in a concerned tone, "How are they going to survive at West Point if they can barely pass here?" Lily shrugged. What was the problem? Either those students just were not trying hard enough, or if they were trying hard and still failing at the preparatory school, they clearly did not have the academic aptitude for West Point. I found these

[130] See Lee 2015; Lee and Zhou 2015 on the Asian American achievement paradox and "model minorities."

discussions quite ironic because I had heard so many parallel conversations from other candidates about how they could not understand how those who could not pass the physical tests or were so bad at rucking were going to survive at West Point—during which sometimes Kelly and Lily would come up by name. There were tensions between those who excelled academically and those who excelled militarily. It felt to me that each group was trying to measure its worth against the other, to find a sense of belonging or a way to matter at the preparatory school. Of course, there were a couple of superstar candidates who were great at everything, but most of the candidates were explicitly at the preparatory school because they needed to grow. It was designed as a development program and everyone had something to work on, but depending on the group, certain skills were seen as more valuable and useful for officership. I saw each group as vying for top positions in the institutional status hierarchy by advocating that their respective strengths were the most essential to fulfilling the Army's mission. They dealt with feelings of inadequacy or failure in one area by diminishing the importance of that area for the overall mission. Gaining status was important because it came with increased influence in the group and positive emotions, and ultimately a sense of belonging in the group and in the profession. Military authorities could then leverage this quest for status and belonging as a way to accelerate the (re)socialization process and gain buy-in from the candidates.

35 Humble Pie

"Ms. Chase, you forget the minus sign."

Ms. Chase was exasperated but she tried not to show it on her face. It was the same thing at the start of every year. A handful of her Calculus students would nitpick at everything she did and give her intense pushback because they were upset that they were no longer getting the grades they had in high school. They would correct her in class or ignore her corrections on their work—assuming *she* must be the problem because their high school teachers loved them, and they had always had As before.

Why was it always White men from wealthier backgrounds that gave her a hard time? Yes, over the years there had been a couple of women too, but the majority were these White upper-middle-class men. Not once had she had this experience with a non-White candidate. She did not think it was because she happened to be a woman; no, the only difference would be if she were back in uniform and briefing them as a military superior. Then they would not dare to talk back. Her colleagues who were men had noticed the same pattern as well—the candidates who were coming in with racial, economic, and gender privilege acted like they did not *need* this place, likely because their parents could pay for other options.

When Ms. Chase encountered candidates like this, even if they were bright, she was hesitant to recommend them for the Academy. Would they be willing to put in the effort and push themselves to the limit? Did they have the resilience and grit to push through tough situations? Or would they just expect to rest on their laurels? They had to convince her they had what it takes to be good officers.

She took a deep breath and looked over the equations written on the board. It would just take some time until they realized that maybe they just were not as smart as they had always

thought they were and ate a little piece of humble pie. They usually came around. She sighed and responded to the student: “No. Actually, the negative sign canceled out.”

36 The Fighters

It was inky black outside, with the moon obscured by clouds. The seasons were changing; the sun was going down much earlier than on long summer days. Angela Lil Boat and Carlos Estrada, a mixed-race man from the Northeast who identified as Africano, were sitting in Ms. Smithy's office under the fluorescent lights. Ms. Smithy was working on the whiteboard. The board was full of equations in different colored markers. She would pause, talk through an idea, stop for some questions, and then keep going. Tonight, they were going over homework problems, but other evenings they would review foundational algebraic concepts that Angela and Carlos were having trouble grasping. It had become almost a daily ritual for the three of them. Angela and Carlos would come in immediately after lunch for additional math help, then they would spend as long as they could there before military science and mass athletics, and then come back after dinner. They would stay in her office as late as possible. With her seemingly endless patience, Ms. Smithy would go over each problem again and again and again until it was clear to her pupils.

Ms. Smithy did not mind staying late to help students like Angela and Carlos who put in the effort and had the bravery to ask for help. Her children were in college now and her husband worked long hours, so she figured the most valuable use of her time was to stay. She warned me though—her dark eyes narrowing and flashing in contrast to her light skin—students who came to her for help without even trying on their own first would be sent immediately back to their books. Her comment made me wonder how authorities would gauge intention and determine who was 'trying hard.' When was help-seeking behavior encouraged and when was it seen as a signal of laziness and the lack of personal discipline to try on one's own? How would the manifestation of these attributes in the classroom (expressions, emotions, body language, and

language) compare to the way they were assessed on a ruck or run? I turned my attention to Angela and Carlos to learn more from their experiences.

Angela and Carlos were barely scraping by in math. Both had originally been placed in Precalculus with an Introduction to Calculus ("PIC") but when they had failed the first quarter, they were moved down to the basic precalculus class to relearn the fundamentals. For Angela, the difficulties did not emerge from her high school's resources. In fact, she went to a private college preparatory program from kindergarten through 12th grade where most of the students were from exceptionally wealthy families. It was during high school that she developed her work ethic: she arrived at school an hour early every morning to get help before class; she met with teachers during lunch; and after cross country practice she would go to meet with teachers again and stay late into the evening. Angela was accustomed to the academic struggle and had no false sense of security at the preparatory school. She had the same mentality in academics as she did on company rucks and runs—she would not give up until she literally collapsed.

For Carlos, the gaps in his education went back to childhood. He had grown up in the Detroit projects with housing and food insecurity. He had head injuries from being jumped as an adolescent when a concussion knocked him out and made him blind for a couple of hours. He took on martial arts to protect himself in the future but was kicked in the head and hospitalized again. When he went to a military school for high school, he thought he had filled in most of his educational gaps but when he arrived at the preparatory school none of the material made sense. As hard as he tried to learn it, it would not stick. Yet, he refused to give up. He had grown up having to fight for everything in life—nothing was handed to him on a silver platter. The motto of the preparatory school—Desire, Faith, Effort—was his personal anthem. If he had the desire, and put in the effort, and kept the faith, then they had to let him stay, right?

Despite their low grades, I learned that Angela and Carlos' teachers and the tactical team respected them because they demonstrated the grit and resilience that the leadership was looking to instill in the candidates. The military leaders would talk to us endlessly about learning to push through our pain and gaining mental toughness, and the teachers often spoke about the importance of perseverance in the classroom. At the beginning of the year, teachers across subjects told us that we would have to work a lot harder here to get lower grades than we did in high school. The key was attitude and effort. Even if we got Cs, we should be proud of them if we were putting in the hard work and maintaining a positive attitude. We were warned that those who did well in high school should be prepared to be "smacked in the face." They may soon be at the bottom of the class. Indeed, there was constant whispering amongst the candidates: "Why is this so hard? I did so well in high school and now I am struggling to pass." Even some of those who had been in all Advanced Placement classes in high school now had Cs on their report cards. Kelly, Lily, and Lisbeth were the exceptions to the rule.

Ms. Chase told us we would need to get used to the "academic struggle." We might be used to the physical struggle, mental struggle, the economic or home life struggle, but now it was time for the academic struggle. Using math, she was going to teach us how to persevere—how to get knocked down and then not give up just because we got smacked around a little bit. It was all about resiliency and grit: to get back up, dust ourselves off and go running at the problem again. The classroom was a metaphor for combat.

Mr. Jacobs had paused dramatically during one of our first classes and took a minute to look each of us in the eye, and asked: "Has anybody ever held your feet to the fire and made you jump over the fence? You got to clear this fence or you are going to fall on your face." He had found his students' gaps were less due to high school or region and more about whether they had

ever been fully challenged before and developed the necessary toughness to overcome adversity. It was a question of who had used their charm or good looks to skate through high school. These students could have been the best at poor-resourced schools, athletes who never had to work hard because they were hometown heroes, or students who were able to cater to their teachers' personalities; it could be anything that allowed them to get by on something other than academic skills. He called candidates who he suspected were in this category into his office early in the year and told them, "Your good looks and your charm are getting you nowhere in college, or at West Point. You can talk to me after class. You can be the nicest kid in the world, but I'm not going to grade you differently. You have to do the work to get through." He aimed to instill in us the message that not everyone would get a trophy; we would have to put in the effort to get results. I noted how this implied that he himself was a completely objective, fair, unbiased authority figure—that nothing relational, emotional, or socio-cultural would impact his assessment of us. An "all I see is green" ethic in the classroom. He stressed that there was a standard that everyone had to meet just like all soldiers had to run a two-mile run in a certain amount of time. That was the beauty of the U.S Army.

Ms. Becker liked to tell us that in 10 years we were probably not going to be taking derivatives. We would be dealing with other types of problems and our ability to persist would be essential. Hard work was not just a hoop to jump through on the way to good grades; it was a significant part of the 'officerization' process. Her usually jolly face would become a bit more serious as she said:

> Grit will help you get through whatever you're doing 10 years down the road when you really can't stand the situation, just like you couldn't stand taking derivatives. But you learn to put your mind in a place where you're like 'I'm just going to get the job done,' and think positively, and that affects the whole environment. This is true whether that's in math class or 10 years down the road when you're in charge of a company or a unit that is even bigger than a company. You may forget the quadratic formula, but you are not

going to forget what it's like to put in the effort and not give up the fight.

Learning to fight was another habit of mind we were encouraged to adopt and practice now in the classroom. Ms. Becker even had a poster in her classroom that said "persist" to remind students to not give up. The teachers saw the long hours Angela and Carlos were spending on their homework, their diligence in coming to additional instruction every day after lunch, the emotions they expressed after doing poorly on an assignment, and the passion they showed to get better despite repeated challenges as evidence of this fight.

And Angela and Carlos kept fighting. Week by week, month by month, Angela was able to pull up her grades to Bs and Cs. Carlos' status remained in question.

37 Separations

Carlos Estrada took a deep breath to center himself. There were 15 minutes left before his academic intervention—a meeting with his company tactical team, teachers, and the dean to discuss his current academic performance and his future at the preparatory school. Candidates who had below a 2.0 at the end of the first quarter were required to have an academic intervention to see if there may be a chance for them to turn their performance around. The hope was that by making the candidates aware of the seriousness of their situations, and that their whole leadership team was working together to help them succeed, their grades might improve.

Carlos wore his blue Army Service Uniform and sat in the front of the academic hallway, breathing deeply and trying not to crease his pants in the black leather chair. He was scared. But he was also optimistic because God had placed him in this situation before and had carried him through.

When he was in high school, Carlos had been in a fight with his friend, and he almost was kicked out of the school district. The night before the meeting with the school board, he and his friend came together to work it out and wrote a letter to the board explaining what had happened and that it was a misunderstanding. Now again, he was praying to God, *how can I present myself in front of the academic intervention board?* He started writing a letter: "Good morning, everyone, I am in this position, but I have learned from this experience and will get better." He thought to himself, *yes, this will help me make it through again.*

The dean opened the door and called him in. She explained that his teachers saw that he was putting in the effort, but his grades were not where they needed to be. His company tactical officer congratulated him on being a great soldier but said he needed to put in the work academically now to be able to go to the Academy.

Carlos took the feedback in stride, nodding at each piece of advice, and left the meeting ready to fight for his place at West Point. West Point was his destiny: how else could the universe have aligned in such a way to bring him here? A young man from the Detroit projects at the premier leadership institution in the world? Carlos refused to let down all the people who had believed and invested in him.

Yet, his grades stayed at Ds and Fs despite spending hours a day on homework. He put in more and more time until he barely was sleeping at night. He would often fall asleep at his desk until his roommate would wake him up and send him to bed. He kept track of all the hours he spent studying so he could show his teachers. He retook all his quizzes and redid all of his homework so he could learn from his mistakes. Towards the middle of the second quarter, he felt like he was starting to understand the material. He returned from Thanksgiving break ready to pull up his grades by the end of the second quarter when his company tactical officer called him into his office:

"Hey Cadet Candidate Estrada, I'm sorry to tell you this but you are being separated."

Damn. Castro thought that he would start crying, but he only shed two tears. "Well, can I at least go to class? Can I at least do anything?" His tactical officer and Sergeant Rae Compton, who was his company non-commissioned officer, also looked like they were about to cry.

"No. The decision is not up to me. Once a candidate is separated, they can no longer attend classes. You need to sit with the rest of the candidates at the duty desk until you leave."

Carlos was devastated. *You act like I hurt someone. I am just trying to work around the system cause I'm still trying to get an education here.*

Carlos refused to accept the decision. He had a lot of fight left in him. His room at home was a closet—a literal closet his mom had made into a bedroom to make space for his siblings.

He was not going from a barracks room with a window back to that closet. He was not going to go from eating three full meals a day back to eating one. He had more at the preparatory school than he had ever had in his life, and he knew he had to convince the leadership that he cared enough to stay.

Carlos hurried back to his room and opened up *Precalculus for Dummies*. He started to read it and realized he was retaining the material. He had learned so much at the preparatory school, and now when he was finally getting the hang of things, they were going to take it all away? *No.* He went back downstairs to talk to his tactical officer.

"Sir, can I at least talk to my teachers?"

"Okay, yes, but there is nothing you can do to change the decision."

"All right."

Carlos resolved that he was going to treat every day moving forward as a regular school day until he left. He asked his classmates for the assignments and did his homework every afternoon. He would turn in his homework to his teachers and still go ask for help during additional instruction time. He would ask his teachers to review what they covered in class and ask them for help on the assignments. He did not want anyone to look at him like someone who had quit; just because he was being separated did not mean that he was a quitter. *They kicked me out, that's the difference.* He wanted to show his teachers and the tactical team that he still cared; he was not like those other candidates who had been separated and given up hope. The other separated candidates had stopped doing everything because it would not count. They had no fight, no determination. But he knew how much the preparatory school and the Army valued grit and resilience, so he was going to show them that he had those traits in abundance.

A few weeks later, Captain Kennedy called Carlos into the office again. It was time for

him to go home. The plane tickets were arranged, and he was leaving back to Detroit that weekend. Carlos took a deep breath, thanked Captain Kennedy for everything, and said that he would be back soon. He would keep putting in the effort and, with desire and faith, he would be back at West Point soon. He would continue to reapply until he had an acceptance.[131]

When Carlos told his mentors that he was being separated, they let him know they were still there for him wherever life may take him, whether it was to reserve officer training corps, enlisted ranks, or back to West Point after he filled his academic gaps at a community college. They were proud of his fight and knew with that attitude he would be successful in life no matter where he ended up. When she found out what had happened, Alice Ramirez, a Hispanic prior in our company, turned to me and said, "I've never seen someone want something so badly, work so hard, and still fail."

Each academic separation of a candidate that wanted to stay at the preparatory school was heart-wrenching for me. These individuals had come to define themselves as officers-in-training, with all the sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging that came along with that identity, and then it was all called into question. The first batch of academic separations occurred at the end of the second quarter with Carlos and then on a rolling basis throughout the spring with about four candidates leaving during the year and another eight who were disqualified for admission to the Academy at the end of the year. On average over four academic years, approximately 12 out of the 230 entering candidates do not continue to West Point because of academic reasons.[132]

[131] In the end, Carlos decided not to reapply. He was discouraged and had depression for a while. After he left the preparatory school, God assured him that everything was going to be alright and that He had a bigger plan for him. Carlos is now a non-commissioned officer and is grateful that he was separated because he would not be where he is today otherwise.

[132] In some cases, candidates were disqualified for multiple reasons, including a combination of academics, medical, physical, and misconduct.

Upon each separation I would ask myself: is the preparatory school the great equalizer if certain candidates who embodied the motto "Desire. Faith. Effort" were still being forced to leave? Were those with the rockiest high school educations and life circumstances still being left behind, or was it possible to fill the gaps in one year if one had the academic aptitude? I was not so sure. Perhaps the preparatory school remained like civilian schools that studies found do more to enforce and mirror students' social standings than equalize them (Bourdieu 1973; Carter 2005; MacLeod 2009; Willis 1981). The convergence between poverty, racism, and educational outcomes had been so powerful in the United States for so long that I was not sure a one-year program could alter trajectories. The majority of Black, Hispanic/Latin-American, and Indigenous candidates were actually from quite middle-class backgrounds; but for those who were not, sociologist William Julius Wilson's (1987) phrase "the truly disadvantaged" echoed in my head.

Moreover, was academic ability so essential to success officership?[133] Why did the implied idea that someone was not 'smart enough' to be a good officer irk me so much more than the idea that one was not 'strong enough' to be an officer? Both perceived strength and intellect were greatly shaped by general status characteristics; people assumed those from certain identity groups were smarter or stronger than those from other groups. Still, strength to some degree felt more like something one could improve on even later in life, whereas 'smartness'—or perhaps more accurately a solid educational foundation—felt like something that was much more ingrained with social inequalities in the United States.

Eventually, I conceded that it was not necessarily about being 'smart enough;' rather,

[133] Research has shown little to no correlation between academic record at the military academies and later efficiency reports as military leaders and professional trajectories (Janowitz 1960:134). On the other hand, general officers were more likely to have participated in extramural athletics than their classmates.

those who matriculated into the Academy needed to be able to keep up with the academic rigor. The preparatory school had to conform to the system that West Point had created, and the teachers and tactical team often encouraged those who had been separated to apply to reserve officer training programs where they could still commission and even offered to write letters of recommendation. An officer needed a college education, but it did not have to be from West Point. Even in the moment of failure there still was a glimmer of promise for officership.

I found that the teachers were of two minds about separations and often internally conflicted. On one hand, they wanted to give their students as big a chance to succeed as possible. They wanted them to be able to grow, learn, and reach their potential. This was the value embraced after the switch was made from an attritional to a developmental model at the preparatory school: instead of accepting more candidates and cutting the bottom percentage each quarter, the school would accept fewer candidates and invest more time and effort into the development of each one. On the other hand, keeping students in an environment that was not a good fit was detrimental to self-esteem and limited their possible options for the next year because they might not have time to apply for other opportunities. Not all the candidates had the academic abilities to succeed at West Point and keeping a student who would not be successful at the preparatory school or Academy was stringing them along. The most humane path was to let them go earlier. There was also the component of wasting taxpayer dollars; could the preparatory school justify spending federal funds on candidates that might not show a return on investment?

When I brought up separations with Ms. Becker, Carlos's math teacher, she told me that situations like Carlos's were heartbreaking for her. Her students that worked extremely hard but still could not catch up were the toughest to let go. She was less upset when students who were not showing any initiative or positive attitudes were separated. The students who did not put in

the effort may have missed out on a great opportunity, but they would learn to apply themselves over time. Her heart broke for people who might not be able to afford to go to any other college; they would be struggling all their lives. But she recognized that not everyone could go to West Point, even if she wanted them to go and they wanted to go. Every time one of her students was separated, she would say a prayer for them. She worried that not all of them would make it out of the holes they were born into.

When candidates were separated and no longer permitted to go to class, I would often sit with them at the duty desk in the entrance to the building and chat about their next steps. If it was early enough in the year, then they had time to apply to another college. Recruited athletes who were separated started contacting recruiters at other universities. The preparatory school coaches would help make connections for those they saw as having put in the effort, and this was a way to place these students in new colleges. The hardest for me were the candidates who were separated when the college application deadlines for the upcoming year had already passed. They would look at me beseechingly, questioning—*what am I supposed to do now?* Now they would be two years behind their peers who went straight to four-year colleges from high school. I felt caught in a terrible paradox: the more time the preparatory school gave them to try to improve, the fewer opportunities they would have for the next year if they ultimately did not make the cut. The candidates who had been separated earlier in the year had begged for more time, and those who were separated later were upset that it was too late to apply for alternative options.

As I sat with the candidates as they prepared for their departures, I found that each dealt with the questions around identity aspiration and failure in his or her own way. Some decided to attend college programs with reserve officer training tracks. They were not going to let this

setback interfere with their identity aspiration of being an officer. Others were considering forgoing college and enlisting directly. They spent their time at the duty desk looking into local recruiting stations online; again, finding ways to reinforce their new identities as soldiers, even if they could not be officers.

On the other end of the spectrum, some candidates were relieved to be done with the Army and ready to embrace their freedom at a civilian school. They often told me that even if their grades had been higher, they would have left anyways—which may have been true or a way to convince themselves that they had agency in this decision to leave. There were a few, like Renee Edmonds, a Black woman in our company from the South, who left it ambiguous whether they were being forced to leave or exiting on their own terms, emphasizing that it was just not the career for them. I wondered the extent to which candidates might reframe the narratives of leaving for themselves and others to preserve self-image and status in the group in the face of a rupture in *who they thought they wanted to be.* They were recalibrating their identity aspiration to now aspire to a civilian, not a soldier or officer, identity. Their identity-failure to be an officer was (re)conceptualized as an identity-achievement, affirmation, and rejection of the institutional ideology that West Point was the best path for success in life.

Still, I was surprised to discover that many separated candidates had decided that they would try again—spending the next year taking community college courses or going to a local civilian school and then reapplying for West Point. Preparatory school leaders had emphasized again and again that a West Point education was the key to success in life. It was the premier leadership development institution in the world. It was the top public college in America. Graduates were recruited into top companies and made millions. Their words inspired even those without lifelong dreams of attending West Point. Thus, when candidates who had adopted this

ideology were separated, it often felt like a half-a-million-dollar opportunity—as senior leaders liked to describe it to us—was being ripped from their fingertips.

38 Let me Axe you a Question

"Let me axe you a question."

"ASk, Cadet Candidate Little. It's aSk not aXe."

"Oh, okay. Let me aSk you a question."

Ask versus *axe*—pronunciation that set apart candidates from different areas of the United States and different racial groups. Some teachers were intent on correcting students who said *axe* to ensure that they had proper pronunciation moving forward. It was essential for them to speak Standard English because this would be the expectation at West Point and in the Army. Discipline was required to communicate clearly and correctly, and this correctness fed directly into clarity in writing and speaking. Mr. Tedesco, on the other hand, saw this as a type of linguistic privilege. *Axe* was a common transposition of letters and there was no difference between saying *axe* and *tis,* except for *tis* sounded upper class so it had been put into the canon instead of being pushed aside.

Mr. Tedesco spoke to us often about linguistic privilege. Some students benefited from financial privilege, he explained, others from racial privilege or gender privilege, but linguistic privilege was often overlooked. Although he grew up poor, his general American accent aided his ascent into academia. He saw the linguistic expectations at the preparatory school—and higher education in general—as code for a White, upper/middle-class communication style. The language of a society would always reflect the ruling class, which was the wealthy White population in the United States. I nodded along thinking about the work in critical discourse studies that views language as a social practice in which ideologies, power relations, and

inequality function in spoken, written, and multimodal discourse.[134] Dominant groups' power was maintained and reproduced through language. Research had revealed a strong parallelism between social power and access to discourse across genres, participants, audiences, scopes, and texts. Thus, dominant groups' linguistic styles and ideologies were spread through television, newspapers, radio, politics, and novels and over time became taken for granted as normal and correct (van Dijk 1993). In this way, Standard English becomes equated with proper speech and minoritized groups learn that their speech styles are incompatible with school success (Carter 2005; Morgan 2002; Perry and Delpit 1998). To gain approval from authorities and appear 'smart,' they must adopt the dominant linguistic practices.

Mr. Tedesco continued that he could not change what the world expected from us. But he hoped to at least show us that what the world expected from us was not fair or right and was based on the privilege of those in power. In the classroom, Mr. Tedesco would emphasize:

> Just because the Army does a certain type of style with language, or with hair, or a thousand other things, it doesn't mean that that's good. It's actually good to push back on things that are inherently rooted in things like White supremacy and sexism. Language and accents are one of those things. Pastimes can sometimes also be a thing—like what pastimes are considered legitimate? What activities are considered legitimate? What activities are considered those of the subaltern, the lower-ranked?

He brought up how golf was an upper-middle-class activity and now candidates could learn to play golf at West Point. Lisbeth Sokolov smiled when Mr. Tedesco said this because she was on the golf team now and loved how she felt like a White, rich man when she was on the course. I thought back to the brief when we learned about proper dinner etiquette for military balls—how to eat, drink, and dress at the fanciest dinner parties. We were learning the proper bodily movements, behaviors, and tastes of the White, upper-middle-class. Nadav Butler, a Black man from the South, brought up how he thought cadet candidate casual was ingrained with White

[134] See, for example, Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000; van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 2013; Wodak 1995.

ideas of professionalism—khaki pants, with a collared shirt, a brown or black belt with matching leather shoes was how the White, upper/middle-class dressed.[135] We wondered: was acting, speaking, and dressing like an officer really just the same as acting, speaking, and dressing like a White upper/middle-class man?[136]

[135] The cadet candidate casual uniform was what we were allowed to wear after basic training if we were leaving the institution on the weekends as a battalion or for pass.

[136] Being a 'good' officer has long been tied to being a 'gentleman,' as is reflected in the 1950 *Armed Forces Officer*: "The military officer is considered a gentleman, not because Congress wills it, nor because it has been the custom of the people at all time to afford him that courtesy, but specifically because nothing less than a gentleman is truly suited for his particular set of responsibilities" (Department of Defense 2013; Janowitz 1960:219).

39 All I See is Green?

Captain Kennedy sat behind his desk and leaned back in his chair. He was wearing a combat uniform with the two captain bars in the middle of his chest. His light brown hair was cut short in a military-style and his muscular stature gave him away as an infantryman. Athena Little and Kelly Carter were sitting across the desk from him. The three were engaged in an intense conversation about racial dynamics at West Point, the preparatory school, and in the "big army." They had these conversations often.

Captain Kennedy was from a White, working-class family. He grew up in all-White neighborhood, went to an all-White school, was on sport teams with almost entirely White players, and joined the infantry, the branch of the Army that is demographically the Whitest. The preparatory school was the first time he had led mostly non-White soldiers and women.

"We have a representation issue in West Point and the Army. It is a big deal and an important thing that we need to fix," he said.

He continued that the "all I see is green" or "I only see Army green" argument was "bullshit." The Army was segregated in a lot of ways, and it was "so offensive to ignore everything that a lot of minorities have overcome and historically overcome." He saw the mentality of "oh, well, we're all the same now" as implying, "I don't care about anything that led you to this point, your family, your generations." The language of "we are all on the same team" or "we all wear green" was meant to contribute to the objectives of respect and equal opportunity but it ignored soldiers' contexts. It was still an "old school message" to hear but he did not think it was still acceptable for people to say. Kelly and Athena nodded along vigorously, adding emphasis and their own thoughts.

The first time Kelly and Athena spoke to Captain Kennedy about these issues they were

shocked. They had not expected those words to come out of this White, Infantry, super *HOOAH* officer's mouth. Athena had looked at me with big, shocked eyes saying, "Captain Kennedy is woke!" after a brief when he discussed the racial breakdown of branches in the Army. Athena had originally stayed away from him. She had seen him as the opposite of everything she was: White/Black, male/female, violent/peaceful. But, after hearing his perspectives on race and racism, she started talking to him more and more. His understanding of her feelings around being Black at the preparatory school made her trust him and relate to him.

Kelly figured that Captain Kennedy could relate to them because he grew up poor, since economic disadvantage could help one understand racial disadvantage. She often spoke with him about how it was hard to keep Black candidates at the preparatory school and West Point because they did not feel that they fit in. After these conversations, Athena and Kelly felt energized to be role models: "We have to get through it so that we can be that person where they can be like, 'Oh, well, they did it, so I can do it.'" By the end of the year, Athena told me, "Me and Captain Kennedy have the same life story!" She told me that she wanted to be just like him as a leader. Yet, Athena acknowledged that Captain Kennedy was still not so great at understanding women's experiences. She figured it was because he had been in the infantry so long.

Athena and Kelly were also very close with Sergeant First Class Lee. Kelly found there was consensus among the Black candidates that they would want Sergeant First Class Lee to be their company sergeant because he was so relatable. He had light brown skin and bright blue eyes, and usually was smiling with a wide impish grin. Throughout his life, he had moved through many cities and locations with different ethnic makeups. In some places, he was considered Black and in others, he was seen as White. Occasionally, he fit right in. He identified as a human—not Black or White, though when really pressed he would say he was African

American and Italian.

Kelly, Athena, and Sergeant First Class Lee would sit in his office for hours chatting about anything on their minds and he would provide them with emotional support. He had daughters and grew up around women so was very comfortable working with women candidates. They became his "adopted daughters." When Athena and Kelly would try to talk to him about race at the preparatory school, he would tell them to stop obsessing about it. He stressed, "You're in the Army. At some point, you got to stop seeing color. We don't care about what you look like. We really want the best of the best." He would repeat to them, "Are you up here with the best because you're Black but you suck? That's not how the Army works." He found that candidates did not grasp this sentiment because they were used to affirmative action and the media:

> You don't just keep using the go-to card, 'Oh, you're gonna hold me back on this because I'm Black.' 'No, I'm holding you back cause you suck. That's not why you're on extra duty. You did something wrong. You messed up. That's why you're here. Stop trying to blame your skin. You just suck."

Sergeant First Class Lee saw women candidates using their gender in a similar way, "They put themselves in a little bubble, and then they blame it on being females."

When he invited candidates to help with a training he was organizing over the weekend, he showed the Black women he mentored in our company the list of volunteers: "Tell me what is wrong with my list." There were only two women, the same two White women that were always volunteering and were active in candidate leadership and athletics:

> I'll point this out because you guys will say you don't get to do things because I'm holding you back. But this one is volunteer and none of you guys are on it. Now, look at this list. The history trip, same thing. So next time I hear you say we're holding you back, you slap yourself because this is all volunteer. I see no females on those lists except the same two. And then you're gonna say that they are kiss ass. No, they're better than you. That's it. You completely had a chance to do better. You chose not to. It's all you, buddy.

The next day he got emails from most of the Black women in the company trying to volunteer.

Sergeant First Class Lee found the same mentality true for gay candidates. They also put themselves into a bubble and would accuse everybody else of being a problem. He told me the story of how Isaac Peterson, a bisexual, mixed-race candidate, had met with the chain of command saying that they did not do enough for the LGBQ[137] community. Sergeant First Class Lee was confused—if the candidate wanted to be the representative of the LGBQ community at the preparatory school, why was he not planning events? "You are at the preparatory school and you're the only gay person that's come out and said something. So how about you do something? I don't blame us. That's not my culture. I don't know." He saw it similarly to yelling at him because he did not celebrate a minority religion's holidays. He did not know how to celebrate these holidays:

> Look, if you let me know, I'm all for it and I'll learn. Same thing with gays—just let us know and we're all for it. But don't blame us cause there ain't enough going on. We don't even know you're here. So, yeah, they have that same mentality where you're like, 'woe is me. Everybody else is to blame.'

When Kelly and Athena challenged him, he would acknowledge that there might be a few rotten apples in the military but there was a greater purpose to being in the Army. He did recognize that candidates did treat each other differently, but he felt that this mostly fell along athletes versus prior service lines. It was the "people that don't know anything about the military versus the people that have this huge military pride." That is where conflict would emerge. If a candidate wore a do-rag in uniform, the prior service candidate was going to be mad. That is why it was essential for the candidates to get to know each other and have roommates from different backgrounds. He would try to get Athena and Kelly to move on and look past these concerns—

[137] They did not use the term 'LGBTQ+' because transgender candidates were not officially allowed at West Point during the research period. See Ender, Rohall, and Matthews 2016 for cadet attitudes on transgender individuals.

knowing that as a whole the Army was better than that. And it was enough for Kelly and Athena to know that Sergeant First Class Lee acknowledged their feelings, compared to other leaders who would pretend inequalities did not exist at all.

When Black candidates would come to Sergeant First Class Lee's office often with problems, he would try to "nip it in the bud." He promised them that if an incident was actually racial discrimination, he would make sure whoever did it was kicked out of the preparatory school. But most of the time, the incident was distorted through "their Black goggles." When candidates would come to him saying they experienced discrimination, he would ask for the evidence and he would speak to all the people involved. Usually, he would tell them, "It has nothing to do with your race. You just are really jacked up."

During the year, I learned that there were two main streams through which the leadership and candidates addressed diversity and racial identity at the preparatory school. These streams reflected Captain Kennedy and Sergeant First Class Lee's approaches. Some military staff, cadets, and candidates resisted the tendency to see race or other differences between soldiers. They only saw green, not the person behind the uniform. This perspective mirrored color-blind ideologies in other organizations that the literature suggests make racism more difficult to combat and undermine diversity initiatives.[138]

Conversations would often get uncomfortable between them and Captain Kennedy. Captain Kennedy chuckled, explaining to me: "You know how painful it is when you show people behind the curtain, and they start to see themselves in the mirror. It's painful and it's hard for people to stomach that reality, because they think it's like an attack that they're racist." He

[138] See Portocarrero and Carter 2022 for a review of this literature. See also Block 2016; Bonilla-Silva 2021; Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011; Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, and Embrick 2004; Burke 2017; Ray and Purifoy 2019.

would try to clarify to his conversation partners, "I'm not saying you're racist. I'm saying that our society has racism built into it. We just need to acknowledge it and work with it and do better."

During the weekly tactical team meeting, Captain Kennedy occasionally brought up his thoughts on diversity and inclusion:

> You guys have to understand this part of this job. We are an all-White staff. White male, combat arms staff leading majority-population. We have to be very cautious of how we are coming across and that we are understanding cultural differences. We are not making concessions on standards, but having empathy and understanding that sometimes coaching a young African American male from a rough background from the inner city is a very different leadership endeavor than your standard upper-middle class White male prior service kid, right?

He stressed that even the developmental model of leadership could be cookie-cutter. It applied the same mold to develop every student—take a person, it doesn't matter what color, creed, race, or ethnicity, and put them through the system and they'll pop out a good officer on the other side. To be successful in creating a diverse officer corps, the leadership style and coaching methods would have to change to meet the needs and reach the minds of the heterogenous soldiers coming in. The same cookie-cutter would not work on all types of dough—some dough with raisins, nuts, chocolate chips, or sprinkles might get stuck. Captain Kennedy noticed that the preparatory school was explicitly dedicated to increasing the diversity of the officer corps, but had done nothing to change its style of development:

> We have not made a new leadership model that does anything to approach diversity. We brought in all these diverse candidates, but we've done nothing to change our leadership styles, coaching methods, nothing. We have changed nothing in the way that we lead to adapt to different demographics. Nothing. So, what the hell are we doing, right? You look down and see the outcomes of that and, again, it even connects down at West Point. It's the Black cadets not getting selected for leadership positions. Getting worse military grades than their peers because all their tactical teams and everyone's White and everyone looks at them and says they're not as good a soldier because they're different.

I nodded along when he spoke, thinking about how those who are lower on the status hierarchy

are evaluated more harshly. The soldiers who did not *look* like stereotypical officers were deemed less competent and given less influence, leadership positions, and worse military grades. What would it look like to change the leadership style and coaching method to expand past the model designed for White, middle-class men? Would it be changing the rhetoric and language? The bodily practices? The whole socialization processes? One of the first steps might be to gain more leaders with different identity characteristics and diverse life experiences; yet to be successful in the Army, senior leaders likely had already adopted and ingrained the existing military ideologies.

The pushback to Captain Kennedy's approach was mainly that the Army was a merit-based society. Captain Kennedy saw this view as:

> Everyone's the same. We all wear Army on our chest. It doesn't matter what our color or creed is, your performance is what dictates your grades. It's this pull-yourself-up-from-your-bootstraps bullshit—like we all started at the same point on day one and you either put up or shut up and your performance will speak for itself. It is a failure to appreciate everything that has led to now. All the privilege and lack of privilege and education and opportunity in that person's life when compared to yours. Most of the candidates that I've had this conversation with tend to see it as, 'Well I work hard, I earned everything that I have. So, that's why I'm here. They must not be working this hard, and they just don't understand.'

Captain Edwards, another White company commander, had never thought about racial dynamics in the Army this way before and started to repeat Captain Kennedy's approach when he spoke to candidates. Other officers, sergeants, and candidates absorbed his mentality, while others rejected it as "too liberal."

One senior leader's approach was that candidate development had to be individually based until they reached the stage in their career where the "all I see is green" mentality was inculcated in them. He recognized that candidates were coming with different challenges and contexts. He did not know, "what scars and preconceived notions were there." He gave the

example of a classmate who had grown up in an all-Black neighborhood, so when he came to West Point seeing so many White people was unsettling. The leader wanted to create a system where candidates were not coming to him after five days to tell him that they wanted to quit because they did not fit in:

> How do we make them feel like they fit in? It's very easy for us in the Army to say, 'Well, we're all green. That's what we do.' That takes years to figure out. It takes years of growth and development and understanding the Army and building that into it. So yeah, I can say that. But for that kid that's just shown up, they don't see green. They will eventually if they stay in, but they don't necessarily see it upfront.

In sociological terms, the leaders had the challenge of supporting diverse candidates before the Army ideologies had been fully inscribed into them and superseded their prior identities. He often asked himself if he was providing enough support for each candidate whether it was along racial, socioeconomic, gender or religious lines: "Whenever they look at me, what do they see and what do they think about? Am I somebody they want to be? Am I something that's totally foreign?"

A different senior leader firmly believed that he did not see race or gender. He just saw soldiers. He explicitly told the battalion he did not care about where people were from or their backgrounds—they all had U.S. Army on their chests now: "I don't give a shit what your background is. I care if you are good. Put forth the effort you want to see in an army leader."

40 Mistaken Identity

Angela Lil Boat walked past her English teacher in the hallway.

"Hi, Renee Edmonds."

"Oh, sir, it's me, Angela Lil Boat."

The teacher laughed: "Oh sorry, all you small Black females just look the same."

41 Equal Opportunity

When our hot meals ("mermites") arrived in the field, we were called up to get our food by platoon. I sat down on the grass with Renee Edmonds, Barbara Fenton, and Jasmine Washington, three Black women from the Southern states. Eating in the field was the only time we could sit where we wanted and talk quietly during meals. It was one of the best parts of basic training.

When Jasmine's squad leader saw her with us, he made a sarcastic remark about her sitting with us instead of her squad mates: "Oh, you're too good for sitting with your squad now?"

Renee responded, "It is hard to be the only female in your squad, especially if you are the only Black female."

The squad leader, a White man, shot back, "Aren't we all fighting for equality?"

Renee quipped, "We are fighting because ya'll made it hard for us."

He walked away in a huff, and we launched into a discussion about how hard it was to be the only female in a squad. Jasmine and Renee mentioned they could not wait until basic training ended and we could sit wherever we wanted during meals.

During dinner, the sky grew darker and darker until it was full of clouds. The wind picked up. There was crackling over the tactical teams' radios: a thunderstorm was coming and fast. When a streak of lightening cracked open the sky and thunder boomed around us, we shepherded to the bleachers next to the weapons range. We sat together under the huge metal roof as the storm raged around us. I overheard one candidate remark ironically, "Why are they having us move under this huge metal object during a lightning storm?" The tactical team communicated with each other over the radio and decided we would wait it out and stay under

the bleachers until the storm had passed.

Captain Edwards used this opportunity to give us the respect and diversity brief:

> In the Army, we want diversity—different cultures coming together and different ideas coming together. Look at the diversity in these bleachers. We have people from 48 states. It is not 50-50, but it is a pretty good ratio of males and females. The Army is the team of teams. How many teams will be successful if they have racial tension? This will lead to an erosion of trust. We can't expect you to come to work in the morning if you don't feel safe and secure.

Intercultural conflicts would interfere directly with military readiness. A divided squad was not an effective squad. I reflected for a moment on how "military readiness" itself had been the motivation behind full desegregation and an end of racial quotas in the military. When the 1954 research project, *Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army*, concluded that Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other racialized minorities performed better when they were not in segregated units and the readiness and performance of all Army units improved with integration, authorities acted quickly to end segregated units and racial quotas that same year (Dansby et al. 2001:xxii; Hausrath 1954).

Captain Edwards opened up the conversation to ask us about relationships between races in our hometowns. A Black candidate mentioned how he felt endangered by his police at home. Another mentioned that his father had told him that there are many people in the world who might look down on him as a Black man, but he had to work with what he was given. After more discussion, Captain Edwards shared that on his first day of deployment his unit took fire. A young, Black soldier was shot in the buttocks. Once they had suppressed the enemy, the whole team went to help him: "Bullets don't care what color you are. When it is sucking, it sucks for everyone."

Captain Edwards summarized that the purpose of basic training is, "breaking you all down together so we can build you on to the same team. Make you feel part of this team that has

the same values and norms of the military." The Army team would be strongest with diverse people and perspectives because it would help in solving innovative problems. *Interesting,* I thought to myself, *the institution embraces diversity—as long as all soldiers have adopted the same values and norms that are part of underlying military ideologies. Ideologies that minimize previous self-definitions so that all soldiers can feel like they are all united under a common identity. A diversity within limits. A diversity that will contribute to overall mission readiness and effectiveness.* Still, the repeated rhetoric tying diversity to mission effectiveness revealed to me that an explicit acceptance and celebration of diversity was essential to the 21st-century officer mind.

When the storm passed, we were told to move our things. We would no longer be sleeping in the wooded area. It was safer to sleep in the open field next to the bleachers. We slept under our ponchos in the pouring rain. One candidate told me the next morning that he woke up in the middle of the night feeling like he was drowning.

A few days later back in the barracks, we had a brief on the Equal Opportunity Program. The program started as a response to racial unrest in the armed forces throughout the 1970s. Racial violence, protests, and blatant discrimination plagued military posts and senior leaders reported that it was interfering with combat effectiveness. The Pentagon formed an inter-service committee to examine the sources of and solutions to inter-race conflict. The committee recommended a formal department to address race relations—the Defense Race Relations Institute. The institute was later renamed the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute as it expanded to address other types of discrimination and harassment.[139] The institute designed

[139] It is more recently known as the Defense Culture Institute.

and continues to organize training courses and materials for commanders and Equal Opportunity Program personnel to "increase combat and essential readiness by enhancing unit organizational leadership and cohesion" (Dansby et al. 2001:xxiv).

The officer leading the brief explained that the Army Equal Opportunity Policy prohibits unequal treatment based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, reprisal, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, status as parent, or other impermissible bases. A behavior is deemed to be offensive based on its impact on a reasonable person—not based on the intent of the actor. These policies apply to soldiers 24/7. There is no "off-time."

A candidate raised his hand, "What about someone who goes by she but it's really a he and he wants to use the female bathroom?" The officer paused and said we did not have to worry about at this point because transgender soldiers were not yet permitted at West Point.

The officer then detailed the policy for bringing forward a complaint but reminded us, "just because you failed a physical training test or weapons qualifications, it's not an EO unless falls into certain violations." These violations included prejudice, racism, sexism, and discrimination. I wondered how the institution would determine what constituted prejudice or discrimination versus standard corrective action. Wouldn't the life experiences of the people making these decisions play a role in how the events were interpreted? Research had shown that senior leaders in the military were majority White, middle-aged men with college education, who were less likely than others to have personally experienced discrimination from either military or civilian personnel (Nacoste 2001). These studies hypothesized that even if these leaders did not personally harbor overt or covert racial prejudices that blind them to racial inequality, their life experiences make discrimination less cognitively available as an explanation for unequal outcomes. The speaker continued that we would receive a command climate survey during the

year to share our experience with the Equal Opportunity Program.

Captain Kennedy shared at the end of the presentation: “I don’t care where you came from or what you did before this—you will respect each other at all times. You all wear the U.S. Army uniform. We have enough enemies on this earth.”

When we were relaxing after dinner during the fall field exercises in early November, Angela Lil Boat and Athena Little noticed a group of candidates together laughing in a circle. We had spent the day rappelling down cliffs and now walked with a bit of lopsided gait from the tight ropes around our thighs and hips, so Angela and Athena hobbled over. When they approached, Athena saw that one of the candidates had made a noose knot out of the rappelling rope. The candidate who made it was mixed race and the other candidates were White. They were laughing and asking the candidate to teach them out to make one. Athena was shocked. She knew people killed themselves with nooses, but this one reminded her of lynching. As Angela and Athena walked away, they expressed to each other how messed up it was. But they were too tired and busy prepping the sleeping area to report it. Athena thought to herself, *just because the mixed candidate was half-Black does not make it okay. He grew up in a White neighborhood and surrounded by White folks. He barely has a Black identity.*

A few weeks later, at a battalion sensing session, Athena could no longer let the incident fester inside of her. She rose and said that she thought it was messed up how candidates, including those in the candidate chain of command, watched their peers make nooses and laugh about it and did not say anything. There was silence for a few moments; then murmuring.

Captain Kennedy cleared his voice, “You should have spoken up sooner.”

She retorted, “What’s the point of speaking up if people are going to change the story

around and act like it didn't happen?"

After the session, Captain Kennedy found her and asked her to come to his office and describe the whole incident so they could do an investigation. He wrote up everything she said then she reviewed it after. Then he and the other members of the tactical team conducted interviews and collected statements from the candidates involved. They concluded that it was just a misunderstanding. Athena was not surprised when she told me the outcome, "that's why people don't report stuff."

When candidates made jokes or comments about Muslims either directly to Hassan Ahmed, an Asian Muslim prior from the South, or in front of him, he gritted his teeth. The terrorist jokes; the sand-head jokes; he was used to it all. He tried to sit back, take a deep breath, and let it go. He did not want to get involved in an equal opportunity case because that would just cause more conflict. He saw how soldiers were hesitant to report anything—particularly around sexual assault and harassment or racism—because there are negative consequences for reporters. In his last unit, he had seen his company mates look down on anyone who brought up problems. When he was brought into a case as a witness in the past, he had been required to give a report. After his report, in which he named some people involved, other soldiers looked down on him.

After a ruck, Eleanor Kidds, who identified as half-White and half-Black, and another Black candidate were asked to sweep by a White candidate leader. Eleanor thought this was strange because there were a lot of other White candidates sitting around doing nothing, but the leader came straight up to them.

Um, why did she ask us to sweep? Whether it was because the White candidates often

held leadership positions and did not want to give chores to their friends (who also were White), or because of conscious or subconscious racial profiling, Eleanor noticed that often White candidate leaders allocated the chores to the Black candidates.

Catherine Poli saw the Black women as segregating themselves. Barbara would always tell her that the leaders and other candidates were picking on the Black females. Had Catherine noticed how much work Black women put in to help others, but were rarely chosen for Warrior of the Week? The obsession with their hair and uniforms? Catherine would respond, "You're stereotyping yourself." She could not see what Barbara was talking about. There was no differential treatment. They were all soldiers. Barbara was always just making herself separate from the team, saying, "Oh, woe is me." Catherine felt that the Black women acted "hostile" toward the White women and created divisions.

One fall morning Addison Martin, a Black candidate from the South, was late for formation and another candidate who was White was also late. Addison told me that he was the only one who received a negative counseling. Another time a candidate leader told him and his Black roommates to come to the pad for push-ups because their bathroom was messy. Yet, the bathroom was shared with two other candidates who were White. The other candidates were not brought to the pad. To Addison, these were moments of subconscious racism. It was underlying beliefs and perceptions that were leading to differential treatment. There were more eyes on him as a Black man. If he messed up, it was worse than if another person messed up. His feelings were supported by the abundance of data that Black individuals, even in leadership positions, are judged more harshly for their mistakes and misbehavior (Carter et al. 2017; Huang 2018; Rosette

and Livingston 2012).

But no one said anything racist to Addison directly. He imagined that other candidates who held those beliefs on a conscious level had to keep them under the surface because of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. No one wanted to go to jail. This was fortunate because if someone did say something explicitly racist to him, it would have been hard not to fight them.

When Matt Smith, a Black man from the South, heard other Black candidates complaining about unequal treatment at the preparatory school and in the United States, he thought back to a fight he had with his sister on the Fourth of July. She had posted on Snapchat, "It's not our Independence Day" with a picture of a Black woman with shackles around her wrists.

"What are you doing?!" He had asked her.

"I am just voicing my opinion. We are not free."

"You didn't have to go through slavery. You weren't a victim of Jim Crow. Why do you have all this hatred? You are doing exactly to White people what people did to Black people. It might not be as extreme, but you're showing resentment towards a group of people. It's ignorant."

Matt was fuming: his sister had a job, she had a place to live, and no one had ever not given her something because she was Black. Her Snapchat was just setting the Black community backwards when the nation was trying to move forward past racial tension and discrimination. When people posted and said things like that it set the country and the military back. In his eyes, everyone at the preparatory school was treated the same and had an equal shot at success.

Malcom Cole loved being at the preparatory school because to be successful all a candidate

needed to do was care, try, and want to be there. If a candidate did not have all three of those traits, he or she was not going to succeed. Behavior was what made the difference; not race. He told me, "White, Black, I feel there's no particular discrimination in weeding those people out." He felt that he could pick and choose scenarios to show that Black candidates are treated differently, such as how his peers talked about the high number of White candidates with leadership positions. But when he heard those comments, he thought people were looking a little too closely. His overall opinion aligned with other Black men, like Matt Smith, Raphael Lewis, and Demarcus Wright, who felt that their experiences at the preparatory school would not have been any different if they were White.

"But…" Malcom paused for a moment. There were a couple of incidents that got under his skin. When Malcom read his peer reviews from his squad mates, he was shocked that they had evaluated him as untrustworthy. It kept happening, and each time he was taken aback. This was a glimpse into how others felt towards him. Why did they not trust him? He had done nothing to warrant this distrust, at least from his perspective. When Malcom told me about his peer reviews, he recounted:

> I don't know what I did. I didn't take anything. I didn't lie to anybody. I didn't do anything of that sort. I always tried as hard as I could to do a task. Never failed any of those little tasks during basic training. Honestly, I have no idea, to this day, why 59% of my squad said, 'I don't trust this person.'

I was also intrigued when he told me this. It seemed to contradict the research on intergroup contact that showed that close personal contact with minoritized groups increased trust towards a generic immigrant. Maybe it was because the study was conducted outside of the United States and dynamics were different in our culture. Or perhaps the essentialized nature of "Blackness" and particularly strong stereotypes about Black men made these beliefs remain salient despite working closely together during basic training.

To Malcom, these were little clues that showed him that other candidates had automatic beliefs about him as a Black man. At first, he tried to change these beliefs because they were all going to graduate together and serve together, and these perceptions were detrimental to the Army. They needed to work together. All the candidates were going to have soldiers working under them that looked like Malcom, a tall, dark-skinned man.

Then there were candidates who spoke to him using slang and pretending to be from the "hood" as he explained it. He just wanted candidates to treat him like a normal human: "you don't have to say, 'dawg, what's up?' You don't have to try to give me a dab. Just say hello. Just say, 'how are you doing?' And I'm gonna say, 'fine, what's up with you?' How I talk is how I talk. You don't have to talk like me." He just wanted to be treated like any other soldier.

When situations of potential discrimination were reported, authorities would come out to observe the unit and investigate the incidents. One senior leader found, "Nine times out of ten, the candidate never got anybody yelling at them before. It's not racially affected in any way; it just so happens to be that person." He had enlisted in the Army dozens of years ago when racial tensions had been very high, and this was nothing in comparison. He explained that in recent generations—unless he was blind to it—he had not seen any racial issues at the preparatory school. When a sergeant came to him and said, "Hey this guy is jacked up and he needs to go," the senior leader would ask why and then go and observe the candidate and ask his side of the story. He needed evidence. Some people might just dislike a certain individual or a certain image.

I had no doubt that explicit racism or discrimination would not be tolerated in the preparatory school. The authorities regularly verbalized an explicit commitment to equal

opportunity. I knew that these forms of normative pressure can help change private beliefs to be more anti-racist.[140] Yet, I was also familiar with the psychological and sociological literature on implicit bias, which reveals how people can act based on stereotypes or prejudice without intending to do so. Even those who hold explicit egalitarian beliefs or a commitment to "color-blindness," may still act in a number of biased ways, from distrusting Black peers to having a preference for equally-qualified men over women, without intention or even being aware of their actions.[141] In fact, those with these beliefs—regardless of their own identity characteristics—may be less likely to even *notice* discrimination because it is less cognitively available to them. It went back to the same processes of controlled versus automatic cognition.[142] When people are acting under pressure or have a larger cognitive load, they rely more on mental shortcuts, like stereotypes and shared status beliefs.[143] They might have a *feeling* that someone is less trustworthy or fitted for the job. On the other hand, when people have the time to think about it slowly or are asked about it directly, they might express different attitudes.

If military socialization could alter our cognition in other areas, I wondered if it also had the potential to slowly erode implicit bias. Or was trying to ignore differences already too ingrained through the military's "all I see is green" ideology? Drawing soldiers' attention regularly to implicit bias based on race, gender, class, and sexuality, and making these salient for them, could undermine efforts for uniformity and an overarching single, shared identity.

[140] See, for example, Blanchard, Lilly, and Vaughn 1991:517; Landis 2001.
[141] Many studies have demonstrated that knowledge of stereotypes can influence behavior regardless of individuals' reported attitudes (Banaji, Hardin, and Rothman 1993; Devine 1989; Devine and Monteith 1999; Dovidio and Gaertner 2004; Greenwald and Banaji 1995).
[142] See Part I, Chapter 14 'Docility' for more information on automatic versus controlled cognition.
[143] See Schneider and Shiffrin 1977.

42 Spectrum Club

The first meeting of the preparatory school Spectrum club took place in Ms. Becker's math classroom. The room was plastered with posters of motivational quotes and the window shades were open letting in the bright winter light. I could see outside the windows bare trees that had recently lost their colorful leaves. Isaac Peterson, a mixed-race candidate who identified as bisexual, had been trying to get the club started at the preparatory school since August. But it had taken time to go through all the official channels for approval. Isaac was persistent though; he wanted to make sure that anyone struggling with their sexuality would know where to go.

The faculty advisor of the Spectrum club at West Point had come to speak to us about the history of the group and its current program. Alice Ramirez, a Hispanic prior-service candidate who identified as lesbian, was sitting next to me, and had brought Claire Row along. She had invited a few others from our company, but they had told her, "I am not gay" and still refused even after she told them the Spectrum club was for allies too. She assumed they were just afraid of people assuming they were gay. Claire laughed in her jolly way when Alice brought up this frustration and said, "well, if people want to assume that about me, let them go ahead."

Alice was glad that the club was finally happening. She had thought it was odd when she first arrived at the preparatory school and there was no existing club for lesbian, gay, and bisexual soldiers to come together. It was part of a larger pattern she had noticed here: whereas there was so much attention to racial identity, sexual identity seemed to be pushed under the rug. A few weeks ago in her Enhanced Performance class, there was a session on biases and stereotypes. They discussed racial identity and racism at length, but when the segment about biases about the LGBTQ+ identity and homophobia came up, they glazed over it in five minutes.

Alice was not sure why her teachers and institutional authorities seemed hesitant to talk

about sexuality; it was a big part of army life. There were tons of queer soldiers in the military. Maybe it was due to an old-fashioned mindset? She did not necessarily think anyone was homophobic. With an army ethic of "all I see is green," she knew she was solely judged on her performance. Alice's question also interested me: was it because sexuality was still more taboo to discuss than gender or racial identity? Was it seen as a more private identity because it was not externally visible, or because it had been unspeakable for so long due to prohibitions against homosexuality and "Don't Ask Don't Tell"? Perhaps homophobia was inherent to the hyper-masculine ethos of the traditional military; but it did not seem to be more so than sexism, which was spoken about regularly. Maybe all the civilian outrage about sexual assault in the armed forces put pressure on military leaders to do more programming on sexism than other issues; they had to get sexual assault under control on their terms to avoid further civilian interference.

Isaac introduced the faculty advisor as a West Point graduate, instructor, and officer. She began by saying that the Spectrum club was a space for LGB cadets and their allies. The club could not add the "T" because transgender individuals were not yet openly permitted at the Academy. Just as the club had had to operate underground at the Academy before the repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell," so too they could not openly accept transgender cadets at that point. Although there are a few transgender cadets at the Academy, she told us that if they decided to be open and transition while at West Point, they would not be allowed to commission. They would be diagnosed with gender dysmorphia.

A candidate asked, "Have you ever experienced differential treatment being gay in the military?"

She responded that she had never had any issues with being lesbian in the military. She laughed a bit, saying that being a woman was more of a barrier. When she first commissioned,

“Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” was still in place, so she followed the rule. She shared that she was blessed to have never had an issue. Problems mostly emerged because people from different backgrounds needed time to adjust to being around openly gay soldiers. It was not that these people were malicious, they just needed time.

“What about dealing with religious people?” Another candidate probed.

“Not all religious people are homophobic.” She clarified that she and her wife were very religious. But she acknowledged that she tried to be extra sensitive around religious people. She wanted to give people time to have a change of heart through honest and open one-on-one conversations. Alice nodded. She thought of Chelsea Melton, a White, Catholic woman in our company. Although Chelsea was very religious and had never been around gay people before coming to the preparatory school, she was now one of Alice’s best friends.

Eleanor Kidds, who was sitting on my left, nodded too. She was thinking that it all had to do with tolerance and intolerance. Homophobia, racism, and sexism all went hand in hand. That was why she came to the club as an ally. Those who attended seemed more open and tolerant than the rest of the candidates. They could discuss politics, diversity, and discrimination in ways that felt safe to her. Eleanor had noticed that the Army liked to say it was tolerant, but it was not really that tolerant. People would say, “It’s fine that you’re gay, but keep it away from me.” She felt this was all part of an “all I see is green” culture where people would ignore difference and advocate for color-blindness while still harboring their personal biases. Perhaps it could be successful in the long-term, but in the meantime, there was work to be done. She still heard those around her use the n-word and derogatory slurs about homosexual candidates. She grimaced each time, particularly when candidates were White. Her friends were always forgetting that she was half-Black and did not censor themselves in front of her.

43 Speaking like Soldiers

During basic training, we learned to speak like soldiers. We quickly adapted to the 24-hour clock and took on new lingo and acronyms. We had no choice; the leadership and prior-service candidates were always using this language and rarely took the time to translate. Our rooms and our uniforms need to be "squared away." If not, they were "jacked up." Cars were POVs. The dining facility was the DFAC. Drill and Ceremony were D&C and physical training was PT.

When we wanted to acknowledge that we understood something we could say, "roger," "tracking," or "HOOAH." When someone asked for a favor or a request, the best response was "too easy." We started referring to civilians as "sir" or "ma'am" because civilians were the superiors of all soldiers. For candidates from the South, this was not a big transition. Yet, those from other regions surprised their family and friends when they returned home and were calling everyone sir and ma'am. I could not help but use these terms as new signs of deference and respect.

For the most part, we picked the new linguistic culture easily. Often without realizing it, we were parroting the words of the tactical team, cadre, and priors. After basic training, I stood with Lily Rose and other candidates whose computers were having issues. The candidate assigned to help said he was "tracking" our problems, it was "too easy," it would soon be "squared away," and some other army lingo all within one sentence. I remarked to Lily about the language. She agreed, "It was crazy how much has changed in just three weeks."

I saw the change in our language as a sign that we were becoming part of the military thought-community and taking on an officer mind. Learning the role-specific lingo was a key piece of military socialization because through it we internalized specific dispositions. "No

excuses" and "too easy" taught us that complaining was not appropriate for soldiers and that we were expected to do our jobs regardless of the circumstances or obstacles in our way. We had to pay attention to details and always be "tracking" both our behavior as well as larger systems of information in the battalion. Someone, something, or action could be "jacked up" or "squared away" and we had the responsibility to ensure that all things within our purview (peers, equipment, and rooms) were in regulations. The military alphabet, 24-hour clock, "roger" and "say again" were all important linguistic tools to avoid miscommunication, particularly in radio conversations during wartime. Being precise in one's speech could save lives. Similarly, acronyms stressed that we had to be efficient in words and actions. Calling civilians and officers "sir" and "ma'am" made salient our deference to them each time we spoke. In these ways, language use helped us internalize institutional ideologies, and the process of internalization itself entailed identification as a soldier and an acceptance of its role and norms.[144]

Swearing also became part of speaking like a soldier. The tactical team and priors from the infantry, in particular, had their language littered with "fucks" and "shits." "Fuck" or "fuckin" was a filler word for some just as "um" or "like" is used in the civilian world. Yet, adopting this piece of the linguistic culture was more challenging for some candidates. Athena Little thought the swearing was extremely unprofessional and could not believe people spoke this way at a military academy. Why were soldiers, especially officers, taught to be hyper-polite in civilian spaces, but then swore so much among themselves?[145]

Athena told her squad leader, "ya'll cuss too much,"

"This is the culture around here and it's never going to change," her squad leader replied.

[144] See Berger and Luckmann 1991:158–59.
[145] Officers can be punished under the Uniform Code of Military Justice Article 133 for acting in a way that is "unbecoming an officer." In the 1951 Code, the wording of Article 133 referred to conduct "unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman" (Janowitz 1960:218).

What do you mean it's never going to change? Y'all are just hypocrites. But she kept her mouth shut because she did not want to get in trouble. When she asked another cadet why the people swore so much, he said it was part of being in the Army. Athena did notice that the Black cadre rarely swore. She figured that Black cadets were held to a different level of professionalism even among peers. If they were to swear, people would say they were aggressive or threatening. They would just be confirming negative stereotypes rather than showcasing their 'soldierliness.' Other candidates also found the use of profanity shocking at first and disrespectful, but over time, they started swearing more and more. Athena would swear and sometimes make big eyes and cover her mouth, not believing what had just come out.

I quickly realized that making fun of each other was also a large part of army culture. It seemed connected with hyper-masculinity, as scholars have found a prevalence of sharp, sometimes cruel jokes, in other settings that value toughness, such as the blue-collar shop floor (Pascoe 2007; Willis 1981). On a typical day at the preparatory, I could hear multiple types of questionable jokes. I learned within my first three months that if no one was making fun of you, it meant that no one liked you. The more my squad mates and teammates got to know each other, the more jokes they made. Friends would make fun of each other about everything. Nothing was off-limits. Often these jokes would make their way into topics of sexuality, gender, race, and religion.[146]

On a bus ride, I heard two Black candidates joking together: "You're like burnt, the colors of a buttstock"

"Well, your lips look swollen."

"What do you want me to do? Take the blood out of my lips?"

[146] See Pascoe 2007 for details on how jokes and ridicule, especially about sexuality, are used to enforce masculinity and toughness.

"You do want me to do? Take the melanin out of my skin?"

At the gym, one athlete yelled back at the others who were goofing around a bit, "Yawl aren't working out, you look like females." One also made a comment when touched the other's back, "Man that was kinda gay...but I mean no homo."

Not all candidates were so free with their speech. Lisbeth Sokolov was cautious about what she said around other candidates because she knew there was always the possibility that she could be overheard and reported for a respect violation. Respect violations were similar to honor violations for cheating and required participating in the Respect Mentorship Program for several weeks. In the Honor and Respect Mentorship Programs, candidates would meet with a mentor—an officer, sergeant, teacher, or coach—once a week and discuss the incident and the importance of integrity in the military profession. If the violation was serious enough, reoccurring, or the leadership did not think there was potential for rehabilitation, then a candidate could be separated. In high school, Lisbeth would joke around with her friends often, but here she knew even if someone seemed to be her friend, they might report her. Those situations could risk her chance of getting into West Point.

Depending on the context and who was there, these comments could be laughed at, ignored, or reported. When Alice Ramirez heard a cadet say to a candidate during basic training, "you're acting like a faggot," she pulled him aside later.

"Look, I don't personally care if you call people that but don't call me that because I'll get mad." She warned him of an incident in her last unit where someone used the word jokingly and another soldier overheard and was offended. The person ended up with an Article 15. "You have to watch that word."

One day Lisbeth overheard a group of men candidates asking each other, "Hey, would

you fuck a girl passed out in the bathroom?" She was disgusted, but she did not report it because she did not know the candidate and she was not sure if it was worth reporting: was he legitimately going to do it? Or was he just saying that? If he were planning on it, she would definitely report it. But since it was all hypothetical, she was worried about jeopardizing his admission over a joke. She reflected on the situation with some regret: maybe she should have done something? But she did not want to be a snitch.

Sam Anderson was reported for a joke he made to a Black candidate about his face. He was put on the Respect Mentorship Program with a sergeant from the tactical team. Sam felt that the sergeant was kind and understanding; he told Sam that he knew Sam was not trying to be malicious or to attack the candidate. It was just bad judgment. Sam acknowledged that he had tried to make a joke—a bad joke—to the wrong person and it just went south. Sam was put on an abbreviated version of the program because his superiors saw how hard he was working to be a good leader and improve himself. The tactical team often described the Respect Mentorship Program not as a punishment but as a lesson. Sam had to write a five-page paper on the results of creating a toxic environment and telling those kinds of jokes. For example, what happens when you mock soldiers and how does it tie into Army values. Writing the paper was difficult because of the length, but Sam enjoyed the content of the paper. From then on, Sam tried to be conscious of what jokes were acceptable and would build camaraderie versus what jokes would come off differently than he intended and would burn bridges.

Captain Kennedy tried to stress to us throughout the year that we had to be careful about our jokes as future officers. A small joke could be taken seriously and lead to harassment: "As a leader, the things you do and say are magnified. If I joke around with sexual things, you guys might go out and commit sexual misconduct. Take what I say and go further." From our first day

on post, it was emphasized that sexual jokes were not to be permitted as these could pave the way to sexual harassment, which led to assault.

During basic training, the leadership also told us that even the Black candidates could not use the n-word. It was unacceptable to use in the professional workplace of the military. Jasmine Washington thought to herself, *how you gonna tell me not to say it? I have ownership over that word and that's my diction. If I wanna use it, I should be able to use it. You shouldn't tell me what I can say and what I can't say, especially if it has to do with my race. It's not your race. You never could say it. I can say it.*

When we were in the barracks, Jasmine often used the n-word as she joked around with us. Our White squad leader heard her one day and told her that she needed to stop. It was not respectful speech. At times, she continued to say it without abandon, and at others she would try to stop herself and correct herself saying "oops," laughing, and covering her mouth. She told me one afternoon that it was a struggle for her because in the rural, mostly Black area of Georgia where she is from everyone said the word, even her mother: "My mom says to my brother hey, n-, come do this, come do that. It's not derogatory. So, coming here, I understand it, but it's hard because it's a habit." The connotation, emotional and moral-ethical valence of the word in her home culture was entirely different from the valence at the preparatory school.

The Black candidates were split in how they felt about needing to police their own language. On one hand, the word was not professional and had a disrespectful history. On the other, who were these White people telling Black candidates that they could not say a word that they had reclaimed? Among the Black candidates I spent time with, the n-word was said regularly, particularly in the barracks in the evenings or on the weekends. Their informal and private conversations resisted and violated the formal discursive rules of the institution. In some

ways, it was like the jokes around race, gender, and religion that took place in other informal settings—laughing quietly in the gym, during a ruck, or in the barracks. These jokes were fine in private, but if they were shared in a formal setting or brought to the attention of the authorities, they would be deemed inappropriate.

When the topic of the n-word and respectful speech came up again in a sensing session, Malcom Cole thought it was a bit absurd that people were so offended by Black soldiers using the n-word when talking to each other in social situations. Other Black candidates were saying that because they were in an army environment now, they needed to stop saying it immediately. They had to behave according to army values 24/7. But Malcom stood up and said:

> Hey, you can't expect someone to change like that. You're taking them out of their culture they've known their whole entire life, eighteen plus years, and throwing them into this new culture, and then you're expecting them to just stop. You need to let it change over the course. That's what the West Point is all about. If you just expect me to come here, already ready and willing to change like that, and forget everything I've ever learned, everything I am, you have another think coming.

Captain Kennedy tried to speak directly with Black candidates about this topic. He understood that it was prevalent in their culture. Although it did not happen often, if he did hear candidates use the word, he would put them in the Respect Mentorship Program to give them a chance to learn and develop. He would encourage the candidates to see that just because it did not offend them personally did not mean it would not offend others. Thinking about others was crucial for achieving the Army values of respect, tolerance, and equality. If a White candidate said the word, that would cross over from a cultural speech and respect issue into hate speech. That was grounds for separation.

Yet the word was still used amongst White candidates, though usually not publicly. It was thrown around sometimes in the locker rooms of the teams that were mostly White or used when White candidates were rapping along to songs. After one ruck, Jasmine laid back on her

rucksack and heard some White candidates behind her singing a rap song. When they came upon the n-word, they said it really loud, unlike the rest of the song that they were whispering. She turned to look at them, but she was too tired to say anything. She did not have the energy. And she thought they would have just retorted that it was just lyrics and did not matter.

Over the course of the year, Jasmine tried to change her habits. She came to realize that using the word was not okay in a professional setting. It took on a new moral-ethical valence for her as she was inculcated with the officer mind. She internalized the connection the authorities had made between language and sexual assault: if she said the word, she could not expect someone else not to say it, and if they said it, there would be a derogatory meaning. Back in her hometown, it was just a regular word, like “bruh,” but here candidates were coming from different backgrounds. She realized her language could offend even other Black candidates. She decided that the word was not good for an army environment, but still, she would not report another Black candidate for saying it.

44 ‘Put this in your notes’

Saul Alvarez, a mixed-race man in my squad, walked up to me after class:

> Hey Winfield, put this in your notes. I just broke up with my girlfriend. I had changed too much. We would not have anything in common anymore. We wouldn’t have anything to do together because of the differences in the civilian and soldier lifestyle. Our values do not align. She smokes, drinks, and does drugs and that would not work with me anymore. This is important for your research.

45 'SHARP'd'

When Judy Watson's friend came into her room distressed and shared that she had been sexually assaulted by Jack Brown over the weekend, Judy knew it was time to come forward.[147] Judy divulged that Jack had been sexually harassing her as well, asking her to send him nude photograph. Judy had been hesitant to report the case alone because she was worried no one would take her seriously. But if both did, action would occur, right?

On Monday morning, Judy went to speak with her company tactical team. She gave a written report. Judy felt like the officer and sergeant listened to her, understood, and were very respectful. But that the since there were other disciplinary issues going on in the company, they seemed a bit distracted. The officer said that Jack was already being separated for grades. He told Judy that if they pressed charges, Jack would have to be around much longer.[148] Service members being investigated for sexual assault had to undergo a full investigation under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which could take months and then Jack would face prison time. The idea of having Jack around any longer was intolerable, so they decided not to press charges. Even Jack's separation for academics flew by quicker than usual. Unlike other candidates who waited around for weeks and months, he was gone within two weeks. The tactical team and senior leadership had done whatever they could to get Jack out of the building. Until he left, he was told to stay at the front desk at all times. He was under close observation now that he was deemed a potential sexual predator.

[147] I interviewed 'Judy' and 'Jack' and received permission from them to include their stories. They reviewed their sections of this chapter. The friend was not a research participant.
[148] Military personnel are 'mandatory reporters.' When Judy reported the situation to her company tactical team, the team then reported it to the senior leadership. The senior leadership brought the case to legal and SHARP program for investigation.

Jack first found out he was in trouble when his company commander called him down to the tactical hallway. He was told to sign a document that said he could not contact either woman for two weeks. They moved him up to another company. Jack told his teammates and friends that the two candidates had gone down to the tactical team together to make accusations against him. Jack was frustrated because he had messages on Snapchat that showed that the relationships were consensual and he was not doing anything wrong, but when they deleted him from Snapchat, the messages disappeared. Now he had no way to prove his side of the story. He did not mention the alleged assault.

The tactical officers started Jack's separation and told him it was about grades, but he only had one bad grade, a D by two points. He told his friends that he was getting kicked out because of his bad grades and his bad reputation from basic training and the first two quarters. He was doing his best to improve and thought that if the candidates had not made those accusations, he would not be forced to out-process. They had no evidence, and he had no evidence, but it was hard to believe a kid who messed up at the beginning of the year over two candidates with good reputations. When the situation came up, the leadership referenced all these old instances and his bad grades, yet he knew there were people with worse grades than him who were still at the preparatory school.

Jack told the others that he was framed as an easy escape, an easy scapegoat based on his personality. He was easy to put the blame on and help them get attention off themselves for having relationships in the barracks. He thought that was very smart of them because he was such an easy target. When Captain Kennedy saw me talking to Jack, he warned me to not believe any of his lies; he was pathological and very dangerous.

When the other candidates found out that Jack was being separated and heard his side of the story, the backlash was horrendous. Rumors ripped around the preparatory school.

"I know him, he wouldn't do that. They wanted to get him kicked out. The girls lied about him."

"I am upset. He wanted to be here. I am sad."

"He was kicked out of over a lie! Over a 'he said, she said.'"

"She obviously knew what was happening. She must have known."

"We should write a letter to the commandant to advocate for him!"

"He is like the sweetest guy"

"They were totally dating! She just did not want to get in trouble."

"I am worried about guys being around those girls"

"Those girls are fucking in the barracks but because they are ass-kissers to the higher-ups, the tactical team believes them and not him. It sucks."

Renee Edmonds was confused about all the drama at first. She did not know what was going on, and her friend who was involved in the incident did not want to talk about it. *Something does not seem right*, she thought to herself. When Renee finally spoke to her friend, she realized how horrible it was that Jack's teammates just sat by and supported him. *How can you protect something like that*? The football players were making the women feel so bad, asking why they were trying to get him kicked out. "Why are you lying?" they kept asking. It was horrible. Renee figured that maybe the candidates were siding more with Jack because the women were not really telling the candidates what was going on and what was happening—but the other candidates did not realize how hard it was to talk about these incidents.

Judy was dumbfounded by the backlash. Women she thought were her friends told her,

"You flirt with the guys, you were totally asking for it." *Wow. We deserve to be harassed and assaulted? I expected this from the males, but really? You too? Aren't we supposed to stand up for each other? At least ask me what happened to hear my side of the story or just see the pain I am going through right now.* She had heard of this happening in movies, but she had never seen anything like it in reality. Maybe she had just not been exposed to it because she kept to herself in high school. She tried to hide her pain. Not one of her supposed friends cared enough to ask her what really happened.

She thought the way the other candidates were acting was completely ridiculous. They just were taking Jack's side because he was a man and on the football team. She imagined them saying to each other, "Oh, he's part of the football team, so I'm going to stay with my guy, my boy. I'm going to be with him and take his side." But she had thought they had been friends with her too? Now they had completely cut her off.

Sadly, I was not surprised. There is immense literature on women experiencing sexual harassment and assault in the military and other workplaces, and how these dynamics interfere with their abilities to do their jobs (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018; Bell et al. 2018; Castro et al. 2015; Folke et al. 2020; Hart 2021; Wilson 2018).[149] There is evidence that women in men-dominated groups, women leaders, and those who are gender pioneers in their workplaces are more likely to be harassed (Berdahl 2007; Holland and Cortina 2013; Leskinen, Cortina, and Kabat 2011; McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012).[150] Furthermore, many women experience negative reactions after reporting sexual harassment and assault, such as

[149] There is a long history of women being sexually exploited, harassed, and assaulted by soldiers, as camp followers, wives, nurses, and during war crimes (Enloe 1983, 2010). With the integration of women into the ranks, there has been increasing attention to sexual harassment and assault toward women soldiers and its interference with combat readiness.

[150] Sexual harassment is often a way to reinforce existing power dynamics that privilege hegemonic masculinity (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018; Berdahl 2007; McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012).

victim blaming, disbelief, and professional penalties.[151] I figured the social sanctions for reporting sexual assault and harassment would be particularly severe in a military institution because of the emphasis on a team mentality and the prevalence of hyper-masculinity. Even other women would want to distance themselves from perceived vulnerability and align themselves more with those in higher status positions, i.e., the men.[152]

Judy felt like no one would talk to her. No one wanted to be seen with her. People would glare at her across the classroom. She would turn a corner and hear other candidates talking, hearing her name. Judy was glad Jack was gone so fast. If there had been a full investigation, she was not sure she could have made it through with all the backlash.

Judy held her tongue and did not tell her tactical team what was going on. She was afraid that she would just be seen as another emotional female, particularly because her commanders were infantrymen. She thought they would just look at her like, "Oh this female can't take the criticism. This is the Army, get over it." On top of everything else going on, she did not want to be looked at as an overly emotional woman.

When the rumors were raging, the battalion leadership called a meeting. The candidate battalion commander said that candidates needed to straighten out, or the tactical team would straighten them out:

> No more bullshit, no more rumors…. You are all here for your leadership, for having character above others. People with the right character will not walk past people who are talking about other people. If we cannot get it together, shit is going to start getting real stupid.

[151] See, for example, Campbell 2013; Campbell et al. 2001; Campbell, Dworkin, and Cabral 2009; Department of Defense 2019b; Hart 2019; Sweet 2019; Ullman 2010; Whiting et al. 2021.
[152] For information on association bias and how it undercuts solidarity in low-status groups see Cabrera and Thomas-Hunt 2007; Hysom 2009; Ridgeway 2019:122; Rivera 2016; Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny 2012; Tajfel and Turner 2004; Thye 2000.

The whole incident represented to Judy the pervasive attitude at the preparatory school around the sexual harassment and assault response program (SHARP): the problem was the females. They were the ones who "SHARP'd" the innocent males, making up problems when there were none. SHARP was not just an acronym; it became a verb.

We first learned about SHARP on the first full day of basic training. The commandant entered the auditorium and explained he was giving us this brief himself on our first day so we would know up front that this was a crucial topic. It was crucial to our development as candidates, cadets, officers, and people. It was crucial for building a respectful environment at the preparatory school: "If you are going to stay awake for anything today, this is it." As future officers, understanding this material on respectful behavior was the bread and butter of the profession.

He shared that the Department of Defense had found different numbers of reported incidences of sexual harassment and assault than those shared in anonymous surveys. In recent years, there had been an increase in reported cases of sexual harassment and assault at the Service Academies.[153]

"Why do you think that is?" he asked us. A few candidates raised their hands.

"There are more females in the Army now."

"It is a regular part of the culture."

"It's perpetuated in the media and on social media."

[153] In 2018, 28.5% of academy women and 5.8% of academy men indicated experiencing unwanted sexual contact since entering the military service academy compared to 21.6% and 3.3% respectively in 2016 (Brook 2020; Department of Defense 2019b). In the past 12 months, 15.8% of academy women and 2.4% of academy men have experienced unwanted sexual contact. Rates from the military academies were higher than the overall rates of assault in the active-duty armed forces. In 2018, the Department of Defense found that 6.2% of women service members and 0.7% of men experienced a sexual assault in the past 12 months (Breslin et al. 2019). There had also been an increase of 4.3% for women respondents but no statistically significant increase for men.

The commandant shared that it was hopefully because people were more comfortable reporting in recent years because they knew reports would be taken seriously. He clarified that in the military there was a stricter line of acceptable behavior, "You are not in high school anymore. What you did in high school will not work here." He gave the example of a candidate receiving an Article 15 for grinding on a classmate without her consent at a dance. He detailed some examples of sexual harassment, including using sexually oriented cadences. There was also the example of smacking another candidate on the buttocks with a towel in the locker room as aggravated sexual assault. Sodomy was listed as a form of assault.

A candidate raised his hand and asked, "What is sodomy?" There were quickly suppressed snickers. We soon learned that this candidate was not trying to be funny. He was just genuinely curious and would ask a lot of questions throughout the briefs.

After answering the question, the commandant continued that it was on each of us to create a safe and respectful culture at the preparatory school. Even though rates of sexual harassment and assault were lower in the service academies than at civilian colleges, we would be held to a higher standard.[154] If one soldier assaulted another, it reflected on the whole army corps.

He explained there were certain new rules in the preparatory school to help prevent sexual assault. The first was that the female rooms were now all at the front of the hallway. Second, was the threshold policy: candidates were not allowed in the barracks' rooms of the opposite sex. The third was the company duty officer. Every evening from seven at night to five in the morning, candidates would sit in shifts at the front of the company hallway and monitor

[154] Data from the 2019 American Association of Universities *Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct* found that in 2015 to 2019 period, rates of nonconsensual sexual contact for undergraduate women increased from 23.6% to 26.5% and 5.6% to 7.1% for undergraduate men (Department of Defense 2019b). This suggests that rates for men might be lower at civilian universities, but not rates for women.

what was happening in the barracks. The company duty officer was ordered to make sure that candidates stayed in their rooms at night.

We were given a list of the SHARP resources at the preparatory school and West Point, and who to contact if something happened. There were two separate systems, which we had to memorize as part of the knowledge book: open and closed reporting. In open reporting, a legal investigation and legal action would be taken in response to the report and the candidate would receive medical support and counseling. In the closed system, there would be no legal investigation or action, but the candidate could still receive counseling and medical support. Military personnel were mandatory reporters, so if a candidate reported to them it would automatically be an open case. There were certain teachers who were assigned to be representatives of the closed reporting system.

The commandant concluded that the purpose of SHARP was to help us recalibrate morally upon entering the Army. The program would only work if we enforced it and garnered a lifetime commitment to its values. Anyone who did not adopt and respect the program would be sent home. There was no toleration for harassment or assault. The message was clear: our preexisting moral-ethical orientation towards sexual relations was inadequate for the Army. We had to either completely recalibrate to align with army values or exit the institution.

On our first night sleeping in the field, Sergeant Compton stood at the entrance to the sleeping area waving her hands: “If you pee standing up, go to the right. If you pee sitting down, go to the left.”

The other women and I walked up to a raised area about 50 yards away from the men. We got into little groups and started to set up our hooches, a way of positioning our ponchos on

trees so we would not get wet if it rained. I learned that in the big army there was no gender segregation in the field, but they did it at the preparatory school to avoid sexual assault. Indeed, out of all the training I participated in, the military leadership was most anxious about me sleeping out in the field as it could be one of riskiest situations. In my head, I liked to imagine it was because they were equally worried that I could be a perpetrator, and not that just because I was a woman, I was inherently at-risk.[155]

Captain Edwards was torn on how he felt about the separation between men and women in the field and in the barracks. He felt like women had a microscope put on them because they were always separated. Even though the Army wanted to treat them as equals, they were constantly being brought off to the side. He worried that the culture of keeping women separate increased sexual assault because the separation added an extra drive or mystery. Soldiers sleeping five feet apart when it was raining and cold outside built shared respect and a bond. They would not go and sexually assault those same people at a bar when they returned from the field. Captain Edwards was not sure if that was a correct assumption, but he thought if leaders were able to do a better job of just treating their female soldier as soldiers (not female soldiers or male soldiers) it would solve a lot of problems. By making gender more salient through separation, the institution was interfering with soldiers' ability to form a single unified identity.

Two months later, we gathered at the picnic tables for a "female sensing session" on a beautiful fall afternoon. There were about ten candidates present, senior military leaders, and the two teachers who were the SHARP representatives. One of the senior leaders started the conversation by bringing up SHARP and highlighted again how prevention was key. We may trust and love

[155] My first year I was not permitted to sleep in the field. The second year I could sleep in the field near the tactical team.

those around us, but 3% of people are predators. We must take precautions. The staff and faculty could not always be there. “You have to let us know about any problems,” he emphasized.

In the past, incidents happened at the beginning of the year but were not brought to light until almost the end. He underscored that there were ways to let the leadership know even anonymously about suspicious or creepy behavior so they could investigate what was going on and make the barracks safer. We needed to show “moral courage” in these situations. Moral courage was the phrase authorities used often when discussing moral-ethical behavior. Just as we needed the courage to face the enemy on the battlefield, we also needed the courage to police ourselves and our peers to maintain a moral-ethical environment within our units.

He asked what we thought about having the female rooms at one end of the hallway. All the responses were positive, with lots of nodding.

One woman said, “Based on what we heard about life here in the past, I think it is better that we have these precautions.”

Then he asked about the threshold rule, and one candidate responded that it depends on the maturity of candidates whether they took it seriously.

Eleanor Kidds mentioned that she liked the threshold policy because she did not have to worry about a random man being in her room when she wanted to relax or come out of the bathroom.

Kelly Carter said the threshold rule was inconvenient, but it did not bother her because she knew why they were doing it. It was like the video cameras in the barracks’ hallways; she knew they were necessary and, therefore, they didn’t bother her too much.

One candidate shared that she had shut her door before going into the shower, but when she came out from the shower, her door was wide open. She was not sure if someone did it

intentionally, but it still shook her. Sometimes during the mandatory study periods, the company duty officer would come down the hallways and open doors since they were not permitted to be closed at those times.

The leader reminded us, "It's your room. You can lock your door, especially at night. Some people may not knock, either because that is the way they were raised or maybe because they forget, or they are creepy." He told the story of how one candidate leader went into the opposite gender's room, and she had just come out of the shower.

Kelly said to me under her breath, "You don't have to tell me twice to lock my door when I go to sleep. I'll do it without hesitation."

The leader told us that he had promised our parents that our safety and security were his top priorities. None of the other things—like academics or athletics—could happen if the candidates did not feel safe.[156] One day we would also be in charge of maintaining the safety of our soldiers. He continued with his questioning: How about the company duty officer sitting at the front of the hallway at night? Did that make us feel safer?

A few women shared said that a person sitting there did not really make a difference, except for making sure people were studying during study periods. The candidates decided for themselves whether to respect the threshold policy based on if they took the rule seriously. The leader responded with a comment about personal discipline, "if you're not paying attention, then you decide you need two vehicles on patrol instead of three. Your standards slip. And that can cause a tragedy." Discipline was multifaceted: starting with maintaining one's uniform, equipment, and physical composition, to the endurance to push through pain, to following and enforcing the rules to maintain the proper environment in a unit. Discipline at the preparatory

[156] See Hart 2021 for information on how even ambiguously sexual interactions interfere with women's work lives.

school, including staying out of the opposite gender's room, was consistently tied to bigger decisions that lead to life-or-death consequences.

Renee shared that she thought it did make a difference because if someone started screaming, the person on duty would hear and come to them.

Barbara Fenton said the problem was that there was not a lot of supervision on the weekends. On one hand, this was a good thing because there was so much supervision during the week. On the other, weekends were when things went wrong. Similarly, the threshold rule kept incidents from happening in the barracks but did not prevent them from happening elsewhere in the building or outside the institution.

One candidate said that she trusted the males and none of them seemed malicious. The SHARP representative jumped in to tell her to watch out—experience had shown that the males are not often the best. These control measures had to be put in place to ensure candidate safety.

Athena Little brought up that this is the 21st century and the threshold rule should also apply to homosexual relationships. And why were the conversations about SHARP always about the women being the victims? Men raped other men. Women could rape men or women. My mind flashed to the research on how sexual violence is typically understood as a heterosexual phenomenon, wherein women are perceived as weaker, vulnerable, and sexualized beings (De Welde 2003; Frazier 2021; Hall 2004; Moor 2013). These dynamics are replicated in the military environment and likely more salient due to hyper-masculinity.

The leader responded that the threshold rule is supposed to be just for males and females, but the no sex in the barracks applies to all people. Of course, there were other types of rape than male to female. However, this was the most prevalent type, and as such, he had to combat it most directly through these protocols.

Athena hated the idea that women were victims. Yet, she noticed that she personally had changed her disposition over the course of the year to avoid sexual assault. At home, she was bubblier. At the preparatory school, she was careful in her interactions with men. She was changing the performance of her gender identity to protect herself from sexual harassment and assault, in what sociologists refer to as "trajectory guarding" (Hart 2021) She also thought about how protocols for interacting with authorities, such as standing in the position of attention, made her feel less comfortable around the leadership. She felt like they were saying, "Don't come to me with your bullshit because I don't care." She would never come to them if she got raped. She understood why candidates felt uncomfortable coming forward.

Another candidate spoke up and mentioned that she did not think that the candidates took the SHARP brief seriously at the beginning of the year. At the time, the candidates were too tired and exhausted and distracted to really listen. Half of the battalion fell asleep in the briefs:

> Maybe if you pushed on us more in the beginning of the academic year and had us reflect on our goals for the future and what would happen if we were involved in the case, maybe then people would have been more careful. There have already been candidates separated for things they might not have done if they had taken it more seriously. I feel like the first time it felt like more of just passing out information. Some cases could have been avoided. It's only now that people are starting to take it more seriously and be more mature because they don't want to get kicked out.

"I agree with you," the command responded solemnly.

Captain Kennedy spoke to us in military science class about how as leaders, we would be responsible for preventing sexual harassment and assault. Leaders set the tone for the unit. Leaders needed to address these challenges early and often. He suggested a multi-pronged approach. The first part was education: training and helping soldiers understand what sexual harassment and assault is, what it looks like, and how to report it. There should be consistent

messaging from the top of the chain of command to the bottom on the purpose of the program, what is and is not acceptable, and the consequences of poor decisions.

"Could you imagine if the environment you lived in was a safe environment and free from chauvinist messaging?" It was our job to create that environment. As candidates, we could cultivate a culture of accountability. If something did happen, or we thought might happen, it was our responsibility to bring it up quickly. Again, it was about moral courage and discipline: we had to live the values and help create a safe and healthy atmosphere.

The second step was putting in real risk mitigation measures. If the barracks were ignored, then candidates could get assaulted and raped. That was why the leadership implemented company duty officers, nightly staff duty officers, the threshold rule, and put women in the front of the barracks. Structural elements obstructed or drove behavior. We too would have to think of creative interventions for our own units.

A few weeks after Jack was separated, there was a SHARP Stand Down Day at West Point and the preparatory school in response to an uptick in reported cases at the Academy. The superintendent of West Point spoke to both groups in the morning session. He did not mince his words: sexual harassment and assault was a problem that needed to be brought under control. The day would be devoted to facilitated conversations about the problem to bring awareness and attention to the issue. Conversation topics included professional relationships, boundaries, consent, toxic masculinity (the negative side of hyper-masculine traits), and alcohol use.

During one of the activities back at the preparatory school, candidates gathered in groups on the basketball court and made a list of some of the issues they saw leading to sexual harassment and assault. They brainstormed ways to address these issues as a community. Ms.

Riley did rounds around the room to help make sure candidates stayed on task.

She came to one group that was having a conversation about a pre-sexual encounter contract. The idea was that both parties could sign the contract to say that they consented to have sex so no one could come back afterward saying, “Well, I didn’t really give consent.”

A candidate turned to her, “Ms. Riley, let’s say you’re in the middle of this sexual encounter, would that be weird if somebody said, ‘Wait just a minute, I need you to sign this piece of paper?’”

Ms. Riley took a deep breath to center herself. She wanted to make sure she could give a good answer without letting her religious beliefs on premarital sex influence her comments. She wanted to say what was best for the candidates in their life circumstances and leave space for their own thoughts and beliefs: “How many of you think it’s weird for somebody to stop an encounter and say somebody needs to put a condom on? Is that weird to you guys? Do you have second thoughts about that?"

The candidates looked around at each other, “No, not really.”

“It’s kind of natural right?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay well when I was in high school, the big topic of conversation was condoms—that it would be weird, and we can’t just stop and tell people to put condoms on. So maybe it seems weird to you now but maybe it won’t be weird at some point."

“Okay, but would you stop and sign a contract?"

“Well, that’s an interesting question. Do you really want to know my answer?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. Well, I made a decision when I was in high school that I was not going to engage

in premarital sexual behavior, so I don't have to stop and think about whether or not I'm going to sign a contract or not. That's a situation I would never find myself in."

"Oh, okay."

The candidates turned back to their lists. Ms. Riley took a sigh of relief.

In Renee's group, a man candidate asked, "When it comes to a girl and you're flirting, how am I supposed to know if she's gonna take it wrong or not? Especially if she's not saying that she doesn't feel comfortable." Renee thought that was a good question. Sometimes women were flirty without meaning to be flirty and it could be confusing. Her group decided that communication was a big challenge.

Demarcus Wright, a Black candidate from a military family, stayed reserved in his group. He knew the source of the issue and he tried to hint at it, but he knew better than to share his opinion outright with the group. He knew his thoughts were unpopular.

Demarcus believed that women could be in the military. But women did not have a place in the combat arms. Before, when the military was mostly all men, there were not the same legal problems. Bringing in soldiers other than men, like women or those who are transgender, brought in the problems.[157] He thought the whole gender movement and gender equality should stop at the military. Women and men should have the same rights, but in the military, there was an obvious boundary that cannot be crossed, like physical boundaries and SHARP cases. When new laws put women in the military, what did people expect to happen?

In the combat arms, the problem was exacerbated. He was worried that with only two or three women in a combat unit there would be a "queen bee effect" where the men would be fighting over the women. He often reflected about a story he heard from his father about an Air

[157] See Ender, Rohall, and Matthews 2016; Matthews et al. 2009 for West Point cadet's attitudes on transgender individuals and women in the military.

Force officer who had relationships with many different airmen. She got pregnant and did not know who the father was. Then she had to take off time to give birth and care for the baby. The unit lost an officer for a significant amount of time. All the investment in her training went down the drain and men needed to step up and fill the gap.

With gender integration, there was SHARP and pregnancies, which were a waste of training and resources. Why include women in the first place? Homosexual males were less of a problem because they could not get pregnant. Even if a woman was infertile or a lesbian, she would still be a distraction. He saw the way the women candidates distracted the men at the preparatory school and were always creating drama. Recruiting more women to the Academy would be a mistake. Needing company duty officers and separating women in the barracks were all proof that they needed to be protected. More women meant more opportunities for disruption, danger, and SHARP situations.

There were many others—leaders and candidates—who held similar views to Demarcus, particularly when it came to combat arms. When men and women were together, sexual assault and harassment could and would occur. Especially if they are alone together and away from home for a long time. Then the leaders would have issues in their unit, have to do investigations, and stop all the training. It would become a combat ineffective squad or platoon. The nation could not afford to be politically correct in times of war.

As Ms. Becker walked around the room she pondered, *is the way they designed the barracks affecting them? Does it put a weird taste in their mouth about the military in general? Do male and female interactions have a different dynamic because of what's expected of a military person?* She wondered if the cases of sexual assault and harassment were from young adult hormones or a piece of the military mindset. *Would they attack if they were at a civilian*

college, and they weren't out in the field with weapons and feeling all HOOAH and strong and physical? Is that a trigger behavior in them? She shuttered thinking about the victims. *Does that make it harder on them that they weren't able to physically get the person off of them when they're supposed to be this strong military person?* She wondered if the preparatory school had its own niche environment and candidates were thinking, "I'm in the military. I'm going to be super strong and attack and conquer." Or for the victim, "I should have been stronger, I should have been able to fight back. What will I do in a war situation if I can't even take this man off me?" Was this a burden that they had to deal with on top of everything else in the military as compared to a civilian school?

At the end of the day, all the women were brought together. The men were able to go back to the barracks. There were murmurs about the differential treatment, "Oh so they really do think we are the problem." Catherine Poli was not happy that they were separating the females to talk about an issue that was a whole battalion issue.

Sergeant Compton was also displeased: why is there not a male session happening at the same time? Why were they segregating the females when there were just as many problems with the males? She found out a teacher had asked a senior leader for a female-only session, and he had agreed that it was a good idea. *But it's not,* she thought, *you can't keep separating the females to talk about SHARP*. Sergeant Compton hated when females were made the subject of SHARP conversations. She was not a sex object. It was on the males to keep it in their pants. She was there to get the mission done and do the task. *Let us do our jobs!*

The teacher who had asked for the session opened it up: "So, what is going on?"

One candidate jumped in right away, "I just want to say something. You may have the

highest physical score. You may have good grades. But the second you do this type of behavior, it completely takes away from the validity of what you've done here."

It was a direct jab at Judy. The woman sitting next to her whispered, "She is talking about you." No one said anything in response. No one said anything to support her.

Another candidate went on the attack, "Yeah, I hold myself to a standard, so no one ever asks me for nudes!"

It was a second direct stab. *Do you even know what you are saying? You are blaming the victim. Acting like I asked to be put in a situation to be asked for nudes.* Judy believed even if a woman and man had sex before, or a woman sent him nudes consensually, it never was a reason to be sexually harassed or abused by him or another man. She was fuming internally:

> *Do you not realize what you are saying and how it can be interpreted by the other women in this room that I know have been raped? Just because you've never done anything does not mean nothing could happen to you, and if it did, that you deserved it. You need to realize what you are saying. Men and women could have something happen to them, but they never deserved it.*

Judy was grateful that her mom had taught her these lessons as a young woman. Maybe these other women did not have good relationships with their parents, or their parents had easy lives, so they did not have these conversations. But Judy's mom had been through hell and back and sacrificed a lot for her family for them to have a better life. Judy was grateful to have the support of her mother when she felt like no one else was there for her.

Another candidate asserted: "If she acts that way, of course it is gonna happen!"

Renee started feeling fire pulsing through her veins. She had been raped over winter break by a friend. She had never known what some people's mindsets really were—who were safe people to go to and who to avoid. As she heard these voices around her, all she could think was, *I am so glad I did not come to you.*

The chorus of candidates blaming Judy continued, “Yeah! girls shouldn’t put themselves in those positions!”

Oh my god, Catherine could not believe these comments. The harshest and most victim-blaming comments were coming from the other women. From the other sessions, it seemed that the men were more on board with disrupting the culture and making a change, and here were women enforcing the worst stereotypes. She tried to figure out why the women were not supporting each other and instead moving onto the attack. Maybe they had never had the chance to bond? There was no unity. No care for each other. To protect themselves, women were throwing each other under the bus. Maybe it was some of their culture from high school? She was grateful none of the candidates speaking were in her company.

“Well, if a girl acts this way, what does she expect to happen?”

Renee gripped her chair: *Are you serious right now? Are you really going to keep throwing shots at Judy? You make it seem like it was not sexual harassment and assault.* That was enough. Renee could not take it. The words gushed out:

> There is *no* reason. There is *nothing* to justify being sexually harassed or sexually assaulted, raped, anything. There’s nothing that justifies it. If a person says ‘no’ or a person says, ‘leave me alone,’ that’s what they mean. So, when you continue to do that, you’re in the wrong. It does not matter what their past is. It doesn’t matter. What if your mother or your sister or your cousin, whatever, came to you and said, ‘I was raped’? What are you gonna do? Are you gonna ask them what they did to deserve it? Cause that’s exactly what you’re saying right now.

Silence. The women who had been saying those comments lost some color in their already white faces. Renee didn’t stop there:

> I bet a couple of ya’ll in this room. No, I know, a couple of ya’ll in this room have been sexually assaulted. You guys think this is not a problem? I will tell you. I was sexually assaulted recently. Not here. Over Christmas break, but it is still hard to talk about. You may think just because someone is not telling you what happened that they have something to hide. But guess what, you don’t know how hard it is to talk about. And for people to say, ‘what did you expect to happen?’ or trying to justify it, that is wrong. And

by the way, only 2% of people lie about being sexually harassed and assaulted.

"Yeah, well what about those 2%?" A candidate asked, suggesting that because 2% of people lie, Judy could be lying too. Renee answered passionately:

> Let me tell you something. Until you are actually in that predicament, and you're looking at the size of the guy and you're thinking how you are going to protect yourself. And you might have been threatened to keep quiet. You don't know what happened, so you don't sit here all night and say, 'oh she lied,' just cause the guy is your friend. You don't do that.

Renee could not help herself. Normally she did not care about the opinions of other candidates, but the women could not be that close-minded and be future army officers. It was well and good if these toxic women wanted to stop talking to her.

After the conversation, Judy came up to Renee in tears and gave her a big hug. Others came to Renee's room later in the evening to thank her for saying those words because they could not say it for themselves. Her words made them feel better and stronger.

Back in the barracks that night, many candidates discussed how eye-opening the day had been for them. They had not realized how prevalent sexual harassment and assault were at West Point and the preparatory school. A White lacrosse player from a farm in Maine mentioned to me that he could imagine how much it would affect army officers' ability to do their jobs if they were worried about being assaulted or thinking about past encounters.[158] He was grateful that he grew up in a household that taught him to go out of his way to respect women. He did not have to change his own behavior, but he started watching the other candidates with new attention.

Others were not surprised at all. Catherine was glad they had the SHARP Stand Down Day; it was much needed. From her time enlisted, she knew a large number of women who had

[158] See, for example, Hart 2021,

been sexually harassed and assaulted. It did not surprise her that the problem also existed at West Point because West Point was supposed to reflect the larger army.

The conversations continued into a Christian extracurricular club that was meeting that evening. A few men spoke to Ms. Joseph about being afraid that if they like a woman, but then stop liking her, the woman will falsely accuse them to get revenge. They did not want to take that chance because she may be vindictive. Ms. Joseph tried to tell them that this was rare. Then one candidate connected it to the Bible, "That did happen to Joseph. It did. Even in the Bible we have an example of some women doing it. She cried wolf to protect herself from her husband and Joseph is the one who ended up in jail." The Bible supported their hypothesis.

Nadav Butler personally did not think men sexual harassing and assaulting women occurred at the preparatory school. He was in the barracks. He knew what happened. Nevertheless, he thought men could still get 'SHARP'd' for just winking at a woman. He thought that there were women at preparatory school who were doing, as he put it, "bad stuff." They would lead someone on and be offended later if the guy tried something physical. As we spoke, Nadav told me how it was dangerous to be a male at the preparatory school: "It's dangerous here. Just try to leave the girls alone. You can get in trouble. You just meet the wrong one, and you're gone. You've got to be safe."

He did his best to keep his distance from the women. He told me he knew the back story of the candidates, like Jack, who had been sent home; it was never serious stuff. The female candidates could say and do whatever they wanted and not get in trouble, but as males, if they got SHARP'd, they were going home. They were perceived as guilty immediately. Later, if they were found innocent, nothing happens to the person who made it up.

Rich Rivers, a White prior from the Midwest, agreed, "I feel like females can be the

perpetrator, but then play the role as the victim. That they can push so much on that guy, and then when that guy finally does something, then she can play the victim." I asked Rich if he knew of cases of this occurring. He said no but he definitely could imagine it happening. Even when a guest speaker from the Army Criminal Investigation Division shared with the battalion that less than 1% of women made up cases, this fact did little to reshape their opinions.

After the Stand Down Day, several candidates came to speak with their tactical teams about incidents over the last few months. Sergeant Compton wished it had not taken a full stop of the schedule for something to change; these issues should always be taken care of. *We should not have to shut down the whole school to get done what should have been getting done before.*

Weeks later, a few of Judy's past friends came up to her. One said solemnly, "I knew you were going through hell then."

"Why didn't you come to talk to me?"

"Well, honestly, I didn't want to come talk to you because I didn't want to be seen with you because I am friends with those people too."

Judy was enraged, *do you hear what you are saying right now?* These were women she thought were her best friends at the preparatory school. She realized they were more interested in fitting in with their men counterparts than the other women. It was easier for them to just assume she was a whore than to stand up for her to the rest of the candidates. Where was their moral courage? She now understood why victims do not come forward: *I am never coming forward about anything ever again.*

46 Toleration and Snitching

During a math exam in the fall, Rich Rivers noticed another candidate was cheating. He did what he could to focus on finishing the test, but the question kept nagging at the back of his head: *What do I do? Do I tell someone or keep it a secret?*

When he was alone later with his suitemates, he asked their opinions. Most responded, "don't say anything, you are going to screw him over." The person he saw cheating was well-liked in the company. They wanted to cover for him.

Rich did not feel satisfied with those answers, so he went to ask a close friend who was also an academic tutor.[159] She thought about it for a few moments and then said, "Yes, you need to talk to him. It's the right thing to do." Rich respected her opinion, particularly because she was close friends with the person who cheated. He felt deep down that this was the correct decision.

Rich first went to confront the person who he saw cheating. We learned during basic training the Cadet Candidate Honor Code, "A cadet candidate with not lie, cheat, or tolerate those who do," and Rich was not going to break the toleration clause. The leadership had instructed us to first try to make the correction ourselves: to have the moral courage to confront others and tell them to turn to turn themselves in. We should give them 24-hours to turn themselves in, and if not, report the incident ourselves.

"I saw you cheating during the math test. You really need to go tell the teacher and your tactical team."

"Nah, I did not cheat."

Since candidate denied it, Rich decided to report the incident to the teacher. The teacher

[159] Candidates who were performing well academically took on roles as peer tutors.

opened an investigation into the incident alongside the tactical team. They determined that the candidate had cheated. He was put in the Honor Mentorship Program. Rich felt relieved after the incident and that he had taken the right steps. The candidate had now learned that he could not cheat and get away with it. This was critical because if candidates learned to take the easy way out now, they would later face decisions in combat where they would try to take the easy way out and get their soldiers killed. Candidates needed to learn how to always act with integrity. Rich had embraced the honor code and institutional ideologies about moral courage to the extent that he felt it was his personal responsibility to enforce to these standards to protect future soldiers. Yet, it was not particularly difficult for him to adopt the preparatory school's approach because he had already been inculcated in army culture for three years.

A few weeks later, the trickiness of toleration popped up on my radar again at a female sensing session. We gathered in the small room off the side of the dining facilities and sat around a large oval table. A senior military leader opened the discussion, asking us what was on our minds. There was a long moment of silence. Most of us present looked down at our plates and picked at our food, but one candidate spoke up. There were candidates in her company who were frequently drinking alcohol in the barracks. She was worried about her company mates but not sure how to make them stop drinking so much. The leader thanked her for sharing and for having the moral courage to speak up.

That afternoon there was a Health and Welfare Inspection in the barracks. Commanders had the authority to order a full inspection of barracks and any buildings under their command when they believed the health, welfare, or readiness of the unit was at risk. The tactical officers and sergeants went from room to room in the barracks, rummaging through our drawers, closets, suitcases, and containers. Candidates with cars had to hand over their keys so the vehicles could

be searched. Nothing was off-limits and there was no warning. Numerous candidates got in trouble, including several members of the candidate chain of command, when alcohol was found in their personal belongings. Little containers of alcohol had been hidden in gloves, granola bar boxes, socks, and other locations. Captain Kennedy was horrified when he discovered a candidate's secret trash bag hidden in a suitcase. Hiding trash bags was common because we had to keep the trash basin by our desks empty, so we found alternatives places to put trash and take it out periodically. But this candidate had forgotten about this particular trash bag and it was rotting and full of maggots. It was not contraband but, "damn," Captain Kennedy told us later, "ya'll are disgusting."

Kelly Carter classified the candidate from the sensing session as "a snitch." Did she even try to talk to her company mates about the drinking first? The first step should be to tell them that their drinking was going too far and that either they needed to stop or that she would report them. A candidate should not just tell on others without giving them a chance to fix themselves. She would never do something like that; it was not necessarily wrong according to the Cadet Candidate Honor Code, but it was snitching behavior.

Kelly explained to me that night as we rehashed the drama of the day, that when she heard any of her friends talking about drinking in the barracks in the past, she had told them "Why are you doing that? That's stupid. You're just making a stupid decision." When they kept doing it, she went back and told them, "It seriously needs to stop. Now they know. Stop it." Since her friends kept drinking after her warning, she felt like they were asking to be caught. At that point, if the commandant had asked her straight-up if they were drinking, she would have said yes. But before confronting them one-on-one, she would have said, "I don't know." There was always the option to feign ignorance and not flat-out snitch on someone.

"But…" she paused, thinking for a moment. "If someone really is your friend, they will not put you in that situation in the first place to potentially get in trouble for toleration."

My mind jumped to make the connection. Captain Kennedy had told us that exact line in almost identical phrasing at the last honor brief. It was another incidence where authorities' language and moral-ethic orientations were being regurgitated seemingly unconsciously by the candidates. Kelly's explanation seemed to be her way of managing the cognitive dissonance between her prior views of "snitching" and the ones she was absorbing from the institution.

Then, a month later, there was "Cheat Gate." I sat down in Chemistry next to Majdi Haddad, a White man from the West Coast whose family was from the Middle East. He turned to me eagerly to ask if I had heard the news.

"No?"

Majdi explained that a group of candidates had copied each other's chemistry homework. When one was caught, he reported the others. They were all in the Honor Mentorship Program now and the whole class might have to switch seats so they could no longer sit with their friends. Everyone was calling it "Chemistry Cheat Gate" and rumors were spreading like wildfire through the battalion.

When I heard one candidate from my company was involved, I ask her what happened. She simply replied, "we had a system." She said she knew she deserved to get in trouble, but was frustrated because one candidate involved, who happened to be White, did not seem to have gotten in any trouble. The rest of them had taken privileges taken away and could not leave post until winter break but the one White candidate involved was allowed to leave three times. She told me she had asked her company commander directly why that one candidate kept being able to leave. He told her that the candidate was "too much of a chicken shit" to tell his parents what

he did so they kept buying him tickets home and they had to let him go. To her, this was just another example of White and Black candidates being treated differently when it came to disciplinary matters. The racialized dimensions of toleration, snitching, and disciplinary action started to bubble to the surface.

As we took our seats for our next full battalion brief, a Black candidate in our company leadership came over to Athena Little: "Are you wearing the right color undershirt?"

"Yes?"

The candidate went over and reported her to Rich, who was directly above her in the chain of command. Rich came to check in with Athena later that evening.

Athena thought this was utterly reprehensible. This was the perfect example of the "White snitching" she had seen going around the preparatory school. The candidate who had reported her came from a White neighborhood. Growing up in an all-Black area, Athena knew that when Black people had problems with each other, they said it to each other's faces. On the media, she had seen that when White people have problems with each other, they tell it to others behind the person's back. This was her first time directly experiencing White snitching. White snitches would report a person behind her back and then watch her go down. How could a Black woman go to a White man to report another Black woman? To Athena, this was the epitome of disrespect: she would never do that to another Black woman. Black women had to come to each other first and correct each other. When she had seen another candidate whose weave was jacked up during basic training, she did not go and tell her White platoon leader. No. She would never. She waited until she had a chance and then helped that other candidate fix her hair. As Black women, they had to stick together. After the incident, she did not trust the candidate who reported her. And to make matters more infuriating, she had been wearing the correct color

undershirt.

White snitches were not the only problem Athena found at the preparatory school, Black snitching—or lack thereof—was also an issue. She saw that Black candidates were hesitant to report others even in serious situations. She knew from her own childhood that often Black people taught each other never to snitch, which she thought was ridiculous. If there was something really bad going on, it was their responsibility to speak up. People were in jail for other people's crimes because they did not want to snitch. Athena's experience showcased to me the extent to which "snitching" or what the preparatory school authorities would call "moral courage" was shaped by community cultural rules. The codes on how to respond to people who were breaking the rules differed, in Athena's experience, between the White community, Black community, and the military community. Her view was well supported in research that found dissimilar cultural rules for reporting in different communities, as well as demonstrating how reporting is connected to relationships with those in power (Willis 1981). Reporting deviance to authorities is a way to maintain institutional power, surveillance, and legitimacy of their rule. Individuals and communities who trust and support those in power (i.e., police, school officials) will report to them. Those who do not will refuse to comply with the official system and develop their own ways of dealing with those who deviate.

By the mid-year, Athena had developed her own guidelines around toleration. If she heard about basic lying or cheating, she would not say anything. That would just be backstabbing her friends before they had a chance to fix themselves. But sexual assault, violence, and stealing were different; those she would report. Things got more complicated for her, however, after her own run-in with the honor code.

Athena was the company duty officer, assigned for the shift from two to four in the morning. A schedule was printed each week and candidates rotated through shifts. It was a chilly winter night, and Athena was wearing her army green fleece over her uniform. From the windowless hallway and the fluorescent lighting, it was impossible to know that it was the middle of the night, but every cell in her body was craving sleep. Her eyes were getting heavier and heavier, and sitting there just started to feel increasingly pointless. The hall was empty. Nothing was happening. It was so quiet. She reasoned with herself, *do I really need to be here?* She decided to go back to her room 45 minutes early. She signed the duty form saying she left at the end of her shift.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

Twenty minutes later someone was pounding on her door. She dragged herself out of bed and was face to face with the staff duty officer. Every night an officer or sergeant was assigned to stay over at the preparatory school in case there was an emergency. They could watch what was happening in the barracks through the video cameras that reported back to the main feed, but sometimes they liked to do a walk-through of the barracks to ensure there was no trouble.

"You are on duty, Cadet Candidate Little. What is going on? Why are you not at your post?"

Adrenaline hit her system. Now she was wide awake. "No excuses, Sergeant. I signed out early to go back to sleep."

"Report to Captain Kennedy first thing tomorrow morning."

When she entered Captain Kennedy's office the next morning, she was greeted with disappointed and tired eyes. He told her that he was shocked and deeply disappointed when he heard her name connected with the incident. He had never expected her to be so selfish. Did she

not realize that in combat zones if she left her guard post because she was tired her whole company could be ambushed and die? Incidents like that happened all the time when soldiers fell asleep on duty. He assured her that he believed in her potential as a soldier and future officer, but she was going to get a company-level Article 15 and enter the Honor Mentorship Program.

For the next six weeks, Athena met weekly with Captain Kennedy to discuss the importance of honor and integrity for officers. She wrote essays on the importance of having moral courage and personal strength. She kept journal entries on all her thoughts and questions to discuss with him. She grew closer to Captain Kennedy through the experience and was more committed than ever to always doing the right thing. Maybe it was more of her responsibility to ensure correct action was taking place in the barracks? Maybe toleration had more risks than she had previously imagined? Other candidates also had positive experiences with the Honor Mentorship Program. One candidate who was caught cheating and went through the program in the first quarter became the Candidate Battalion Honor and Respect Officer by the second half of the year. Several others mentioned to me it was one of the most impactful trainings they had had in their lives and completely reshaped their perspectives. The leadership was working carefully and strategically to indoctrinate us with army values and ensure that when we did see misbehavior we would report it to the chain of command, extending the reach of the authorities and playing our part to root out deviances that may one day have deadly consequences.

47 A Profession

Lily Rose wanted to make an impact on others in her life. She did not want to just skate by in the civilian world. When she reflected on her friends at civilian colleges, she could not help but think about how they were just partying and sleeping in every day. They would never really impact anyone in their lives. But as a West Point graduate, she would be a major influence on the world. As an officer, she would oversee others and could motivate her soldiers. In a time of war, her impact would be even greater. She would be sacrificing herself for the United States and taking out terrorists. What could be more meaningful or a greater purpose in life? Even in peacetime, Lily figured she would accomplish more as part of the profession of arms than an average person.

Our officers and sergeants told us often about what it meant to be part of the profession of arms. Although military sociologists argue that the military is trending towards a more occupational model of employment—with an increase in pay incentives to rival civilian employers—institutional leaders emphasized to us regularly the difference between soldiers' professions and civilians' careers.[160] In a career, employees just cared about money, and it was just a nine to five job. But in a profession, they told us, there was a total dedication of self and indoctrination of values. There was passion, motivation, and community accountability. I realized that conceptualizing "officership" as a profession mattered because it gave us a deep sense of purpose in our roles and a sense that what we were doing mattered. Even homework assignments were a way to hone our critical thinking, learn how to attack problems, and think from diverse perspectives. We were told repeatedly how this was the most important and

[160] See, for example, Blair and Segal 1978; Janowitz 1960; Moskos 1973, 1977, 1986; Moskos and Wood 1988; Segal and Segal 1983; Shields 1993. Segal (1986) discussed how becoming "pragmatic professionals" was a compromise between warfighting as a calling or job.

meaningful job in the world.

Unlike other jobs, life and death were on the line. We were the protectors of millions of Americans. We were heroes-in-training, making the world a little safer from enemies foreign and domestic. As officers, we would shape the futures of our soldiers. We were role models to thousands of America's sons and daughters and had to be our best physically, mentally, and morally. Unlike enlisted soldiers who pledge to obey the lawful orders of those appointed over them, as officers, we would pledge to faithfully discharge the duties of our office. We would need to have the ability to decipher what that meant in each moment tactically, morally, and ethically. That is why our actions mattered so much. Hearing this rhetoric preached time and time again as I sat side-by-side with my squad mates, all of us together in the same uniform, made my heart swell. I could feel the institutional ideologies taking root in my mind and emotions.[161] The pride was contagious and intoxicating and my U.S. Civilian nametape did not protect me from its potency. I was part of something bigger than myself. I was protecting others. I was a role model. I was honing myself into the best possible version of myself. *HOOAH.* And then, a bit later, once we had left back to our rooms, and collective effervescence had evaporated back into the atmosphere, my critical and still unsocialized mind would creep back in: *but what about the wars and all the killing*?

[161] People adopt ideologies (moral values, religious beliefs, scientific knowledges) through participating in what Althusser referred to as "Ideological State Apparatuses," such as schools, families, religious institutions, and the legal system. As people enact the material-discursive practices of each apparatus, they become "interpellated" as subjects. They *recognize* themselves in the behavior and adopt the identities and beliefs the behavior entails. These material-discursive practices may take on many forms, such as language use, ritual actions, clothing styles, and more. See Althusser 2014; Butler 1997a; Winfield In Pressb for more information on interpellation.

Part III: The Warrior Spirit

How we learn to
Fight
Protect
Win
Destroy the Enemy
(But not Civilians)
And Live with Ourselves Afterward

During basic training and throughout the academic year, our officers and sergeants worked to cultivate in us a "warrior spirit": the willingness to keep fighting and to do whatever it takes to protect and defend the United States of America. As military leaders of a nation at war, they felt it was their duty to prepare us emotionally, physically, and tactically to engage in combat. Regardless of the branches the candidates ultimately chose, all soldiers had to be proficient in the tasks and skills of a warrior.

In this section, I will ask: what are the essential elements of a warrior spirit? How does the institution work to condition us to pull the trigger and risk our own lives on the battlefield? How do candidates experience the potential obligation to take lives during combat? What happens when a candidate has a religious or moral objection to violence?

The first piece of the warrior spirit was developing in us a winning mentality so we would keep fighting past exhaustion. Institutional leadership used sports, company competitions, and awards to push us to do our best physically and militarily. Mottos such as "Kill Them All" encouraged not only comfort with violence but also the intention that we should "kill everything we do." We needed to learn to defeat all our challenges. Teamwork during competitions functioned to show us that a winning mentality went beyond individual ambition: we learned that soldiers would fight to the death not for themselves, or even for their country, but for the people

fighting to the right and left of them. Pitting companies against each other in dodge ball and having us yell our mottos were ways to develop company pride, and eventually, the desire to win for the unit. We learned to fight for our teammates, even to the extent of sacrificing our own bodies to injuries. Challenges emerged when there was a conflict between pushing ourselves to the limit during fitness tests or rucks versus being a good teammate and hanging back to support those who were struggling. We had to judge for ourselves when was the right time to show off our grit and fighting mentality versus dedication to our teams.

The winning and fighting mentalities were traits already inculcated in athletes. Although some questioned the athletes' motivations for coming to the preparatory school, skills developed on the sports field directly corresponded with skills on the battlefield. The grit, tenacity, relentless pursuit of excellence, teamwork, coordinated action, and the ability to overcome adversity and stay calm under pressure were all things that made good athletes as well as soldiers. Some leaders argued that through recruiting athletes, the Army was recruiting leaders who were physically and mentally tough and seasoned at working on teams and motivating others. Still, there remained a deep tension between the recruited athletes, particularly football players, and those who were the most "*HOOAH*" at the preparatory school, particularly the priors. This tension was heavily infused with racial dynamics as football players were majority Black and the priors were majority White. The phrase "football player" was often used as an innuendo for "Black man."

While sporting events and competitions cultivated fighting and winning mentalities, battle drills brought these skills into the realm of real violence and war. During battle drills, we rehearsed military movements and exercises to prepare for combat situations. Often, we were placed in stressful and high-pressure situations—with the leaders yelling at us and the sound of

machine-gun fire—and had to stay calm and complete our objectives. Battle drills were an essential piece of military socialization because they trained our muscle memory on how to react automatically in various situations and desensitized us to background chaos. It was, in the words of a senior leader, "blunt force trauma mindless repetition." When we were put through the same situation over and over, eventually, we would have instinctual, non-emotional reactions to otherwise highly stressful events. Leaders told us that this would serve us well, and possibly save our lives, in combat. The one instinct that some military leaders doubted could be overcome through battle drills was the desire to put women's safety above the mission. That was why it was risky to integrate women into the combat arms: if a woman was injured, the whole system would fall apart and jeopardize the mission and soldier safety.

Additionally, authorities intentionally designed weapons training in a way to desensitize us to pulling the trigger during combat. For some candidates, receiving a rifle during basic training was exciting. But others were horrified at handling an instrument of death. Those from areas with high violence and those with religious objections to killing were the most distraught. Yet, over basic training, we gained comfort with our weapons—giving them names, sleeping with them in our sleeping bags, and always keeping them within arm's length. We learned the fundamentals of marksmanship and applied them during weapons qualification.

At the range, targets were shaped like human heads and torsos. During qualification, the targets looked like little green people with helmets and weapons. The mini-human targets would fall backwards into the dirt each time we hit them. Each fall signaled another point, moving us closer to qualification and perhaps even an award on our uniforms that would indicate soldierly competence. The positive emotional response to hitting human-like targets at the range was a way to make it easier to pull the trigger on real humans during war. From a distance, enemies

would just look like the mini-human targets from the range. Another hit, another point.

In military science class, we studied basic military knowledge—the branches, weapon systems, types of attacks—and were regularly tested on this material. Our instructors told us that this knowledge makes up the basics of our profession. Just as surgeons-in-training learned to yield a knife, we needed to learn to lure the enemy into the "kill box" and orchestrate an attack on a multi-dimensional battlefield. Our officers and sergeants spoke about violence openly, regularly, and realistically, telling us that this was now our profession. They had no intention of sugarcoating the role. They used rhetoric, such as "good guys" and "bad guys," to draw a distinction between us and them, making it easier to stomach wiping out another human life. Some candidates could not help but question if those abroad were really "the bad guys." What if they had been brainwashed from a young age or were forced to fight due to threats against their families? Was war just a way to help the powerful gain even more power? Moreover, why was there such a focus on enemies abroad when there was an uptick in domestic terrorism? Black candidates wondered if there was an association between 'Whiteness' and desire to kill, as there were mostly White men in the combat arms, and it was often the White men candidates who seemed most excited to go into combat and destroy the enemy.

Explicit language around violence was jarring for many of us at the beginning of the year. We had to explore how the potential to take a life in combat fit into our existing moral frameworks. Often candidates justified it to themselves by concluding it was the only way to protect their loved ones and their country. It was self-defense or defense of the American way of life. They may not have loved the idea of harming others, but it was a necessary evil to allow for the spread of good. Religious candidates grappled with how killing in combat related to the commandment "Do not murder." Some used religious principles to make sense of the violence;

they were destroying the demon seed in human form. They were mirroring the actions of King David. For them, killing in combat was not the same as murder. Others considered all killing murder and argued that Jesus had advocated for peace. Yet even those who were morally or ethically against killing seemed resigned to its role in the profession by the end of the year. Instead of saying they would not engage in violence, they brainstormed which branches would keep them out of direct combat and how to shoot others to incapacitate rather than to kill. Over time they too were desensitized to violent rhetoric and conversations about killing.

The cultivation of the warrior spirit came with a major caveat: officers were responsible for ensuring that an unchecked killing culture did not develop in their units. After covering the fundamentals of warfighting in military science, we turned to discussions about war crimes and unchecked warrior culture. We read articles on what happens when leaders encourage their troops to increase lethality towards the enemy to the extent that the line between combatant and civilian became blurred. We learned that when officers allow their emotions to cloud their judgment and put soldiers before the mission, moral degradation occurs. Our sergeants and officers told us that as leaders we had the responsibility to uphold the morals of the United States and foster a commitment to fighting 'just' wars. For candidates who were uncomfortable with the killing rhetoric at the preparatory school, these conversations were comforting. At least there seemed to be some limits to the violence. For others, it was more difficult to grasp the problem with a killing culture—at least those soldiers could pull the trigger! Those units seemed motivated to fight for their country at all costs, unlike other units that shied away from conflict.

We ended the year with conversations about the emotional consequences of war and how, as officers, we would be responsible for protecting our soldiers after deployment and helping to mitigate any feelings of guilt. We would have to bear the burden of "killing authority." By telling

our soldiers the rationale behind the orders as well as reminding them that they were exerting violence at our instruction, we could shoulder some of the psychological burdens. These steps could reduce post-traumatic stress disorder. We discussed that reaching out for help was a sign of moral courage and how we might support our battle buddies who are experiencing emotional distress. American soldiers are dying at a far higher rate from suicide than as casualties of war, and as leaders, we might be able to help change those trends.

The stories that follow explore these themes and dynamics and detail the training involved in developing the warrior spirit, and ultimately, a soldier identity.

48 Becoming a Warfighter

The infantry club arrived for afternoon practice “slick”—no patches or belts on our combat uniforms. It was time for Army Combatives training, and we did not want anything that could snag on ourselves or our opponents.

Captain Kennedy led us through some warm-up exercises to get our muscles soft before starting. We moved back and forth across the turf with dynamic stretches. High knees, heels to butt, cherry pickers, wide and narrow jumps, lunges, and sprints. We experimented with forward and backward somersaults. Captain Kennedy stressed that under no circumstances could we practice what we learned today by ourselves in the barracks; it was too dangerous. If we did, all Combatives training would cease immediately.

When the Combatives instructor arrived, he told us to pair up with a partner. I linked up with Alice Ramirez, who was a similar size and build. He instructed ‘partner ones’ to get on their backs and ‘partner twos’ to mount them. He showed us how to throw the dominant partner off balance by pushing up our hips, breaking their hand positions, and pivoting to the side. We learned several ways to get out of being trapped on our backs, then to get the opponent on their backs, and to flip them so we were on top. This was part of Drill One: escaping blows, maintaining the mount, escaping the mount, maintaining the guard, passing the guard, assuming side control, maintaining side control, preventing and assuming the mount.

As we tried to escape and dominate our partners, the room filled with grunts and cries of exertion. We swapped partners and I took on Olivia Greene, a White prior from the Midwest. We kept trapping and choking each other, only tapping out when we were about to pass out or break a bone. I quickly came to think of Combatives as wrestling with the intention to kill.

When the instructor explained new moves, he switched between describing them as what

to do in a bar fight or in a combat situation when you needed to get your gun or knife. He said that females should practice with the males because in combat situations we would rarely, if ever, encounter another female. When we rotated partners again, I tried to fight a 250-pound prior. I could barely move under his muscular and stone-like physique. I felt trapped under a boulder and tried to wiggle free. I would have to practice a lot to take on an opponent that size.

As we continued, we discussed the violent potential of the moves. We talked about breaking bones and breaking necks. Captain Kennedy reminded us: "if someone is trying to take your life, you will try to kill them." We learned to smack our chins in the back of opponents' necks, kick them in the face, and push their noses into their brains. If we had to use these skills in real life, it would be in a hand-to-hand fight to the death.

The instructor concluded that Combatives were designed to cultivate a warrior mentality. All soldiers must be ready to fight. We wear this uniform because at any time we might need to blend into the surroundings to avoid being killed or to kill.

"Who is the best runner on your team?" he asked us at the end of a session. We pointed to Demarcus Wright, who could run under a five-minute mile.

"Right, it is easy to know because you run every day. Who is the best shot?" We wavered a bit. One teammate tentatively raised his hand. He shot expert during our last rifle qualification.

"A little harder to know because you don't shoot every day. Now, who is the best fighter?" We all looked around. I jokingly raised my hand a little and we laughed.

"That is the hardest to know. And the best fighters will be the person who is the most useful in combat. You want the best fighter on your team."

It did not take me long to learn that being a fighter and cultivating a winning mentality was an

essential piece of preparatory school culture. We were being trained in dispositions that would allow us to fight and win, even to the death, on the battlefield. My company's motto was "kill them all." Our cadet company commander during basic training explained that our motto was "kill them all" because we "need to kill everything we do." She hated to lose and expected us to always do our best to win. Killing was associated with winning.

Our platoon greeting was "Beast Mode" because beasts never give up. Our cadet platoon sergeant expected "violence in action;" everything we did had to be done with precision and intention. A senior military leader shared that he wanted us to be "aggressive." We should attack everything we did, even our homework. Academics was "a bare-knuckle brawl with the dean." Captain Kennedy told us in military science class that his main role was to prepare us to be victorious warfighters. In the Army, other soldiers "are going to expect you to win." Whether we were men or women, combat arms or non-combat arms, all of us were warfighters. Being soldiers and future officers was not enough, we needed to be warriors.

I found that the desire to fight and win at the preparatory school was cultivated through sports, competitions, and awards. All candidates had to participate in sports after lunch during mass athletics. Recruited athletes joined their teammates on the football, soccer, and lacrosse fields and wrestling mats, while other candidates joined the infantry and running clubs.[162] Each quarter, we had an awards ceremony for the top-performing academic and physical candidates. Those with the highest grades were on the Dean's List. Those with high grades and high fitness test scores were on the Commandant's List. During the 'top cadet candidate' competition, the best performers from each company competed in fitness tests, weapons qualifications, land navigation, and interviews. All spheres of life at the preparatory school had a competitive edge,

[162] See Janowitz 1960:130 for the role of sports at the military academies.

as we vied for public declarations of our place in the status hierarchy. The rewards were evidence of high competence and "deservingness" of influence. I was struck, although not surprised, that it was often those who were already high status based on their identities (White or men or priors) that won top awards.[163]

When Captain Kennedy was recruiting for the infantry club, he asked the battalion, "Where are my warriors at?" We shouted back "HOOAH." He described the club as "basic training on steroids" and anyone who wanted to improve themselves should join. I joined to spend time with those who were the most committed to the institution and infantry values. The other women who joined the team—Alice Ramirez, Olivia Greene, Grace Ives—were priors, except for Claire Row, a White woman from the Midwest, who epitomized a winning and fighting spirit. Claire had to leave the team partway through the year after she destroyed both of her hips and needed reconstructive surgery from ignoring and pushing through severe pain for months. Most of the men on the team were priors as well, but there were a few non-priors, like Raphael Lewis, who joined to immerse themselves in intensive military training. When I told people I was in the infantry club, I gained immediate status: "You must be badass." Associating myself with this high-status group immediately provided me with a kind of "halo effect" wherein I was seen as a more competent 'soldier,' even though I was most likely the weakest link on the team (Ridgeway 2019:94). Athena Little joined halfway through the year, her strength and stamina contributing greatly.

I loved being on the team. We were always pushing ourselves beyond our "breaking points." We went on longer rucks each week with more weight on our backs. We did intensive pre-deployment training programs. We ended each day in the gym lifting weights. In the second

[163] See Berger et al. 1998.

quarter, Captain Kennedy switched the emphasis from team building to winning competitions. Several team members were unhappy with this change in focus. When I spoke to Captain Kennedy about the decreased morale and mentioned that some teammates were telling me it was because of the new focus on winning, he said yes, that was the point: “The point is to represent the preparatory school and win. This is the Army. We win.” This conversation reinforced to me the importance of creating a winning culture at the preparatory school—having fun was not enough.

The desire to fight and win did not only stem from individual ambition. We learned that soldiers would fight to the death not for themselves or for the country, but for the people fighting beside them. Sergeant First Class Lee worked to create an environment where we felt like a family. This was the purpose behind company mottos and images; he wanted team spirit to be ingrained in us for the rest of our lives.

The tactical team also wanted to see us bond together through challenges. Captain Kennedy explained, “basic training was designed to strip away habits of individuality and selfishness and start to build the Army values of selflessness—self-sacrifice for the good, for the mission, for the teammates—from day one.” The leaders worked to cultivate these traits even to the extent of trying to get us to band together against them, telling us, “If you want us to leave you alone, you will have to help each other and correct each other.” It was the family culture that would lead soldiers to defend—at first their company in competitions and one day the nation. Sergeant First Class Lee shared, “The ability to perform in combat comes from being there with soldiers you know and love. You know their whole families; there is no way you were not going to go fight with them. You fight for the people that you love.” Love was part of mission effectiveness.

I experienced the motivation to perform for my teammates in the infantry club. On days that were particularly hard, when I was not feeling my best physically or emotionally, I had to keep going for their sake. One day when I thought I needed to stop because I was slowing down the team, Captain Kennedy yelled at me, “Are you part of this team or not?” Another time when we were running up the ski slope, I was feeling upset about some things in my personal life and I had a bad leg cramp. I was ruminating about how could I push myself to run when I felt so beaten down: *Why try if I know I will suck?* I just wanted the team to go on without me but they would not leave me behind. Teammates kept running alongside me and the others who were struggling, encouraging us to keep going. I realized this was the epitome of teamwork. I had to “stick it out,” “suck it up,” and keep fighting for the sake of the team. It was for the team that I instilled inside myself the fighting and winning spirit. During practices, Captain Kennedy would often tell us the secret of battlefield success: “you aren’t fighting for your country, you are fighting for your teammates.”

49 Self versus Team

We weighed our rucksacks prior to leaving for the German Proficiency Badge ruck march to order to ensure we each held the minimum amount of weight. I was surprised to discover that, despite following the packing list, mine was still two pounds below the 35-pound limit. Perhaps they had based the list on men-sized clothing so the smaller amount of fabric in mine made it lighter. I added in more items to make up for the weight discrepancy. I was not going to get disqualified because of two pounds and I certainly was not going to pretend I was carrying the right weight and do less than my teammates.

We were told to ruck in small buddy teams. I linked up with the other women in the infantry club, Grace Ives and Alice Ramirez. Chelsea Melton joined us as well. I was eager to show off my new rucking skills and was sure I would meet the cut-off. Another medal to attest to my soldierliness. Yes, I was a civilian and could not wear it, but it felt so good to have material proof of being a 'good soldier.'

We arrived at the start site—a gravel-covered area next to a forest. The trees were still covered in multicolored leaves, though many were starting to fall and gather on the ground with the drop in temperature. Still, it was hot enough that we were told to unblouse our pants and unbutton our sleeves to allow for more air circulation so we would not be a heat casualty from the exertion. Even in the coldest months, we still had to worry about overheating during rucks because bodies went into overdrive.

The leaders reminded us of the rules: we had two hours to complete the almost eight-mile ruck. They would be keeping time and let us know our time when we arrived: "Ready? We are starting…NOW."

Some took off running to try to get a starting advantage and find their place at the head of

the pack. My buddy team also took off in a light jog. The path through the woods was mostly paved, winding up and down many hills. The hills rivaled the ski slope in terms of their length and incline. Chelsea exclaimed as we took on the first few, “these are some come-to-Jesus hills!”

My buddy team sped-walked up the hills and ran down them. We started off doing okay but then Alice got a cramp in her leg. We slowed down to wait for her. Chelsea was struggling to make it up the hills and was having a hard time catching her breath.

“Just look down. Don’t look up at the incline. Just take it step by step,” I tried to share with her my own technique for hills. We kept switching between going fast and then slowing down again. Time was passing. Grace checked in with the group: we could still make the time cut if we picked up the pace, but if we wanted to finish as a team, that was also an option. I was split. I wanted that badge badly, but I also knew that it did not really matter for me because I was not a real soldier. I did not want to be the jerk who left her teammates.

We did not make a decision, but I stayed with Alice and Grace helped Chelsea. Chelsea and Grace stayed a little bit ahead of us, with Grace carrying Chelsea’s ruck on some of the worst hills. Alice would not let me take any of her items even though her cramp worsened. Alice said she hated making me wait with her, but I reminded her that the team waited for me all the time and I could not wear the badge as a civilian. Sometimes I let Alice go ahead a bit to help someone else up the hill.

Lisbeth Sokolov was behind us. She was struggling and barely breathing. She was so tired that she kept rolling her knees on the uneven ground. She had just gotten off profile two weeks earlier from a basic-training knee injury, so she was not confident she was going to make the two-hour time limit. Still, she was confident she would finish. Lisbeth had been motivated by what Captain Kennedy said before we started: “If you can’t make it to the German Proficiency

Badge time, at least finish it so then you can have some pride in yourself." She was ready. She was going to finish the ruck without falling out. The problem was that her knee was still loose. She thought it would be healed to the point that she could walk normally, but she was wrong. Her thoughts spun out: *I am going to die. I am not going to make it. My mom just wasted $400 on flights for Thanksgiving.*

One candidate kept walking alongside her and motivating her. He would not leave her no matter how much she urged him to go ahead. As she started to feel more delusional, she started to see him as God's angel coming to help her—her own Gabriel. His presence gave her resolve: *Fine. I got to do this. I got to finish this for him.* When others tried to help her after she stumbled and asked her if she needed a medical evacuation, she kept saying, "No! Don't touch me! Give me back my ruck!" She was determined to finish on her own. One time she fell and hit her head on a rock. When she got up, she asked her friend, "Am I bleeding?" When he said no, she kept going. They went on, step by step.

"Don't touch me. Don't touch me. I am doing it myself," she stuttered whenever anyone tried to stabilize her.

I caught back up to Alice, who had taken on another candidate to coach through the ruck. Alice shared her knowledge with those who were struggling more than her. She told them to just lift the right foot a little bit above the left to make it up the hill. She made purpose out of her pain by helping others.

Two track athletes were having bad cramps. We slowed to taking just a few steps at a time and then pausing. I had completely accepted my fate of not making the cut-off time, so I figured I should be as helpful as possible. At least when my teammates made fun of me for not making it, I would have the valid reason that I was with others who were struggling. I might not

be showing off my fighting and winning spirit, but I was showcasing another important characteristic that they were working to ingrain in us: being a good teammate.

I helped push one track athlete up a hill. I thought we would catch up to Alice again, but she had carried on. Now it was me and the track athlete. We slowed down so much that the candidates at the end of the formation caught up. I saw Kelly Carter, who passed us quickly along with a friend. As they passed, I noticed they were not wearing their rucksacks. Two football players who had been posted at stations along the way—they were not allowed to ruck during football season—carried the weight for them.

As I got to the very end of the battalion, I saw two more football players who were dragging along Angela Lil Boat, a Black woman from the South, who was huffing and puffing. They pulled her by the hand. She was still carrying her rucksack. She told me that someone in the chain of command had just told her to fall out, but she said no. Lisbeth was a few steps behind with her "Gabriel." She huffed to me that he deserved a medal for not leaving her side.

We were reaching the end. Angela started running down the very last hill. Lisbeth started to, but fell again, twisting her knee badly. Her mind was in a fog. She started speaking gibberish. She felt that her brain was getting fried, that she might be a heat casualty: *I am dying. Dead.*

A senior leader, who was with us now since he was stationed at the end of the formation, said, "That's it. She is done. Get a Med-evac." He pulled her rucksack off her back, and she did not even notice. But when her mind cleared again, she shouted, "Where is my ruck?! Give me my ruck!" The leader was telling the medics to get her onto the medical evacuation vehicle, but she started shouting, "No! No! I can't go. I want to keep going. Please. Please! Let me keep going."

"Are you okay? Can you walk?"

"I can try."

They had already put her ruck in the vehicle but took it out again and helped her put it back on. Her leg was in excruciating pain, but she ignored it: *Fuck it. I ain't no little bitch. Yeah. I ain't no little bitch.* She would not let us stabilize her at all. She wanted to make the last few steps on her own.

When we crossed the finish line, the senior leader told her to go get her knee checked out by the medics. When she went over to them, they told her there was nothing they could do now. She mentioned she also had a blister. They snorted, "welcome to the Army." Finally, the medic who had been on the march and seen her suffer came over. He wrapped her knee and gave her some Advil. Unlike the other medics, he knew that she was not simply another "soft body" with a "tiny heart."

We sat down and Lisbeth ranted: had I seen the candidates who had taken off their rucksacks and then put them on again to gain the honor of completing the task?

> It is fucking unfair. Yeah, I was technically the last one to finish the ruck, but I never gave up my rucksack. I always had it on me. I never had my friend carry it. What made me really mad was when they decided to put back on the ruck[sack] when they crossed the finish line. That was just unfair. They have no pride in this. They leech off of people that help them. That's so wrong. You're such a liability if you do that because you can't handle your own shit. You know, man up, suck it up, woman up, and fucking finish it with your own 40-pound rucksack. Even though I did finish very last—that was a little embarrassing—I was really proud of myself because I could have chosen to fall out the first moment that I rolled my knee. But I didn't fall out. Then I rolled it 10 times more, but I didn't. I just keep going, the whole way, even though there's a possibility that it is getting really fucked up, but that's okay. I never gave up my ruck[sack]. It's called a fucking eight-mile ruck march. If you have the physical ability, finish it with the 40-pound sack-of-shit on your back even if you're already passed the time. If not, you just cheated yourself.

Lisbeth was fine with the people who left in the fall-out vehicles because they had a medical reason to stop. This was a lot more honorable than taking credit for finishing. I smiled slightly to myself as she was talking, laughing to myself about how much she had internalized the Army

rhetoric around honor and sacrifice over the past five months. Her mindset was entirely different from when she had exaggerated her pain during our first battalion march.

Afterward, I could not stop thinking about a core tension I felt in my army socialization thus far: was I supposed to push myself to my limits or slow down to help my battle buddies? Was it more important to show grit and that I was a fighter, or that I was a good teammate? The dilemma came up a few weeks later during infantry club practice. Athena Little's hamstring was bothering her, but she was afraid if she stopped the teammates would think she was faking it. We were running sprints and she kept switching off between running and walking. I tried to stay with her to pace her. I thought that I was being a good teammate for supporting her and then people would not think she was finishing last. Deep down, I was also relieved. Whenever someone else was going slower than me, I had an excuse to take it easier and I was horrible at sprints.

I wondered how the candidates would make sense of these dilemmas. I thought about a study I had recently read about Black and White officers' evaluations (Johnson 2001). Although both groups received positive comments with equal frequency, the content was markedly different. The researchers found that "positive" comments for the Black officers, such as "attentive to the needs of others" and "gets along well with others" were negatively associated with promotion recommendations. For White officers, comments that they were "motivating" and "instructive" were positively associated with promotion recommendations. The only comment that was positively associated with promotion recommendations for Black officers was that they were "aggressive." These findings seemed to reflect the larger literature that low-status individuals are viewed as more communal and warmer, but that groups preferred more agentic and assertive leaders, even if they were less well-liked and sometimes perceived as self-

interested.[164] These patterns were amplified in groups where the goal was aggressive competition. In our case, prioritizing teamwork rather than showcasing personal strength was likely a mistake for those who wanted to be seen as the most valuable in the unit. The institutional mission was ultimately about winning wars.

I spoke to some teammates after practice about making these decisions. They said I had made the wrong choice: I was not pushing myself at practice and Athena was not as inspired to push herself because I was with her. At what point did one become a crutch? Nathan Cohen, a White prior in our squad shared that he regretted carrying Kelly's rucksack during basic training because now she could not get through the marches on her own. On the other hand, Kelly was proud of herself for finishing the full ruck, even if she had help. Others distinguished between graded events like fitness tests and regular company runs and rucks. On graded events, it was important to push oneself all the way, but on regular events, teamwork and motivating others took priority.

Carlos Estrada, a mixed-race man from the Northeast who identified as Africano, failed a fitness test early in the year because he went back to run with someone who was struggling. He slowed down to motivate his peer: "Come on man, come on. You can do it! I'm not going to give up on you. Don't give up on me." While Carlos was motivating the other candidate, he was losing time. Carlos did not see this as a failure because he felt his efforts would one day help the other candidate pass the fitness test. However, when it came time to assess his file to see if he should stay at the preparatory school, a fitness test failure was seen as another strike against him. He was frustrated: *Can they at least think about me motivating somebody, you know? Can you give me brownie points at least?* But the Army did not work that way. Carlos eventually realized

[164] See, for example, Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount 1996; Halevy, Y. Chou, and D. Galinsky 2011; Maner and Mead 2010; Rucker, Galinsky, and Magee 2018.

he had to become a bit more selfish. There were no brownie points in war.

50 World War III

"North Korea shot another missile over Japan. This is about to be World War III. And guess whose gonna be on the front lines? Me and you boo," Kelly Carter laughed ironically to Angela Lil Boat as they watched the news together over dinner.

A couple of tables over some candidates were pumping each other up after hearing the news: "Fuck yeah. Let's go to war with North Korea."

"I can't wait to get out there."

"Maybe if there is a war we could graduate early!"

"Let's go kill some terrorists."

Lily overheard the cadets who were eager to go fight, thinking to herself: *Why would you say that? Do you know how many people would die? Who wishes for war? War is not the best thing ever; it's extremely sad. You get PTSD. Your friends die. That is not something you wish for*.

51 Obstacle Course

The night before the basic training obstacle course, cadets came to check our combat helmets. The obstacle course had some dangerous exercises that could lead to severe injury or death if mistakes were made. They wanted to make sure our heads were protected. The combat helmets were made of hard material that could protect against concussions and potentially take a bullet. They had soft padding inside to cradle our heads. When Lily tried hers on, it fell over her eyes like a bucket. The tightening straps did not do much to help keep it up: "Ugh, nothing fits me here!"

When I tried mine on, I notice that it was missing a few patches of padding. Some other pads kept falling due to old Velcro and revealed the inner screws. I asked my squad leader what I should do. He said just use some duct tape. Duct tape could solve everything.

"Roger, Sergeant." I made little duct tape bubbles to stick on the loose pads and covered some of the screws with tape to add a little more protection. It did not even occur to me that this was an absurd way to protect my head.

We lined up along the barracks' walls with our combat helmets in front of us as the cadet company commander walked through the hall and peered in each one. Then he had us put them on to show that the straps were secure. The company commander stopped to look at mine, grimaced, took it in his hands, and fingered the black duct tape: "Wow. Your helmet is jacked up. That is not okay. You're missing pads. Look at those screws!" He escorted me to the supply room to get a new combat helmet that was fully padded and fit correctly. Lily came along as well so he could try to find her a helmet that was a bit smaller.

The next morning, we rode buses to the obstacle course. It was our first time leaving the preparatory school walls and the excitement, though mixed with exhaustion, was palpable. A few

of us used the 15-minute bus ride as an opportunity to take a little break from the hawk-like eyes of the cadets. They kept telling us to keep our eyes and heads straight forward, but they often did not notice if we closed our eyes, pulled down our patrol caps, and took a little nap.

I had no idea what to expect from the obstacle course, other than I hoped I would not make a fool of myself in some way or another. I was not feeling confident in my ability to perform the obstacles while fasting for Tisha B'Av.[165]

When we arrived, I snuck glances at the strange structures around me. The obstacle course was a clearing in the woods and each obstacle led to another as the pathway looped around the area. I saw a tall, wide wooden ladder-looking structure that went above the trees—the confidence climb. There was a triangle-shaped structure that had logs placed a foot or so apart that came to a point at the top—the weaver. There were ropes to climb up and swing from, wooden logs to balance on, wires to crawl under, and monkey bars high above the ground. It was like a playground on steroids.

Before we separated by squad to do the obstacles, we received a safety brief. The uniform for the day was the combat uniform, combat helmets, gloves, and eye protection. We had to keep these on at all times. We should carry with us our Camelbaks and drink regularly because of the heat. There were several medics on-site to help with injuries and a vehicle to do medical evacuations in case of emergency. The mission of the day was to help us build up our confidence and learn to trust each other.

Our squad went to the weaver first. I walked over slowly trying not to exert extra energy. Kelly Carter had a painful rash developing between her thighs, so she walked with me, with a slight limp. Rich Rivers, a White prior from the Midwest, went through the weaver first, expertly

[165] A Jewish day of mourning the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem. See Part I, Chapter 23 'Religious Bodies' for more information.

maneuvering over and under each log. He grabbed on like a sloth hanging upside down, pivoted his hips, looped a leg over the next log, and moved on top of it. He was literally weaving himself through. It was not his first time on this challenge because obstacle courses tend to be the same across the Army. Underneath, Aaron Evans and Ben Hall, our squad football players, were his spotters. They were making sure that if he did fall, it would be on to them. They promised to catch him just as gracefully as they caught footballs at practice. At the very top of the triangle, there was padding underneath because the fall was about 10 feet down.

I hung back and watched the other candidates do the weaver. Some worked with surprising agility. Others struggled. I cheered loudly when Kelly made it across. When it was my turn, I made it to about the second log and then dropped down. I tried again and did not make it much further.

"Winfield, you got to trust us. We will catch you. Trust yourself and use your hips"

I cleared my head, breathed, and figured I would give it a full go. No more fear. At least my helmet was fully padded now. I went one log at a time, thrusting my hips, grabbing onto the next log with all my upper body strength, again and again. I got into a flow. I stopped to breathe for a moment at the top and then worked my way back down. They cheered for me. The flesh on my forearms and biceps was aching. I peeked under my uniform top and saw purple bruises emerging. I wore them as badges of honor.

We made our way to the confidence climb. The giant ladder-looking structure had different heights in between logs. The goal was to make it to the top by pulling oneself up onto the next ladder level. Kelly went and fell backward from the third level straight onto her back. She felt nauseous and had a headache for the rest of the day.

Then there was an obstacle where we had to run and jump off one log onto another higher

log and then swing ourselves over the top. One candidate ran so hard at the first log, jumped so powerfully, that he flipped over the second level, and came to land on his feet at the bottom. But his ankle hit a rock and it twisted to the side. I tried to jump to the second level but just kept landing painfully on my stomach, unable to pull myself over.

Athena Little was too scared to jump on one of the obstacles. She kept trying to convince herself to move, but she would not budge. She breathed deeply, centering herself. We cheered her on. This was the point of the day—to learn to trust ourselves and our teammates. To build confidence in our strength and that we could survive even wild-looking obstacles. We were there to build courage, trust, and confidence and, to do so, we had to physically enact these dispositions by taking a literal leap. And she jumped.

The balancing challenges were my favorite because for some reason women seemed to be the best at these obstacles. The rumor was women had better balance. *Finally,* I thought, *something where we have the physical comparative advantage! Too bad balance was not on the fitness test.* I walked easily and confidently over the shaking logs. One candidate slipped on a damp spot on the log onto Renee Edmonds, who was her spotter. Both tumbled down.

Otherwise, the obstacles proceeded as planned. Over and over, we tested our limited and preconceived notion of what was possible. I felt ecstatic each time I was able to make it through an obstacle, was more confident on the next one, and often took even more risks.

We took a break for lunch. I stared enviously at the candidates' 'Meal, Ready-to-Eat' (MRE) packages. MREs were typically disgusting, but I was so hungry and thirsty from the fast. After lunch, we moved to the Leader Reaction Course. The purpose of this activity was to help us learn to work as a team. They add some additional challenges to this activity: only one person in the squad could speak at a time. Although some of the priors had done these obstacles before,

they tried to stay quiet so us newbies could figure it out for ourselves.

Catherine Poli, a White woman from the Northeast, was frustrated during the activity. On one of the obstacles that involved lugging heavy barrels across an area, a squad mate told her that he would carry the barrel instead of her. He said, “Girls, can’t hold their own, can they?”

She responded, “Hell yes they can.”

Renee Edmonds was irritated because a White prior would not listen to her when she was selected to lead the exercise. He would talk over her because he was more familiar with the obstacles. *He thinks he is so much better than us,* Renee thought to herself. There was tension in the squad status hierarchies, as Catherine and Renee advocated for increased influence and perceived value.

We cycled through the team obstacles fairly well. I was able to contribute to the team except for the obstacles that involved jumping. I already knew I was a terrible jumper, and the lack of food and drink was making my jumps even more pitiful. When we circled back to the first obstacle we had attempted, we planned how we were going to execute together as a team using our respective strengths. The obstacle had a “moat” of wood chips that we had to jump over to grab a rope. Then we would use the rope to climb up a slanted wall and make it to the other side. Anyone who fell into the moat was considered dead. The first idea was to have our tallest squad mate do a plank over the moat and I would climb across him. He was not able to bear my weight and quickly fell onto the wood chips. We decided that the only other option was for the squad to pick me up and toss me to the rope. This seemed reasonable to me, and I enthusiastically consented to the idea.

The rest of the team picked me up and on the count of three, they tossed me. But instead of a gentle toss, the combined force SLAMMED me against the wall. There was a loud bang and

I fell to the ground. The medic heard the sound and came running over. I got up laughing. I kept thinking how lucky I was that nothing bad happened. My shoulder was not dislocated. I did not have a concussion. Right after, I tried to see if I could have done the jump myself and I was able to jump over the moat.

The obstacle course was just one of many times during the year when I put my body on the line—sometimes foolishly—for the sake of my team. If the mission of the day was to gain confidence that we could push our bodies further than we expected and achieve tasks that had previously seemed impossible, then it was achieved, at least for me. I gained confidence that my body could take the bumps and bruises, and I was more than willing to endure them to demonstrate I was a competent member of the team. I learned to trust my teammates above all else; they would not let me fall. Even if I did fall (or fly into a wall), it was okay because I was contributing to our objectives. I was beginning to embody the military dispositions of trust, courage, and bodily sacrifice. And I was not going to let fear get in my way.

52 Let's Play Army

On the bus ride to the spring field exercises, the candidates behind me were joking around:

"Let's play army."

"We don't play. We are."

"No, we still have a few years."

"Still, we are in the beginning."

I caught a snippet of a conversation in front of me.

"Since we are technically on active duty, what happens if another war breaks out?"

"I am not going."

53 Calm under Pressure

Hassan Ahmed, an Asian prior from the South, and I were partners for the medical readiness training exercise. We waited with others in a shaded area until we were called up for our turn. I could hear machine guns, simulation artillery, and lots of yelling.

When our turn arrived, we walked across the gravel parking lot to the lanes which were within the tree line. A cadet greeted us and handed us each a magazine full of blanks and put a cover over our rifle muzzles. We continued to the medic who was running our lane. He told us that the instructions were simple: when our turn started, we would have to bound forward to the casualty (a life-size and weight dummy) and apply combat first aid to the wound. Next, we would call in the nine-line medical evacuation information through the radio. One of us would also have to pull security, making sure that the enemy was not approaching us. Then we would have to carry the casualty to the helicopter evacuation zone, which was about 100 yards away. He told us to make sure we were taking cover as we moved. I looked around at the thin trees, curious how by any stretch of the imagination they would provide adequate cover from bullets. He saw me looking and said not to worry about it, just imagine the trees were thicker.

We moved to the starting position, and he told us to begin. We moved forward in a low crawl. Real machine gun fire—with blanks—started coming from our right flank. We started bounding forward. The medic who had just been kind and calm a minute before started yelling in our ears: “WHAT ARE YOU DOING? THEY ARE SHOOTING YOU! THE CASUALTY IS BLEEDING OUT! WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?”

Cadets came over to surround us and yell: “YOU THINK THAT TREE IS THICK ENOUGH TO PROTECT YOU? THE BULLET CAN GO RIGHT THROUGH THAT!”

Just keep breathing. Keep moving forward. I tried to maintain my composure even

though I was irritated that they were yelling at us about the trees which the medic had just told us to pretend were thicker. My heart was racing.

We bounded a few more times until we arrived at the casualty. It was missing a leg. I yelled at it "ARE YOU OKAY?" to check for consciousness and responsiveness. Obviously, it did not respond because it was a dummy but I performed the first step anyway so we would not lose points. We were told it was a live casualty and it was bleeding out. I moved quickly to tie the tourniquet on the stump of a leg. I wrote the time on the tourniquet. Then I checked the body for any blood in any other locations. We rolled the casualty onto the litter.

They kept yelling at us. I took over security. Hassan called in the nine line. He turned on the radio. The machine guns were so loud I could barely hear him.

"DestroyerMed, this is BeastAlpha, over."

"Request medevac."

"ONE" He gave the location of the pick-up site.

"TWO" He gave our radiofrequency.

"THREE. 1-Alpha." One casualty needed urgent medical attention within the next two hours to preserve life, limb, or eyesight.

"FOUR. Alpha." No special equipment required.

"FIVE. Lima-1" One casualty who would need a litter.

He made a break so other nine-lines could get through. Lines six through nine were helpful but not essential. In the rest of the lines, he conveyed that there were enemy troops in the area, we would use panels to mark the pick-up site, the patient was U.S. military personnel, and there was no biological, nuclear, or chemical contamination present.

"HURRY UP! HE IS DYING!" More machine gun bursts rang out. I shot blanks back in

the direction of the firing, but my rifle kept jamming. *Damn it.*

It was time to move the casualty to the evacuation zone. The cadets had decided that we had taken too long so they took away the litter. We now had to carry the over-100-pound dummy all while trying to maintain some semblance of cover, suppressive fire, and bound. The cadets kept yelling at us, swearing at us, and telling us how terrible we were doing.

Simulation artillery. "GET DOWN." A loud boom.

We made it to the final pick-up site.

"THAT WAS A NO-GO, CANDIDATES." We had failed but they did not tell us why.

"What the hell?! They kept telling us conflicting information," I said exasperatedly to Hassan. I was still out of breath and my heart was pounding.

"I think they purposefully were trying to make us upset to see if we could keep our cool."

That made sense to me. It was not unlike the leadership to try to increase the stress and adrenaline on purpose. They had even told us during our first nine-line training that they were exposing us to stress now so we could maintain composure in emergencies. As officers, we would have to maintain the ability to think clearly and rationally even in high-stress situations. Still, it was irritating and unnerving.

We rejoined the rest of the candidates who had finished the lane. Lisbeth said that she had felt panicky the whole time: why did they keep yelling at her to hurry up, shoot the enemy, provide aid, and call in the nine-line all at the same time? What the fuck was she supposed to do? She did not have nine arms. She joked but was visibly shaken. The stress, adrenaline, and sensory overload made it feel all too real. For the first time, she had imagined what it might be like to be in war.

Lily walked over to us. Her buddy team had failed because they had not adequately

pulled the casualty to cover. She said I should just name my book *Torture*.

Kelly Carter was not fazed, "You don't actually gotta be sacred, but you have to act like you are." If she pretended to be upset or stressed out, the cadets would leave her alone. She put an anxious look on her face and kept going at her own pace, learning to block out the noise. Externally, she complied with the feeling rules to show proper intention and effort—grunts, grimaces—when in reality she was already desensitized enough to stay calm. Her current internal state was the objective of the exercise, but if she expressed it too early in the process, her stoicism would be interpreted as not taking the training seriously. She was always calm, never fazed, and as she spoke, my first thought was: *That will serve her well in war*.

54 Battle Drills

The weather was chilly, but rather sunny for a mid-January late afternoon. We arrived around one o'clock, or 1300 as I now said, in the training area. We were in the middle of a forest but there was a clearing with several red concrete buildings. We put on several layers to protect us from the simulation bullets. Although not lethal, the bullets could still break skin if shot too close. I wore a pair of khakis under my fatigues, my fleece, and a camouflage outer jacket. We put on our combat helmets and SWAT face masks. We were given weapons, and my heart started to pound fast as I took the cold, black steel into my hands. We had to open the rifles and switch out the bolts. My hands fumbled over the M4, trying to figure out which pins I had to press to open it up. I felt like an idiot, incapable: how could I have forgotten so much since basic training?

Don't mess up, I kept telling myself, *don't mess up.* One simple mistake could turn this whole operation very dangerous. We lined up our real bolts in order so we would not mix them up with the bolts for the simulation rounds. Then we loaded our magazines with the ammunition. I had to press hard and almost blister my fingers to get them in. Captain Kennedy told us to hurry up. We did not have much time. I scrambled, my hands trying to push the bullets in, worried I was messing up. My heart was pumping. My hands were shaking. Adrenaline coursed through my veins.

We separated into groups: blue force and opposition force. I was in opposition force with Sergeant First Class Lee. As we walked toward the largest red building, he checked that my weapon was working, firing off a round. I tried to fire but it jammed. I got the jammed bullet out, tried again, and it jammed again. He said the magazine was defective and I hoped it was not my fault for loading it poorly. Sergeant First Class Lee loaded in a new one, and I shot off my first

round into the side of the building. The shell shot off to my side and the bullet ricocheted off the bricks.

My position was upstairs in the two-story building. The rest of the squad spread out around the other buildings. We waited for blue force to emerge from the wood line. I spotted them in the distance. Their uniforms blended in with the foliage, but I could sense movement. I stayed in the window watching, when suddenly, a bullet whizzed by, scraping my jacket. I got down quickly, impressed that the blue force was able to shoot from that far. *Snipers!*

I kept ducking and staying out of sight, as I watched blue force make its way into the far-left building. No opposition force was in that building, so they took it over easily. I started hearing shooting nearby. I made my way back into the room, looking around the corner to aim at the first person to cross the threshold. The shots continued. It sounded like they were entering my building. I heard them clear the bottom level of the building. My heart was pounding. My weapon was up and ready. Footsteps on the stairs, more shooting, more yelling.

I heard them say that they were taking the right room first. I was on the left. I heard them go left, and then as they walked through the doorway, I switched my weapon off safe and started shooting into their chests. There were four of them and just one of me, so I shot and ran to the back corner of my room. I found cover behind a block of wood and kept shooting over it. They surrounded me and I kept shooting, until they said, “safe kill,” meaning that they would not shoot me at such a close range. I was not sure they would have gotten me behind my shield and was confused about how they could not have been hit in my fury of fire but went along with them to restart the simulation exercise.

This time I was on blue force, and we started in the woods. We had to plan our attack. We broke into small groups, Alpha team and Bravo team. Our designated squad leader told us

which way to maneuver, and our team leader took the front. One team would attack first and those who stayed behind would support from the tree line. They asked if I wanted to support by fire and I said no. The squad leader laughed saying, "Winfield wants blood." *HOOAH.*

We went up the steep cliff to enter the area from the far left. We were right above a waterfall and stream. I gripped my rifle with one hand, the ground with another, and hoped my feet would not slip in the mud. Any misplaced step could mean a broken leg. We low-crawled up the hill through the mud, careful not to put our muzzles in the dirt. We jumped up and sprinted, trying not to get shot by the opposition force in the building to the right. We were careful to raid the building according to battle drill six and pull security. I was in the back of the wedge, making sure no enemies were coming at us from behind. We cleared the building and Bravo team came in behind us and took control of the building. We then went back deep into the woods to breach the two-story building from behind. My heart was racing. My legs felt heavy as I ran through the rocky terrain in my boots, careful to take cover and stay with my group. The people in the building spotted our team and started shooting. Bullets whizzed by. I kept going, trying to get behind cover with each bound.

Up, they see me, I am down, Up, they see me, I am down. I repeated the mantra we learned for bounding in my head. Then my team cleared the tree line and went to the window. I was last, pulling security from the rear. Pop, pop, pop.

My team was laying low. *Wait…are they…?* It was a few seconds before it registered that they were 'dead.' A rifle came out at me from the window. I shot back. I was hit in the left armpit. I kept firing with my other arm but was hit again in the other armpit. I laid dead next to my teammates, as opposition force came and stole our ammunition. They checked our bodies and looked for intelligence as we had been taught.

I could hear shouting in the distance as our squad leader learned he had one team down. The other team tried to maneuver into the building too, but the plan had gone very, very badly. The squad leader went down. A few lone survivors tried to clear the buildings, but they too were soon shot too many times to keep moving forward. Blue force was all dead.

Captain Kennedy told us to all come back together. We were chatting animatedly, replaying the events.

"Listen up. You can share your war stories later." During his talk, someone spun around ready to hit the enemy. It was just some leaves. There was no one there; he laughed saying it was just PTSD.

During battle drills, my mind often drifted back and forth between having fun, learning new skills, the reality of war and what can happen in combat, and existential fear of death. My team was having fun when we tried to breach the building; but as we lay there 'dead,' I realized that this happens in real life. It was not just a game. It hit me particularly hard when I asked Sergeant First Class Lee what would have happened if I had really been shot in both armpits and he simply said that I would have bled out almost immediately. Dead in minutes. Clearing buildings was one of the most dangerous tasks in the military with the highest causality rates.

I learned that battle drills were the way to prepare new soldiers for combat scenarios. They were essential to military socialization because they trained the muscle memory of soldiers on how to react to various situations. While sporting events and competitions built the muscle of fighting and winning mentalities, battle drills brought these skills into the realm of real violence and war. Our tactical team often stressed to us: "in the future, when you are all officers, rehearsals are key." A senior leader explained battle drills to me as "blunt force trauma mindless

repetition." If he kept putting his soldiers through the same scenarios over and over again until every soldier knew how to react without thinking, eventually they would have instinctual, non-emotional reactions to otherwise highly stressful events. In psychological terms, they would be moving from controlled to automatic behavior and cognition in these moments. He continued that this would serve them well, and possibly save their lives, in combat.

Some basic-training mornings started with what I then called war rehearsals: spontaneous battle drills. One morning, as we were eating breakfast in the field, I heard some commotion by the port-o-johns. The cadets were telling candidates they were shot down because they had been walking around without battle buddies. Those who went to the port-o-johns, trash bin, or water buffalo alone were now causalities. Other candidates ran out to help the causalities. But if they went to a casualty out in the open, they were also "shot," so now there were even more casualties. Candidates' bodies were sprawled across the field. There was a lot of laughing and the cadets were having fun but also trying to give some advice: "Don't try to save them if they are already dead!"

"Don't all get behind the same tree—a grenade will take you all out!"

"That tree will not provide cover! You're dead"

It was a mix of fun and play-acting, almost like a childhood game, but in the back of my mind, I kept remembering that this all could be real. A blend of playfulness and humor, with the ominous reality of what happens during war and what may happen to the candidates in their future careers. Overseas there were real firefights, real injuries, and real causalities.

The game went on until we had to gather back together for medical readiness training. We broke up into four groups and cycled through stations for medical trauma, tourniquet

application, buddy carry, and the nine-line medical evacuation.

The buddy carries turned into a bit of a race and a chance to pick each other up and joke around. I struggled to try to carry Chelsea in the fireman's carry despite her small size. She laughed at me and lovingly made fun of my struggle. Then she grabbed me and threw me over her shoulder easily despite our height and weight differences. Other candidates were crying out in mock screams, "MY LEG! MY LEG!"

It was fun with a hint of grimness. I wondered if on some level we were using humor to laugh away anxiety about our existential fear of death and the realities that could await us on a real battlefield.[166] Or perhaps we just really needed a break from the seriousness of basic training, and this was a time we had a little more freedom.

Before the final challenge of basic training ("the crucible"), we practiced bounding forward in a wedge formation, reacting to contact, returning fire, and yelling out the "Three Ds"—description of the enemy, distance, and direction of the incoming contact. On our first run-through, I was in front.

Pop. Pop. Pop

"CONTACT! CONTACT" We took cover and fired back.

I tried to yell the three Ds but could not remember the second one.

The next step of the battle drill was bounding forward, returning suppressive fire, and taking cover. We did not bound straight ahead and ended up behind one another, flagging each other with our weapons. Then I accidentally bounded without taking orders from my team leaders. The cadets yelled out we had a causality.

[166] See, for example, Pérez-Aranda et al. 2019.

Captain Kennedy, yelled “F” when he saw us, rolled his eyes, and walked away.

The company came back together to practice Battle Drill 1A Platoon Attack. There was some confusion and conflict between cadets and the priors on how to properly lead the exercise, and a sergeant took over. He led us through a full rehearsal of the battle drill.

We broke into two teams, Alpha and Bravo team. Alpha team—the fire team in contact—moved forward in a wedge formation and returned suppressive fire. Bravo team moved to the flank to assault the enemy from another direction. We had to be sure to get the timing right, so we did not enter each other’s field of fire and accidentally shoot each other.

Towards the end of the drill, we crossed through the enemy area—“the kill box”. The sergeant explained, “It’s a war crime to come back to an area and kill someone, so make sure to shoot them twice when you are going through the first time.” We then learned how to check the enemies’ bodies for live grenades that they may have pulled the pin on before they died. We also were told to search for intelligence in their pockets.

Captain Kennedy showed us how to do the grenade check. As he tilted to the body to check underneath, he said, “If one is holding a grenade, jump on him and win a medal of honor.” We all laughed. He showed us how to cover a body completely with his own. It took me a second to fully process what his words meant. A medal of honor meant that he had sacrificed himself by using his own body as a shield against the explosive.

In the infantry club, we went to patrol the woods and learn ambush techniques. We took cover behind the trees as Captain Kennedy walked us through the details. He described the specifics of ambush attacks and where and how to set up the “kill box.” The ambush should start with a large explosive (a claymore) and have a “mad minute” of continuous cyclic fire to destroy the enemy.

He continued, “Once they are all dead, you check the area, and destroy all of their things.”

A prior hesitantly asked, “This might be a stupid question but what do you do with their bodies?”

“You add them under the C4.” C4 was a plastic explosive.

“Oh damn.” There were exchanged glances and a few gasps. The mission had to come first. Enemies discovering the bodies of their comrades would give away that American troops were in the area. They had to be destroyed.

During military science class one fall afternoon, we went outside to learn about the types of machine guns and how to operate them. At one of the stations, Captain Kennedy showed us how to move a dead gunner out of the way with a roll. He asked, “Do we feel bad that Joe is dead? Absolutely. But we have to keep the gun going. Once the enemy is suppressed, we can apply aid.” This idea was drilled into our minds: fire first, then get cover, and when contact is done, set up security, check the casualties for explosives, then care for our own causalities and lastly, those of the enemy. Again, the mission came first.

We laid down in the grass with a partner and practiced rolling each other over. As the person next to the gunner, if she were shot, I would roll my back onto her back, link our arms, roll her to the side, and immediately keep shooting back. There should not be any pause in the suppressive fire.

As people were playing around with the machine guns and laughing as they rolled over each other, Captain Kennedy said, “It’s all fun and games until you are in a real firefight.” He said this in a light manner but there was a darkness to the words. I remembered how he had told us about losing his own soldiers in firefights.

I wondered how the mixture of laughter and playfulness felt to those who had experienced real combat. When I asked a senior leader about this, he told me he thought the laughter was a lack of leadership; these exercises should be taken more seriously. Captain Edwards thought there was a time for some fun during battle drills. At this point in the candidates' careers, it was okay for them to blow off a little steam or laugh a little in the field. There was a long-term reward for making the experiences enjoyable now. If we were engaged, we would be learning more. Sometimes he would bring a more serious tone to the battle drills to ensure we were able to connect our exercises to what soldiers were doing in combat at that very moment. He did not mind laughing and joking in the train-up, but during the actual execution of the exercise, we needed to take it seriously. It was all about balance, with separate feeling rules for the train-up and actual execution. In exercises with simulation rounds, if we were not serious then everything would fall into chaos and the drill would lose its training value. He wanted us to understand the gravity of the moment and that proper training saves lives.

Blunt force trauma mindless repetition, I would repeat to myself during training. It felt like a dress rehearsal for war. When the time came, we would be prepared.

55 Protecting 'the Female'

I heard there was a major problem with the integration of women into combat arms: men would put women's safety above the mission. If women on the battlefield were injured or in harm's way, men would drop everything to help them. That was a natural reaction. Soldiers were trained to keep going even if their best friend's head was blown off, to push ahead, and put the mission first and only go back to help them when the objective was secured—but if a woman was injured, the whole system would fall apart and jeopardize the mission and soldier safety.

I asked a senior leader how it was possible that the military could train soldiers in entirely new skills and dispositions—engaging in firefights, risking their lives, pulling the trigger, fighting for their teams, building grit and discipline—but they could not overcome the tendency to protect women soldiers over the mission. What happened to blunt force trauma mindless repetition?

He responded that he was not going to say it was impossible. I was right: with a lot of training and repetition, every change was possible. But every time he trained up a platoon that was ready to go, soldiers would leave or be transferred. Then he would have to retrain the platoon again. He had to redo everything and start over again with repetition. To try to break down such an instinctual human reaction to protect the female might take decades to fix, so repeating it over and over with new soldiers would not be particularly successful. Yes, he could try, but it would be a never-ending repetition.

The problem was not the females, he assured me. They could be tough as nails. The problem was the males who want to protect them.

56 Weapons Training

We lined up to receive our rifles at the supply room. Candidates went up to the counter, repeated their names, and were issued rifles. Each candidate was completely responsible for the safekeeping of his or her rifle. As a civilian, I could not be issued a rifle. Instead, I was given a model rifle, called a "rubber duck," with a similar structure and weight that is used in training exercises. For actual marksmanship, I was given the M16 of a candidate who had out-processed during the first week of basic training.

Athena Little was disturbed when they handed her the rifle. They gave it to her without any instructions: what was she supposed to do with this monstrous thing? The knowledge that with the rifle she could kill someone was horrible. Kelly Carter was similarly distraught because she knew that weapons killed people, especially in the area she grew up. She had lived in the middle-class area of town, but a 10-minute drive away in the city center there were daily shootings. Her sister would always yell at her nephew for playing with fake guns because in her area, gun violence was very real. Guns were not a game. People were killed every day. She noticed others' excitement but tried to remain nonchalant.

Lisbeth Sokolov was not pleased, but for a different reason. *They gave me this outdated Vietnam War bullshit?* She thought it was a heavy, old, and ugly weapon. She would rather have a M9 pistol. Our squad mate, Saul Alvarez, a mixed-race man from the South, was also unhappy with the age of the rifle: *Oh my god, my dad shot this gun. This gun is old as fuck. Why are you giving me these old weapons*? The priors had similar disappointment when they were issued the M16 rifle instead of the sleeker and more up-to-date M4.

After receiving the weapons, we were brought back to our rooms to wait for the rest of the platoon. On her way to her room in the next batch of escorted candidates, Barbara Fenton

accidentally came into our room instead of hers. We were one door apart and it was easy to mistake our doors when we were not allowed to look around. Barbara was irritated. A candidate next to her had been pointing his rifle upwards, and they all got in trouble and had to do push-ups. The cadet who noticed the mishandled rifle had exclaimed, “If someone does that again, everyone will be doing 100 four-set push-ups.” Barbara preferred not to have weapons at all because she knew her peers would continuously mess up. She emphasized, “They gave it to us pointing down! How are people pointing it up immediately? If someone points it up again and we get smoked, I am just going to stand there with my rifle pointing down because I am not the one who messed up.” She was not in the mood for more mass corrections.

When everyone in our platoon had weapons, our cadet platoon sergeant brought us together to learn weapons safety and proper holding positions. He asked us, “What comes out of the end of a weapon?”

“A bullet?” Someone tentatively answered.

“No. Death,” he replied, “Death is what comes out of a rifle. We will treat rifles like death machines because it is a death machine.” He told us a personal story about a friend who was shot when they were children during a game with a family rifle that they thought was unloaded. He told us he would have no tolerance for us pointing our weapons in the wrong direction: “I cannot stress weapon safety enough.”

He reviewed the rules of weapons safety:

1) Treat every weapon as if it were loaded.

2) Keep your finger straight and off the trigger until you intend to fire.

3) Never point your weapon at anything you don’t intend to shoot.

4) Keep your weapon on safe until you intend to fire.

He taught us how to hold our weapons pointing straight down. It was painful at first, but he assured us our wrist muscles would adjust and lengthen to make the position comfortable. Our dominant hand would always remain on the weapon, keeping it pointing down, and all of our fingers would stay outside of the trigger well. The other hand would hold the barrel and keep it steady. We practiced slinging on and unslinging the weapon while keeping it pointed down. He showed us how to maneuver our upper bodies in and out of the sling smoothly. He had us practice taking the weapon on and off at his command and doing it more and more quickly: "ON. OFF. ON. OFF."

He timed us. I accidentally hit myself in the chin with the butt of my weapon in the frenzy to do it quickly. *Ouch!* Damn that hurt, but I did not show any reactions on my face. Others suffered little bumps, but no one pointed their weapon in an unsafe position.

He showed us how to use our thumbs to double-check that our weapons were on safe without looking down. The thumb of the dominant hand could graze the selector switch to ensure that it was in the correct position.

When picking up weapons from the ground or receiving weapons from another person, the first thing to do was to clear them to make sure there was no ammunition in the chamber. We practiced picking our weapons up from the ground, clearing them, slinging them, unslinging them, putting them down: "Again! Again!" It was essential that we embodied proper weapon stances and safety now because in a few days we would be working with live ammunition.

When he was satisfied with our progress, he reminded us that our weapons had to always be within an arm's distance—even when showering, on the toilet, or sleeping. Our weapon would be a constant companion, to snuggle with in bed and take to the bathroom. As we marched to lunch formation, I thought about the scholarship on how socialization shapes object

affordance—i.e., what objects *afford* a user in terms of perception of use, actual use, emotions, meaning, and value (Gibson 1977, 1979; Gibson and Pick 2003). I could sense already that a key piece of military socialization would be redefining our relationships with weapons.

We arrived on the pad, took accountability, and grounded our weapons—each rifle taking the place of its new owner in formation. Captain Kennedy told us before we were marched to chow:

> I know a lot of you have not handled weapons before, but you will get used to it. It is your new battle buddy. Think of it as part of your body. It will be on you at all times. Treat weapons as loaded at all times. I have personally seen soldiers shot by weapons we thought were not loaded. These are not a toy or left around.

A cadet would be on duty to watch the rifles during lunch. Weapons could never be left unattended. When the cadet saw my 'rubber duck' rifle in the formation, there was brief panic. The fake rifle had a loaded magazine, and the selector switch was on burst. When we returned, the cadets had put yellow tape around the magazine so no one would mistake it for a fully loaded rifle again.

We had two full days of lessons about the weapon system and the four fundamentals of shooting before going to the range. On Marksmanship Day Zero, we rotated through stations. Our first station was disassembling the rifle. We were each given a big, white plastic sheet to place all the pieces. They warned us not to take apart the bolt because we might lose the tiny firing pin. It would blend in perfectly with the turf.

Kelly and I bent over her weapon, taking it apart slowly, looking over at Saul's rifle when we got a bit lost. Saul was familiar with weapons from Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps and from growing up with a command sergeant major as a father. We had to figure out how to get each part loose and the order in which to remove the pieces. When we had two minutes left

before rotating to the next station, two priors went up to the front and raced to see who could disassemble and reassemble their weapons the quickest. It happened so fast I could not make out the steps. The instructor told us that soon we would be able to do it just as quickly; the weapon was a new part of our bodies. We would get to know all the pieces intimately.

At the second station, we learned about weapon safety. We learned how to do functions checks to ensure the rifle operated properly with the selector switch in each position. Then we practiced loading and unloading empty magazines. Chelsea Melton had used guns before, but this was her first time learning how to properly use the safety and do functions checks. She was excited to learn new military knowledge.

Saul let me practice using his rifle and the weapon's weight surprised me. It was difficult to hold it in place as I tried to load and unload the magazine. Now I understood why upper-body strength, even finger strength, was so important for soldiers. Even carrying and loading a weapon could take a lot of strength over time and my trigger finger was exhausted. We practiced locking the bolt to the rear, loading the magazine, moving the selector switch off safe, and firing. Lock, load, shoot, clear, put back on safe. Lock, load, shoot, clear, put back on safe. We practiced over and over. Then we did functions checks again. These were the first of many hours we would spend repeating the motions until they started to take root in our muscle memory.

At station three, we learned about zeroing in and practiced mechanically zeroing our weapons. "Point at the human-shaped blob and kill," said the cadet running the station. A candidate asked how many circles counted on the target as a point and the cadet responded, "This isn't field artillery, this is specialized marksmanship."

Sam Anderson, a White prior from the West Coast, became increasingly frustrated with the cadets during weapons training. He felt that the cadets were not competent in teaching the

fundamentals of marksmanship. All the fine points he had learned in enlisted basic training and taught to other soldiers as a sergeant, the cadets were passing over. He felt the cadets were not teaching; they were just yelling at us and going through the motions. They did not hold legitimacy as authorities in his eyes. He sucked it up and tried to be helpful when others seemed to be struggling. Sam was not yet aware that basic training was also a training exercise for the cadets; this was a "leadership laboratory" for them to try to learn how to lead soldiers. Just as we were being assessed on our competencies, they too were receiving explicit assessments, rankings, and grades from their peers and supervisors.

We then went over the four fundamentals of shooting: (1) steady position; (2) aim; (4) breathing; and (4) trigger squeeze. We practiced by balancing quarters and dimes on the top of the barrel and pulling the trigger. If the coin did not fall, we were holding the rifle steady enough. We practiced in the unsupported prone and kneeling positions.

We ended the training with a rehearsal of the proper behavior on the range. Cadets yelled out range commands and we practiced following the orders. We learned to maintain "muzzle awareness" and always point the rifle downrange. We repeated this over and over so when it came time for live fire, it would be ingrained in our minds and muscles.

After lunch, we collected our gear and took the bus to the Engagement Skills Trainer Range, a virtual range at the Academy. While waiting our turn, we had a 20-minute review of basic marksmanship. The cadets reviewed again the fundamentals of marksmanship, safety checks for entering and exiting the range, and firing positions.

We talked a bit about naming our weapons. Cadets shared their rifles' names and asked if we had named ours yet. I noticed that the men tended to name their weapons women's names, referring to them as their girlfriends. One prior laughed, "if you take care of her, she will take

care of you." A candidate who got in trouble for not cleaning his weapon well enough, wrote his cadet platoon sergeant a letter about why it was important to keep his rifle clean, just as he must keep his girlfriend clean—"nobody wants a dirty girlfriend." I thought the feminine names were surprising given how clearly the rifles seemed to be phallic symbols and signs of warrior virility. But apparently, the intimacy with one's rifle trumped those other forces. Women typically gave their weapons men's names.[167] I named my M16 at the range Blue, after candidate Blue who out-processed during the first week of basic training. Candidate Blue's father was a general officer but within a week of seeing what military life was really like, he had had enough. "I just want to be a civilian," he had told me the night before he left. I was able to consistently use his old weapon when we were in the field and named it in his honor. Beyond the nicknames of the M16s, we had to be careful not to call them "guns." These were not guns; they were rifles. Since we were in the profession of arms, we had to be careful to refer to each weapon with its specific class otherwise risk corrective action. Just as (re)socialization included learning new affordances for weapons, it also entailed learning the correct terminology to refer to them. The way we spoke about weapons signaled our membership in the profession of arms and built boundaries between us and other social groups. We would no longer speak about "guns" like civilians.

In the middle of a lesson reviewing the shooting positions, a cadet stomped around the room, staring closely at our weapons. He saw that Saul's weapon was not on safe: "Are you fucking kidding me?! Your weapon is on burst!"

He took Saul out of the room to our cadet platoon leader. When he returned 10 minutes later, I looked over at him worriedly. What had happened out there? Saul shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly and said the platoon leader just told him not to do it again. The platoon leader had

[167] I did not hear whether LGBQ candidates gave their weapons names from the same or opposite genders.

told Saul that he did not believe in hazing so he would not force physical punishment. Later, we were instructed to write 300 lines of "I will always keep my weapon on safe." Writing lines became our new pastime whenever there was a free moment.

Finally, it was our turn to line up for the simulation range. The room was dark and there were 10 rifles hooked up electronically. The system simulated live weapon training to let users experience how it felt to fire a weapon and provide information on their accuracy. We each had our own lane and targets on the screen in front of us. A few candidates accidentally shot at the targets on the wrong screen.

Sitting there with the weapon, I struggled to translate the lessons I had learned about using the rifle intellectually into actual shooting. Since I did not have a real weapon to practice with regularly, my muscle memory was not there yet. I was stressed and did not want to do anything stupid. *Don't stand out.* My heart was racing. A few priors were there to help us walk through the steps. My weapon malfunctioned a few shots in. I could not help but think that I had done something to cause it. They had me switch lanes and the new rifle worked well. The sound of air releasing when we pulled the trigger and the recoil on my shoulder made it feel real.

We started by shooting five shots at the bullseye to zero our weapons. The cadets explained that zeroing was a mechanical process through which a weapon is adjusted to the shooter's eyes to make sure when the shooter is aiming properly, the weapon will hit the target. The goal is to get a cluster of shots and then adjust the sights to make sure that cluster will hit the bullseye. On the range, we would have to zero the weapon by physically moving the site posts. On the simulation range, the system automatically compensated for us once it learned our errors.

Weapons that needed to be zeroed would have a cluster of bullets together but off-center. The real challenge for me was being steady enough to get the cluster to let zeroing happen. I was

thrilled when they finally grouped close enough. Jasmine Washington, a Black woman from the South, shot extremely well. She scored .9 on the grouping (the angular dispersion of the rounds), which was the best grouping in the room. Once our weapons were zeroed, we switched to simulation range qualification where the targets would appear on the screen at different distances.

We went straight from the simulation range to the field. We set down our rucksacks in the sleeping area and then went back to practicing the shooting fundamentals. Then we went through a rehearsal of what exactly would happen on the range the next day. Lane safeties were able to practice their roles, as well as those who would be collecting and distributing the magazines and those checking for brass and ammunition. No one was allowed to leave the range with brass or ammunition under any circumstances. We went through the rehearsal three times. Just as in the battle drills, repetition was key for success. Blunt force trauma mindless repetition.

Afterward, we sat in a circle and cleaned our weapons. A clean weapon would work properly. Captain Kennedy often told us horror stories of units who did not clean their weapons regularly and, when they were ambushed, the weapons did not fire. Even those who were not directly engaged in combat might need to use their weapons. His most repeated story was of a transportation unit that was ambushed in Afghanistan and none of their weapons fired. They assumed they would not need to use weapons since they were not in the combat arms and did not clean or maintain their rifles. He did not need to explicitly say they were all killed—the message was clean your weapon or die.

We used rags, baby wipes, pipe cleaners, sharp metal tools, and pocketknives to clean off carbon. I went over Blue, again and again, hoping that he would meet the satisfaction of the

cadets who were checking our weapons and would shoot straight the next day. Weapon cleaning became one of my favorite times during basic training because we were able to just chat about the day and share stories from our lives before the preparatory school.

That night, I slept with Blue deep in my sleeping bag, sometimes spooning with the weapon, feeling the cool steal against my cheek. I knew that the cadets on night duty would be roaming around trying to take the weapons from us while we were sleeping and did not want to be one of the poor souls to lose theirs. Holding on to Blue was a privilege and I was not going to let anything sacrifice that. I was surprised how emotionally connected I felt to him—and yes, he had become 'male' to me.

On our first day on the range, we had to zero our weapons. I put duct tape on Blue's buttstock to make sure I always placed my nose in the same place. My body was not long enough to put my nose at the start of the sights like was recommended. This would help me reduce the distance between my shots due to moving my head along the rifle.

Before we started live fire, the leadership reiterated the importance of safety and attention to detail. There was no space for mistakes. If we pointed our weapon in the wrong direction, we would be tackled. Our squad leader told a story about a soldier who did not like his squad mate, so just loaded his weapon and shot him. There were also stories of accidents in which soldiers thought their weapons were not loaded or that they had a blank and accidentally shot someone.

It was time to begin. The priors zeroed first so they could serve as spotters and lane safeties for the rest of us. Each lane would have one shooter and one spotter, to give shooter tips and ensure safety. While we waited for our turns to go up to the range, we practiced shooting positions that we had learned the day before and tried to dry shoot the weapon without letting a

quarter or dime fall off the front of the barrel.

I was nervous and excited when it was finally my turn. I had never shot a weapon before and was terrified I would do something wrong. My heart was racing, and my hands were trembling. I tried to remind myself to take deep breaths and slow my breathing. I secured my ear and eye protection and took my ammunition and went down to the lane. My lane safety was Olivia Greene who was comfortable with weapons. She had been shooting since she was a child in Minnesota and had perfected her craft as an enlisted soldier for three years. She gave me one of her wide smiles and told me, "You got this Winfield."

Her presence eased me. I laid my magazines down carefully, stepped back, and waited for the range control's commands.

"Shooters, take your positions." I laid down and took the prone-supported position, with my rifle resting on two sandbags.

"Lock and load a 10-round magazine." I grabbed the first magazine to my side and entered it into the weapon. I heard the bolt ride forward to load the first bullet.

"Switch your selector from safe to semi. Watch your lane." Trembling, I let my thumb move the switch from safe to semi and moved my finger towards the trigger well. The sounds of the first bullets leaving the weapons around me added to my adrenaline. I lined up the front and rear sight posts and aimed for center mass on my target. There were four targets on it, and I would switch between them if necessary for zeroing. I started with the top left. I took a few deep breaths and tried to get to the bottom of my breath as they taught us, the moment where I had fully exhaled but had not started to inhale again.

I pulled the trigger. BAM. The recoil came back but it was not as hard as I had expected. A surge of pure power rushed through my body. I refocused and did it three more times. When I

had shot off four bullets—the appropriate number for zeroing—I put my weapon back on safe, dropped the magazine, and locked the bolt to the rear. I bent my right leg at the knee, stuck up my right foot, and put the rifle flat on my shoulder. Olivia came to check that my weapon was clear: "All clear." She tapped my shoulder to signal that I could put my foot down. I sighed with relief.

When the entire range was clear, we were instructed to "range walk" to the targets to check out our clusters. Mine was not terrible, but I needed some adjustments. Olivia made the adjustments on the rifle manually, turning the pieces that controlled the places of the front and rear sight posts. She explained to me what she was doing so I would know how to adjust the rifle myself in the future. The target had markings that allowed her to know how many clicks to adjust the sites up or down, left or right.

Then we repeated the exercise, again and again until I had a proper cluster. I almost had a good cluster after my third iteration. Olivia showed it to the sergeants overseeing the range, but they wanted me to get one more in that area. My heart rate accelerated at the chance of almost being zeroed so quickly. *I am amazing! A great soldier!* and I missed the area completely. It kept happening like this, having three in the same area, getting overly excited, and then having to start over. After about an hour, they said that it was good enough and that I should join the others that had finished zeroing.

In this manner, each of us moved through to zero our weapons. Some candidates who had prior experience shooting were able to zero quickly, though others, despite years of hunting or even prior service struggled. A sergeant that was running the range mentioned that it is often better to get a new soldier that has never shot before, instead of having one that already has bad habits. Chelsea was having a blast zeroing. She was zeroed far before she was ready to stop

shooting.

Jasmine zeroed rather quickly. When a sergeant saw how tight her clusters were, he was shocked that it was her sheet. She was offended, *why is it so hard to believe that I can shoot well?* It was like the day before when people had not believed that she clustered so well at the simulation range. *Is it because I am female? Is it because I am Black?* She was sick of people assuming she was less competent based on snap judgments and stereotypes. She was also irritated because after finishing zeroing, her lane safety had noticed that her weapon was on 450, instead of 300. He told her to just keep it and it would be fine. She sighed to me on the bleachers, "shit like this always happens to me."

Kelly kept trying to zero all day. The first time she shot, the sound shocked and scared her. No matter how many times she had practiced shooting, there was nothing like pulling the trigger. She thought back to all the attention they had given to the trigger squeeze and breathing. She thought it was pointless: *If you are in war, you are not going to look through your sights and take a deep breath in and breath out and trigger squeeze. No, you're just going to shoot*. She just kept thinking about that over and over. *If I am in war, I am just going to shoot. I am not gonna do all this extra stuff.* When she told me this later, I figured by the time she went to war, the shooting fundamentals, like breathing and trigger squeeze, would already be automatic for her from so much practice that she would just be able to pull the trigger without a second thought.

Even those who had not yet finished zeroing were able to take a break for lunch. Over our 'Meal, Ready-to-Eat' (MRE) lunch, Lily Rose lamented to me, "Watch, I am going to be last." Her weapon had been malfunctioning for a while, but now seemed to be getting better. Saul was upset that his rifle kept jamming despite his constant cleaning. Every three shots, a bullet got jammed in the star chamber. *I just got fucked. This weapon sucks,* he kept thinking. He wanted to

show off his warrior skills, but the weapon kept getting in his way.

When I finished zeroing, I joined those who had zeroed or were not allowed to shoot because of their injuries. We cleaned our weapons but did not take apart the bolt for fear of losing the firing pin in the grass. Lisbeth was enjoying assembling and reassembling her weapon. She was imagining herself as a Bond girl in a James Bond movie, disassembling, reassembling, and shooting things. Well, minus the shooting because she was not allowed to shoot due to her knee injury. She had a severe sprain after jumping off a wall during our last uniform drills. During the drill, we had five minutes to run back to our rooms and change into the opposite uniform (physical training uniform to combat uniform and back and forth) and come back out to the front of the building. When it became clear to Lisbeth that the only candidates who were making the time hack were those who were jumping off the four-foot wall instead of taking the stairs, she followed suit. There was a loud pop when she landed slightly off balance. Now she was on crutches for the remainder of basic training.

We started hypothesizing how much all the ammunition must have cost for the day. Estimates ranged from five to 15 thousand dollars. This allocation of money troubled Athena. She announced to our small whispering group:

> I hate how they spend so much money on bullets. I hated it because it is like billions of dollars, probably more. So much money that the government is spending here. I just don't understand why this money is not filtered to people who really need it, like my school. My school is broke. They could have given us that money. They could have given homeless people that money, to foster children, or to create a better public housing program. Those little rounds cost so much money that could have gone somewhere else. What are the priorities of America?

Kelly concurred:

> Those bombs we dropped in fricking Syria—you know how many kids you could send to college with all that money? Or the amount of money we spend on ammunition at the range. Just us. We're prepsters. We have how many years? Yeah, and they want to say they can't make public college free.

Our mission for the next day was to qualify on the range. To qualify, we had to hit 23 out of 40 shots. Each target pops out at various distances—50, 150, 100, 200, 250, and 300 meters. Twenty shots are from the prone-supported position, 10 in the prone-unsupported position, and 10 in the kneeling position. We started the day with a review of how the qualification range would work and how to hold our weapons when walking downrange. Any mistaken movement or misdirection would mean range safety would tackle us. Despite their threats, I noticed that range day felt different. The cadets seemed a bit nicer, calmer. I later learned that the tactical team had instructed the cadre not to yell at us for the day. We had to be calm and collected to do our best on the range. It was not the time for stress inoculation training—learning to calm ourselves when pulling the trigger was effort enough.

We sat on the bench and waited for our turns. Again, the priors went through first so they could be lane safeties. A sergeant asked if everyone was zeroed to 300. Not wanting to lie by omission, Jasmine raised her hand and said they zeroed her on 450. He responded aggressively, "I guarantee that they did not let you zero like that." Jasmine knew better than to respond by saying what she was thinking in her head.

Kelly was one of the first few to qualify and was surprised that it was quite easy. She had spent the whole day before zeroing but qualified on her first try. Although she could have gone back later in the afternoon to try for a higher score, she was done. As we cleaned our weapons, she shared, "I didn't enjoy shooting, I'll just say that. I just wanted to hurry up and qualify."

Claire Row was her happiest at the range. As a teenager, she would go hunting with her brother, grandfather, and friends from around the Indiana farmlands. Money was scarce for her family when she growing up. But when the state moved her and her brother out of their parent's

custody into her grandparents' home, things became more stable and she could afford little hunting outings and some trips to the range. She was mostly use to shooting deer rifles and shotguns but before coming to basic training she tried out some rifles.

Claire kept shooting over and over, every time there was space in the line-up even though she had qualified quickly. Every time she sat back down on the bleachers someone would ask her, "Have you not qualified yet?"

She responded cheerfully, "I qualified my first time."

"Why do you keep going back?"

"I don't know." By the end of the day, she had achieved the expert level of qualification, hitting over 36 of the 40 targets. Claire's skills on the range, her performance on rucks, combined with her desire to push herself to improve had already made her start to stand out as a top candidate.

Later in the afternoon, she helped others as a lane safety and shared some techniques. She could not believe others had never shot a weapon before. By the end of the day, her cheeks and nose were pink as her light skin burned easily and the patrol cap offered little protection against hours in the beating sun.

In my first lane, I scored a 21. For some reason, none of the 50-meter targets would go down even though I was almost positive I was hitting them. Apparently, some of the lanes were not fully functioning; some of the targets would not go down and others would go down even if you do not hit them. Sergeant Compton asked which was the most reliable lane and told me to go to that one on my next turn. I waited in line with the other candidates waiting to go back out, filling up my magazines, with my gloves and glasses ready to be put back on at any moment.

When I went to my new lane, I took a deep breath and concentrated. The pop-ups started.

I aimed at the targets, shaped like little soldiers with hats and weapons, and fired. When a target went down, I would feel a rush of euphoria. *Hit.* Another shot. *Hit.* Another one. I fell into a trance, waiting and watching for the next target and pulling the trigger. Sergeant Compton called out to me where to aim. She told me to aim for the "brim" or the "top" but with all the ambient noise, I heard her say to aim for the balls and the hat.

In the end, I got 33 out of 40—the second-highest score for "sharpshooter." Captain Kennedy told me he was proud of me: "Winfield you're officially a killer." I was brimming with joy, excitement, and pride. Although I could not wear my sharpshooter badge because I was not in the Army, I proudly kept it in my room as a source of pride. Other candidates could wear their marksmen badges on their dress uniforms, showing off their proficiency in warrior tasks and skills. However, as soon as they became officers, they would no longer wear them because all officers were deemed to be experts and did not need the symbol.

I went to the porta-john with a group of women who had already qualified. One asked if the others had noticed how they were the "top females" in the company—better than the other ones militarily and physically. They were drawing attention to the status hierarchy that was already forming in the company.

By lunchtime, Lily still had not qualified. Eventually, her lane safety—an enlisted soldier who was there to help with the training—added a few extra bullets into her magazines so she could shoot an extra bullet at any target she missed. She was able to qualify. But she decided to go through again and qualified the next time on her own without the extra help.

After qualification day, we were able to shoot two machine guns—the M240B and M249. Before going to the firing line, they told us to manage our trigger squeeze. We had to hold the trigger for

the proper amount of time. One cadet mentioned that we could just say the phrase, "Die Motherfucker Die," and it would be the proper amount of time.

We went to the firing line in pairs. The non-shooter would load the ammo for the shooter so it would not jam. If the weapon did jam, a sergeant would come to help fix the weapon. The M240B was a large weapon and when I shot it, I felt it ram against my cheek. I did not hold it too tightly against my shoulder because it hit my injured side from the obstacle course wall incident.[168] The weapon felt extremely powerful and difficult to control. On the other hand, the 249 felt like the perfect combination of power and precision. I was able to hit the far-off targets. It was my new favorite weapon system. I was starting to enjoy shooting, the feeling of power surging through my veins.

Lisbeth was allowed to shoot the machine guns because she did not have to be in the kneeling position. She was thrilled to finally be hands-on with a weapon: *Wow. Forget wasting money on a shooting range, I got you for free!*

This was her first time shooting a weapon and it was one of the most powerful. She was anxious at first because on her first trigger squeeze the recoil hit her in the face. She worried that if she passed out, she would be done for—*it's a bullet that comes out and if it puts a hole in my head, I would be dead*. But then she reasoned with herself: *You know what, that's okay. Because I signed up for this and I already signed the contract. At least my family would get 500K and what's remaining of me. So okay, let's just do it, fuck it.*

So, she pulled the trigger again: *Die mother fucker die! Die Mother Fucker die!* Lisbeth did not aim at anything in particular, just shooting out the bullets into the air, but with the recoil, she felt like a badass. She was powerful. She chuckled when sat down next to me on the

[168] See Part III, Chapter 51 'Obstacle Course' for a description of the incident

bleachers, “You just think of the violence the cadre have done to us over the past few weeks and shoot.” She laughed again, “I didn’t even zero and I shoot a fricken machine gun. I’m an epic human being.”

Over the year, we built relationships with weapons. We learned to use them competently and gain an emotional connection with the cold steel. On some deep level, I felt bonded with my rifle. It gave me power, a power that could easily take a life. I was in awe of the rifle, feared it, and at the same time loved it deeply. For some, the process of relating to rifles was straightforward and familiar, particularly for those who had grown up around weapons. Others had to build new relationships with weapons from a place of neutrality or even distaste. Learning to use and care for weapons was an essential skill for all soldiers so we had to get over any aversions to the task. Although we carried rifles around with us for the entire duration of basic training and for periods throughout the year, the tactical team tried to instill in us that our comfort with them should not be replaced with compliancy. The change in our relationships with weapons—their meaning, value, emotional valence, and our ability to use them—was one sign of our socialization into the military community.

Our knowledge of how to use weapons with deadly force also came with the great responsibility to use them properly. At the range, our weapons were constantly checked. We were checked to make sure the selector switch was on safe when we were lined up to go on the range. We were checked before we could stand up after shooting. When we got up, we were told to walk with our weapons facing downrange or straight down, and we were checked again before getting off the range by firing into a concrete barrel. The person in charge of the firing barrel would check the chamber was clear again and then pull the trigger. Once a shot was fired in the

barrel. Everyone was shocked and shook. But the leaders stated calmly that was what the barrel is for. Then we would line up for brass and ammo check, in which a cadet of the same gender, would pat us down and check our pockets for spare ammo or brass.

I had several dreams about rifles during the year. In the first dream, I was carrying a rifle carefully but looked down to see that the selector switch turned to fire. I was startled, did a functions check, and bullets fell out. I was terrified that I could have shot someone. I also had to keep track of a pistol in the dream. I had another nightmare about keeping my weapon on safe. I was at the range with a full magazine, but I wanted to take a break. I tried to put the rifle on safe, but there were four options instead of three and none of them said safe. I tried to get Sergeant First Class Lee to help me in the dream, but he would not come over until I shouted there was not an option to put it on safe. Then he immediately listened, took the rifle, and shot the remaining bullets into the ground. The other candidates and tactical team members laughed when I told them about these dreams because they had them as well. Weapons safety and anxiety had burrowed deeply in our subconscious minds.

After weapons qualification, I realized how soldiers could smoothly transition from shooting at targets on the range to shooting targets in real life. The targets I was shooting were shaped like humans. They were wearing helmets, they had weapons, and when I hit them, they would fall backward to the ground. Each hit signaled joy. I was being trained to associate knocking down these little people with success, status, and material symbols of competence as a soldier. Would I, if ordered to, be able to return to that range mindset in on the battlefield? Each hit another point. Each real human just another target that could lead to another award on my uniform and praise from my commanding officer.

57 The Hunter

Demarcus Wright was a passionate hunter. He loved to hunt, kill, and skin animals. He laughed when he told me that he would, “shoot anything that moves.” In his perspective, “God put animals on this Earth for a reason. Let’s go kill it, skin it, and eat it.” Animals were there for humans to enjoy. He did not ever kill just for fun; he always used the animals for food, material, or hunted to stop an infestation. He assured me he did not have “bloodlust.” But he figured that his comfort with hunting would help him on the battlefield. Killing something in the woods would prepare him to pull the trigger on humans:

> If you haven’t really killed anything before with a gun, if you’re going to be in combat, you’re going to see a mangled human body, you’re gonna see someone get shot, they need to train you on human targets to acclimatize to that. But someone like me, I’ve shot living things before so it’s not gonna hurt me as much as it would someone who’s taken straight from the city.

People needed the resolve to pull the trigger and he had it in abundance.

58 Cadences

As we marched up the last hill on a ruck, Marcell Artist, a Black prior from the South, lead us in a cadence in his deep, booming voice. With his large stature, commanding presence, and seemingly boundless energy to help others, he appeared to me as the perfect future officer. It was no surprise when I learned that a general officer, who was his customer at a furniture store, had immediately singled him out as someone with the potential for military greatness. He was the obvious pick when it was time for the cadets and tactical team to choose the leaders of the cadet candidate chain of command, though I learned later that some authorities suspected that his enthusiasm might be fake or over-exaggerated.

We shouted the words after him to keep us in step. Priors harmonized with additional verses as we roared together:

LEFT. LEFT. LEFT. RIGHT ON LEFT.

Walking down the street one day
I met a total stranger
He asked me what I wanted to be
I said an Airborne Ranger

(*Locked and loaded, pull the trigger, hit the son-of-a…*)
A-i-r-b-o-r-n-e
R-a-n- (*die, kill, die, kill why won't you die?*) g-e-r
Lead The Way

I'm sitting in my foxhole
Sharpening my knife
Up jumped the enemy
I had to take his life

(*Locked and loaded, pull the trigger, hit the son-of-a…*)
A-i-r-b-o-r-n-e
R-a-n- (*die, kill, die, kill why won't you die?)* g-e-r
Lead The Way

I went to wake up the Sergeant

He was lying in his bed
I went to turn him over
I found out he was dead

(*Locked and loaded, pull the trigger, hit the son-of-a…*)
A-i-r-b-o-r-n-e
R-a-n- (*die, kill, die, kill why won't you die?*) g-e-r
Lead The Way

My buddies in a foxhole
With a bullet in his head
The medic said he's wounded
But I know that he's dead

(*Locked and loaded, pull the trigger, hit the son-of-a…*)
A-i-r-b-o-r-n-e
R-a-n- (*die, kill, die, kill why won't you die?)* g-e-r
Lead The Way

I hear the choppers coming
They're flying overhead
They come to get the wounded
But all they find is dead

(*Locked and loaded, pull the trigger, hit the son-of-a…*)
A-i-r-b-o-r-n-e
R-a-n- (*die, kill, die, kill why won't you die?)* g-e-r
Lead The Way.

We switched to another cadence as we rounded the corner back to the preparatory school.

I see Al-Qaida dressed in red,
I put a bullet in his head.
I'm the one he did not see,
Airborne Ranger Infantry

I see ISIS dressed in black,
with my e-tool in his back.
I'm the one he did not see,
Airborne Ranger Infantry

I cried out the cadences as we walked. Each word gave me more energy after an exhausting ruck, distracting me from the pain in my legs and back. I was pumped up and belted the words. *We are*

warriors! The violent language did not bother me. If anything, it energized me with a feeling of purpose, strength, and adrenaline. Only once when a prior started singing a cadence about killing baby animals did I feel aversion and disgust to the song. This different reaction puzzled me: why was I more distressed by songs about injuring animals than those about killing other humans?

59 ‘Kill Them All’

We were split up by company on Reception Day to report to our cadet first sergeants. We marched together outside, went up the stairs to the barracks, and then lined up. A cadet greeted us and had us line up on the tape lines. In front of us was a whiteboard, that said, “Cadet Candidate X, reports to First Sergeant Harold, as ordered for the (X)th time. KILL THEM ALL, FIRST SERGEANT!”

The cadet told us that we needed to follow the correct protocol to report. We would follow the yellow arrows down the hall to the cadet first sergeant’s door, knock three times, enter, salute, recite the phrase, and after we were done reporting, he would drop his salute and we would drop ours. We were instructed to recite the company motto loudly and confidently. As we stood in line, we practiced mouthing the words to ourselves. If the cadets heard us repeating it out loud, they would tell us to shut up and that we did not need to speak to memorize.

As we practiced, they asked us if we all had finished our entire breakfast box. Chelsea Melton said she had thrown hers away. They made her get a new one and eat the entire meal in line. She had to finish her lunch before she could report. In truth, she had eaten most of her lunch earlier but knew that she was horrible at memorizing, so she needed an excuse for more time to practice. Despite her extra 10 minutes, she butchered reporting four times.

Each time candidates did not report correctly, they would go to the end of the line and re-memorize the greeting. The cadet in charge of the area would ask them what went wrong and tell them to fix it. Lisbeth Sokolov stuttered when she was reporting and the first sergeant whispered it along with her, helping her. Then he asked her to report again louder. She was surprised he was so nice.

Reporting did not intimate Saul Alvarez. He had reported to boards of generals before in

his high school Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. This was a cakewalk.

Claire Row braced herself to report. She kept repeating to herself, *I just gotta make it through today. I just gotta make it through today.* She memorized her line and she said it correctly. But the first sergeant responded, "What was the last word?" She had mumbled it.

"You didn't say it loud enough! Go back!"

It took her two more times to pass.

When Athena Little entered the reporting area, she was shocked and disturbed when she saw the motto. *Who are we killing? Do you assume we are all killers in this room? Are you trying to make us into serial killers?* She took a deep breath, re-centered herself on her goal of graduating from West Point, and went to report: "KILL THEM ALL, FIRST SERGEANT."

"Welcome to Destroyer Company, Cadet Candidate."

Three times per day at formation our cadet first sergeant yelled "DESTROYERS" and we responded "KILL THEM ALL" in unison. We said the company motto as a greeting each time we passed a company cadre member. "Kill Them All" replaced "hello" and "how are you?" as courtesy greetings. We were imbibing the discourse of the new community, in which talking about killing was as normal as saying good morning.

The mottos had originated with the cadet cadre, who voted on company names and mottos. They were ultimately approved (or unapproved) by the tactical teams. I realized I could gauge a tactical team's approach to violence depending on its company motto. With infantry officers in command, the company names mottos were often very violent ("Kill Them All", "No Mercy"). When other officers were in charge, the mottos focused more on teamwork and positivity ("Send the Best!" "Protect the Gate," "Never Fall.").

When we discussed the company mottos and how some companies had to change theirs to be less violent, Captain Kennedy told me that he saw the move away from violent rhetoric as a paradox, "with people talking out both sides of their mouths": "We want West Point to be the largest producer of combat arms officers. We want to be the hub for combat arms and military training. They want to ramp up militarily, but then it's not socially acceptable to talk about killing or have mottoes that are aggressive?" He saw this as hypocritical.

When I had the same conversation with a senior leader, who was not an infantry officer, he stressed to me that these mottos and language were out of line because they did not demonstrate the control and restraint that was required for soldiers to execute violence in responsible and ethical ways. The ability to conduct violence was a sacred right given by the American people to the military:

> When the American people give you the ability to go out and kill their enemies, that is something that's sacred. That is an amazing responsibility, and it must be controlled. Otherwise, especially with the firepower and the advancement that we have, it could be completely out of control. So, we take that very seriously in the military. The way we apply the force, and the disciplined application of force is really what we focus on at the units.

It was a practice of restraint, professionalism, and discipline that needed to be reflected in language use as well. He expounded:

> It sounds cool to have a motto of 'Kill them all' or 'No mercy.' But I would tell you that's not what our military is all about on the battlefield. I've seen it plenty of times. No mercy? Really? We are all about mercy. We will shoot a guy and then Med Evac him if he doesn't die. I mean, that is mercy. We have rules of engagement that are very restrictive. We go through a laborious process before we pull the trigger. That is mercy. Only kill the really, really bad ones and when you're sure that those are the really, really bad ones. When you do shoot, make sure that you don't hit anything but that really, really bad individual.

He thought it was a huge mistake to ingrain into the heads of new soldiers that the Army was an army of no mercy. The American army was an army of mercy—that was what made American

soldiers different on the battlefield. That was what let soldiers go to bed at night and wake up in the morning okay with what was happening around them and what they had done. Soldiers had to hold themselves to a standard. He thought it was imperative to express controlled, focused aggression. Not letting emotions take over. Emotional aggression is out of control—like a company named Berserkers—whereas the Army's aggression was calculated and methodical. Being thoughtful about the rhetoric the candidates were employing would ensure they gained the right balance of aggression and control.

Athena told me regularly how much she despised our motto. So I was surprised one winter afternoon in the dining facilities to hear her rapping, "kill 'em, kill 'em all, kill 'em" under her breath. I look at her questioningly. My questioning eyes were all it took.

"I know Taylor, this place is changing me. Look what a person in America needs to do to get a college education."

60 The Soldier's Creed

As the company stood at attention to say The Soldier's Creed, Athena Little did not move her lips. Voices rang out around her, as the others belted out the words from our knowledge books:

> I am an American Soldier.
> I am a Warrior and a member of a team.
> I serve the people of the United States and live the Army values.
>
> I will always place the mission first.
> I will never accept defeat.
> I will never quit.
> I will never leave a fallen comrade.
>
> I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills. I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.
> I am an expert and I am a professional.
> I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.
> I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.
> I am an American Soldier.

Athena stood in quiet defiance. She decided she would never say The Soldier's Creed. She did not want to destroy anyone or anything.

61 The ‘Bad Guys’

As we waited between turns to qualify at the range, Captain Kennedy put a whiteboard on a stand to introduce us to machine guns. He drew pictures of bullet trajectories and then showed us how to best utilize these trajectories to hit the “bad guys.” If the bad guys were below us, we had to use a different angle than if they were above us or on level ground. He drew little graphics with his red marker and labeled the American troops as the “good guys.” It was the good guys versus the bad guys, and damn sure we were going to learn how to take out the bad guys. The purpose of the rhetoric was clear to me: in war, it was an ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ The clearer the boundaries between the two groups, the easier it would be to pull the trigger on the machine gun. The verbal distinction would help us internalize an emotional distinction between the groups and allow soldiers to do their job.

Athena Little whispered to me, “What if we are the bad guys? What are we doing abroad anyway?”

The question of who were the ‘good guys’ and the ‘bad guys’ haunted Athena. The boundaries were blurred for her. She could not wrap her head around how killing a stranger was protecting anyone. We would discuss it often throughout the year, usually in the privacy of our rooms after military science class. We would return from learning about a new weapons system or offensive attack, and she would look at me with a distraught look on her face:

> They think what they are doing is right but it’s really not. It’s not protecting anyone. Are we really serving the people if were killing other people to be safe? I don’t understand how they think killing resolves anything. Why can’t we just have a conversation and figure out the issues? Our model is just to kill, kill, kill and the issue will be resolved but it’s not how it works. When you have an issue with someone, talk to them about it, figure out the problem, mediate, and figure out a way to work together in the future.

She would continue: how could the preparatory school preach about respect and then teach the candidates how to kill others—how was that respecting another person? Whatever happened to conflict resolution?

The rhetoric that the military was protecting America by sending soldiers abroad was also hypocritical to Athena. People are murdered all the time in America and there are domestic terrorists, but all the attention is on the Middle East. America paints a picture that it is perfect when it did and continues to do the same horrific crimes as other countries: terrorism, rape, murder, pedophilia, and sex slavery. How can America go and kill people in other countries when the same problems are happening domestically? Where are our soldiers when there are school and church shootings? They think ISIS is dangerous, but what about the KKK? Homegrown Nazis? Police violence against Black and Brown bodies? Mass shootings? Why is it okay when the perpetrators are mostly White men? Why is there was focus on Muslims when White Americans are doing the same things domestically? These questions kept her mind whirling when she had time in her schedule to stop and think. Free time was dangerous. It led her to question and then the whole system she had just joined would start to unravel in front of her. Better to keep busy:

> Taylor, the shit we are killing them for, we are doing too. Let's fix America first. Let's get people off the streets. Let's educate people. Let's close the gap. Let's get child molesters off the street. If ISIS wants to kill us, I don't care about that. I care about what is happening here. But no. They will never bring that up, never.

Then there was the additional layer of complexity: were soldiers just fighting the battle for those in power to gain money and more control over the world?: "The real reason we are in war is over some stupid ass shit that a White man and another White man, or not even White, an Arab man are fighting about. And those bitches are in their damn palace drinking tea while you are killing people for them." What if it is all just entertainment for them?

Athena mused, not for the first time, that perhaps White men just loved to kill. They killed the Native Americans to take over America and established the military so they could go kill abroad. She heard some of the White men candidates talking about how they could not wait to go to combat. It made sense to her:

> Who stole this country away through murder? White people did. Who fucking made the military? White people. And now they are justifying why they can kill people at a mass rate. I am just saying maybe, Taylor, there is something in White men that they just love to kill motherfuckers. Maybe they say, 'we just love to kill people so let's just make a military and justify us just killing people left and right.' They want to be justified in just killing people for fun. I think White men love that shit. They just love killing people, there is something about it that makes them feel good. It is just sick to me.

This would explain why so many White men went into the infantry. Some days she felt that she was surrounded by a bunch of delusional, brainwashed, and sadistic individuals. She thought American and foreign fighters were both brainwashed into this kill mentality.

Athena tried to talk to other candidates about her concerns, but for the most part, she thought they treated her like she was crazy. Kelly Carter did understand her when it came to the wars in the Middle East—desiring oil was not a justification for killing. But Kelly tried to avoid these conversations because she did not want to think about why the U.S. was engaged in wars overseas. She would get too upset.

Rich Rivers told Athena to just give it time; it would not bother her too much after a few more months. And he was right. I saw for myself how the motto and talk about killing bothered me less and less over time. At first, it was shocking. Then, it was just like any other topic like the weather. When I realized how much the emotional and moral valance of the topic had changed for me during my time in the institution, I understood the extent of my own (re)socialization. Through speaking like I was okay with killing each time I shouted the motto and behaving like I

was okay with killing each time I pulled the trigger, my moral intuitions had altered. Scholars argue that these moral intuitions are deeply ingrained and automatic, based on emotions rather than reason, and vary between one culture or community and another.[169] I could sense that my moral profile was shifting from a civilian's to a soldier's. I was still not fully okay with violence and had my own reservations about the utility of war, but my evaluations and judgments of killing in combat had markedly evolved.

Athena and Saul Alvarez often got into debates about killing. I would hear them arguing in the barracks hallways and over meals. One lunch, the 9/11 terrorist attack came up. Saul asked her, "You don't think they are justified for killing them? They killed 3,000 innocent people!"

Athena responded: "I get it but at the same time, you don't know that person. They could have been brainwashed to do it. Like in combat, the person behind the gun could have been forced to be there, they could have had nothing to do with that." The people committing atrocities could have had their families threatened or been brainwashed from a young age. Did a four-year-old child with a suicide vest know what he was doing? Or an 18-year-old who had been corrupted by ISIS? It was not her role to judge and certainly not her role to play God. There was no justified killing in her opinion. As a Catholic, she believed that all killing was murder. Killing was a sin regardless of the circumstances. Athena's moral profile remained deeply rooted in her religious upbringing.

Saul disagreed. These people were evil. As a Mormon, he had warrior blood and his job was to wipe out evil from the world. He thought it was his religious duty to kill in combat: killing enemies was part of the rite of passage to becoming a man. Saul's moral profile also

[169] See, for example, Firat, Kwon, and Hitlin 2018; Haidt 2007; Kinder and Kam 2009; Lamont 2012; Smith, Ritz, and Rotolo 2020; Tajfel and Forgas 2000; Vaisey 2009; Vaisey and Lizardo 2010.

remained rooted in his religiosity; yet the moral valance of killing in combat in his community was dramatically different from Athena's.

Athena retorted, "I know in the Bible war did sometimes make things better, but that is not the way forward in the contemporary world. Jesus brought peace. He didn't kill people. The military could be a tool to show the world how it's possible to come together."

Demarcus Wright, a Black man from the West Coast, overhearing, joined the conversation. Demarcus connected his openness to violence with his evangelical Christianity:

> I know there's lots of controversy between 'Oh I'm a Christian, I can't kill' but God talks about murder. That's the killing he's talking about. If you see a civilian, bam, kill the civilian, that's murder. There's a difference between that and war. If you read the Bible, King David killed tens of thousands of people. Like when he came back from battle one day and they were like, 'Saul killed his thousands but David, he had killed tens of thousands.' God led him to kill tens of thousands of people. They didn't have guns back then, they had swords so that's a lot of bloodshed. Some people would say, 'Oh he killed, he disobeyed the ten commandments.' No, that's not what God's talking about. He's talking about killing the innocent. Murder. But it ties in perfectly with me coming here. The loyalty, the serving, soldiers, like Jesus, he served his disciples. I can make those relationships, those connections as a soldier.

Lily shared that the Christian club had discussed how it's really just self-defense. Killing for self-defense was not murder.

Chelsea Melton explained that the Catholic chaplain had described soldiers as warriors of Christ. They were protecting what was right by destroying evil. The chaplain helped her see the moral side of things; it was not as simple as killing is bad. Killing could be right if she were killing evil, even if it was in a human vessel. Other Catholics expressed similar sentiments: the 'bad guys' were trained by the Devil. Eliminating them was okay because it was wiping out the bad. Punishing the demon seeds.

As they spoke, I was fascinated by the ways in which candidates use their religious moral profiles to make sense of a soldier's moral profile. For some, like Demarcus and Saul, there

seemed to be a seamless transition: the profiles were completely complementary. Others, like Lily and Chelsea, sensed tension but were able to negotiate a solution with the help of religious authorities within the military. I found most candidates I spoke with fell into this second group; it was uncomfortable at first but manageable to make the profiles comply. And then, there was the small minority like Athena, for whom the profiles seemed utterly irreconcilable.[170]

In military science, we learned basic soldier knowledge: the branches, uniform insignia, weapon systems, and types of attacks. We were regularly tested on this information. Captain Kennedy explained that these were our fundamentals. It was our basic addition and subtraction, the new nouns of our profession's language. We were like surgeons learning how to do surgeries, and these offensive attacks were our surgical knives that we needed to wield expertly. We had to learn how to get the enemy into an enclosed area—"the kill box"—and destroy them.

Captain Kennedy told us that in his class we would talk about violence openly and realistically but not romanticize it. Our job was to destroy the enemies of the American people both foreign and domestic. It was his job to help us get us into the mindset to be able to kill others. Killing was a very intimate and psychologically damaging task. The American soldier has historically struggled with killing in combat and pulling the trigger. Did we notice that our bullseyes and targets at the range were shaped like people? These were strategies to help soldiers get over the mental blocks about killing to be able to pull the trigger:

> Why would I want to kill anybody? I didn't join the Army to kill anybody. I wanted to help people, right? Everyone here, nobody wants to kill. It's horrible, seeing people die, seeing death, seeing destruction. It's awful. Nobody wants peace more than an army officer or soldiers. I firmly believe that.

[170] See Rohall, Ender, and Matthews 2006 for analysis of how military affiliation, gender, and political ideologies also influence attitudes on war.

But we needed to be in touch with the reality that in five to six years we might find ourselves on the front lines whether or not we were in the infantry. He needed to normalize violence culturally for us: “It’s part of what we do. It’s part of the profession.” He did not want a single candidate leaving the preparatory school with any illusions about what the job entailed. It was his duty not to sugarcoat the reality. We were committing to something, and we could be sacrificing our lives. We needed to understand what we were getting into.

If the United States went back into conventional warfare, like in the World Wars, thousands of soldiers could die every day. He worried that the Global War on Terror had made soldiers complacent, forgetting the possible extent of causalities in a single day. Like in World War II, West Point cadets would be graduating early because too many officers died. Then how much would we care about basketball practice? His job was to help keep us alive and survive. To do that, he needed to prepare us for what was coming.

As Captain Kennedy spoke about the types of attacks and how they were coordinated on a multiple-level battlefield—ground, artillery, air—, Lisbeth Sokolov thought, *he is talking about battle like it’s a fucking symphony of music.* She took notes and tried to memorize the material for quizzes, but it felt to her often like memorizing all the ways to attack and kill people. A few months of classes later, she no longer felt uncomfortable when he spoke about these topics. She was desensitized. She realized this is what the military was. This was a real part of the profession she had signed up for so she might as well accept it.

Athena called her father to tell him how much she hated all the talk about killing and violence: “Infantrymen are like followers to me. They literally listen to people say, ‘go kill this person.’ I just hope I don’t get like that. Because I’m not killing anyone.”

He responded, “it might get to the point where you do have to pull the trigger.” Athena

shuddered, *oh, my God, I am going to be a trained murderer and I don't want to do that at all.*

One winter afternoon in class, Captain Kennedy told us a story about his first deployment. He was in Afghanistan and the fields were covered in IEDs and grenades and the trees had tripwires. One of his Afghani attachments was blown up by an IED on patrol.

Athena kept giving me looks during the lesson and trying to ask Captain Kennedy if military intelligence people were there during the patrol. Athena had decided a few weeks earlier that she would branch military intelligence to stay out of the action. But last night at dinner, we had spoken about how military intelligence units are embedded into the infantry and go out with them on patrol. She was now worried that she would have to kill alongside them.

When walked back to the barracks after class, she asked me, "Did you hear what he said? Military intelligence was there! Well, I'm gonna have to be a killer." She paused and considered, "Well, maybe an injurer. I'll aim for the arms or legs, or just hit the eyes to blind them."

We agreed that she needed to be a really good shot to do this properly. She was giving in to the idea that she might have to shoot, but she would shoot to incapacitate, not to kill. Time to start practicing on the range.

Although Athena avoided the tactical officers and sergeants at the beginning of the year because she judged them for what they had done in war—they were sinners—when she started to see Captain Kennedy as an ally on racial issues, she figured he might surprise her again.

Athena was not the first candidate who had come to Captain Kennedy's office to talk to him about their anxieties around killing. They would come and tell him, "Sir, I'm not prepared to go out and go to combat and die."

Behind closed doors, he tried to peel back the curtain for them and put their minds at ease:

> Look, okay, let's take a step back. That's five, six years from now. There's a very small percentage of the Army that actually goes out and fights and shoots and is in harm's way. 85% of the Army is behind the scenes doing all kinds of amazing career fields.

He tried to help them see that the Army was so much bigger than just the infantry. Infantry was actually the minority. And even infantry officers rarely actually had to pull the trigger.

Captain Kennedy told these facts to Athena. He emphasized that there were avenues for her in the Army that might not include direct combat. He shared his own vulnerabilities: he also did not want to die and was conflicted about some of the things he had to do in the profession. It was a simple situation.

They also unpacked together the segregation between races in the branches: White soldiers tended to go to the combat arms while Black soldiers went to support branches. Captain Kennedy shared his perspective, "Parents are not going to push their kids to go potentially fight and die for this government that they perceived has oppressed their rights for hundreds of years."

Athena nodded. He was right on again.

He continued that in White culture, combat was, "romanticized and fantasized at an early age with toys and television and movies. Young White boys are expected to be these patriotic freedom fighters." Captain Kennedy saw this American narrative as being an intentional way to get young men to fight and die for the country. They needed a way to inspire them from a young age. These ideologies were more prevalent in White households—even the movies themselves have White heroes killing bad guys. Childhood games are often cops and robbers and soldiers. White parents push their children to go into the Army because it was seen as a valiant and patriotic cause.

Additionally, vocational jobs were more of steppingstones to learn skills that would be useful outside of the military and those who held them would still gain military benefits and Veterans Affairs healthcare. This complied with Athena's own goal to use the military as an avenue to get a college education and leadership experience, which she would be able to use as a politician to make real change.

These conversations affirmed what Athena had been feeling and made her feel recognized in her plight. Captain Kennedy reminded her that she did not have to be on the front lines and that there were ways to be more of a lifesaver than a killer in combat. He clarified, however, that even though there were plenty of roles she could play in the Army without engaging directly in combat, she still needed to become proficient in warrior tasks and skills. Athena continued to pray that she would not have to commit violence and that God would give her the answers.

Despite her internal conflicts, Athena stayed at the preparatory school. The American system had used Black people for generations and now she was going to use it to get what she needed and achieve her goals. She was using the system back. She promised herself she would not conform.

At the beginning of the year, Athena told me that if she were deployed and put on the front line, she would not shoot: "I will die. I just don't want to kill anyone, and I feel like there are other ways to go about it and this is not the way. If they kill me, it is my time." She was willing to sacrifice her own life to preserve the lives of others. Yet, over the year I noticed that her position budged. She would shoot but be sure not to hit anything important. She started feeling more comfortable with our company motto—not necessarily because she agreed with it, but it just did not spark the same emotional reaction. She would say it by rote and sometimes

have it stuck in her head. I heard her use language like, “ugh, I want to kill them” or “just shoot her” more often in her daily life when she was upset with others. The changes were small, but visible. She was, despite her internal reservations, becoming a warrior.

62 Killing like Candy

I passed a conversation in which Jerry, a White Midwestern man in our company, was talking to some friends near his room. He said in a joking tone that all they had to do was parachute him into Gaza and he would kill all the terrorists: “Write this in your book, Winfield: ‘One Jerry equals dead terrorists’”

Lisbeth Sokolov was with me and sighed after we passed them. She hated how some talked about killing like it was candy: “Fuck, yeah, kill shit, HOOAH.” Had I noticed it was mostly the males who spoke this way? People should not take pleasure in killing their enemies; otherwise, they are serial killers and psychopaths and should be removed from the military immediately. Sometimes she wanted to ask them: “Is this what the Army is to you? A fucking playground for serial killers?”

63 Learning Restraint

We gathered as a company in the auditorium for military science class. Captain Kennedy and Sergeant First Class Lee stood at the front of the room and told us to fill in the first three rows. It was late in the day and late in the year, and everyone seemed antsy. We had covered the foundations: learning the branches, weapon systems, and types of attacks. Now it was time to reflect on what it all meant as human beings.

For homework, we had been assigned to read "The Fall of the Warrior King" (Filkins 2005) and "Kill Company" (Khatchadourian 2009).

"Who read the articles?" Captain Kennedy asked after we all had settled into our seats. A few hands went up and many more stayed down. It was not worth it to lie and risk an honor board this late in the year. "If you did not read it, leave now. You're useless."

About 50 candidates got up to leave. *Well at least people are honest*, I laughed to myself.

"Glad one-third of the company cares about becoming better people," he said, as they filed out. Captain Kennedy then placed two folding chairs at the front of the room so Sergeant First Class Lee and he could be seated during the conversation. He wanted to create the right atmosphere for an intimate, serious discussion about moral-ethical behavior in combat.

He called on a candidate to summarize the articles. The candidate explained that "Kill Company" was about a unit in which the commander became obsessed with killing enemies after losing several soldiers in combat. He reduced cultural awareness training programs in favor of more time at the range, more battle drills, and hand-to-hand combat competitions. The company celebrated each kill and even kept a tally of kills (which included both civilians and combatants) on their company blackboard, making it into a competition. The commander tried to obtain the deadliest weapons for his unit and used violent and aggressive rhetoric when speaking about

Iraqis. After a group of his junior soldiers shot non-insurgent detainees, an investigation deemed that the commander had created a toxic command climate, which ultimately lead to the murder of the civilians. Through the commander's obsession with taking down the enemy, the line between combatant and civilian was blurred and moral discernment lapsed in his unit. The soldiers involved in the incident were sentenced to prison in Fort Leavenworth, and the commander was reprimanded, though he did not face any criminal sentencing.

"Fall of the Warrior King" told a parallel story. An officer, whose unit regularly faced off with enemy combatants and suffered heavy causalities, increased his violent rhetoric. In line with orders from superiors, the commander told his unit to elevate lethality to help get the country back under the control of American soldiers. His unit, which already had a reputation for aggressiveness, bumped up its intensity and force. They were fighting a confusing war, a guerrilla insurgency, and making up the playbook day by day. Along with other infantry units, there was an increase in his ranks of creative uses of non-lethal force—throwing rocks back at locals (including children) who threw them at soldiers, burning down houses of alleged insurgents, and eventually, experimenting with what they called "getting people wet." After an incident in which two of his junior soldiers threw two civilian Iraqis in the river after finding them out after curfew, the commander decided to omit the piece about the water in his report. One of the men was found dead from drowning, though the identity of the body was subject to debate. Eventually, the full story came out and the team was reprimanded. The irony was that if they had just shot the two men, there would have been no investigation.

Captain Kennedy asked us for initial reactions to the article. One candidate commented that it was a story about a good officer whose career ended because of lying, "We have to put everything out there, the whole truth."

Captain Kennedy nodded: “Yes, he was willing to tell everything but the water. Sometimes we leave out inconvenient parts of the truth, but the full truth will come to light.”

Another candidate said that he felt like the officer did nothing wrong; he was just protecting his soldiers. Captain Kennedy directed the conversation, “The problem was that he created a culture in which that behavior was acceptable.” A culture where it was permitted to commit violence against the local population. Both were stories of an unchecked warrior culture that spun out of control.

A candidate called out, “They served their countries, maybe not morally, but they were in a situation without a playbook.”

Another responded, “They let the moral compass of their companies degrade. They reinforced an us-versus-them mentality that led to this situation.” These commanders were caught up in their anger and being aggressive. They let their emotions overtake them, a huge no-go for officers.

Captain Kennedy jumped in again:

> I think one thing you guys have trouble with is: what is officership? What is your role as an officer commissioned by the president of the USA in order to defend the constitution? Officers are responsible and accountable TO their soldiers. Non-commissioned officers are responsible and accountable FOR their soldiers. Officers create missions on the moral high ground of the U.S. people, even above men and self. Our order goes mission, men, self. As the commanders of that battalion, both officers had the responsibility to uphold the morals of the U.S. The U.S. is the upholder of the moral high ground. We treat even the enemy with justice and honor and respect. We fight JUST wars. We have morality. The officer’s responsibility is to create that end state.
>
> These officers were emotional and had a short-term mission. They were tactically on the wrong end of history and created a wrong culture in which their soldiers were on the ground deciding what was right for themselves. Soldiers were deciding their own standards. If at the preparatory school, I was not here trying to instill a culture of standards, you would make your own standards that do not align with army values. People may start to think, ‘if I break my morals, if I do what I know is wrong, it is okay because it helps me reach my end goal.’ They think the ends justify the means. This is a skewed perspective of men above the mission, above the morals of the country to save

> soldiers' lives. A skewed perspective that my loyalty to my soldiers goes above my loyalty to the United States. You have a legal obligation to act, investigate, and openly display the facts up the chain of command."

A candidate responded, "Do you ever have to look at the men over the mission?"

> No. Always put the mission first. Of course, you take care of the soldiers, but you might have to send them into harm's way. You do risk management and assessment. You have big problems when soldiers are placed above the U.S. constitution and morality. It's hard to be emotionless and keep your eye on the goal, especially when your soldiers die. Leadership is nothing without ethics. The priority is to uphold this guy first."

Captain Kennedy pointed to the flag on his arm. "Then this guy." He pointed to U.S. Army tape on his chest. "And then this guy." He pointed to his own nametape.

Another candidate chimed in: "What is it about us that this happens in combat environments? Or is it an individual thing?"

Sergeant First Class Lee answered this question:

> When the rules of engagement are gray, you get people going crazy. When we first arrived over there, we didn't know the culture. We put down anything that moved. It got stricter over time, from guns-free to very locked up. If one of my soldiers gets killed, I know their friends and family. What do you think is going to happen? Leadership matters, what you say and do matters. You go through five years of training so you can make the right decisions in hard times. So, you're not just an 18-year-old with a gun in survival mode.

The authorities were ingraining in us appropriate behaviors and values now so that we would have the ability to act appropriately and lead in stressful and emotional crises.

The conversation delved into what happens when soldiers let their emotions take over: when they kill because they are angry and mourning rather than because it is part of the mission. We also talked about what it meant to throw rocks back at children. Yes, rocks could kill people if the rocks hit them in the head, so when civilians threw rocks at soldiers it was an act of violence, but did this mean it was okay to throw them back?

Captain Kennedy reminded us over and over that morality was the one time to break

uniformity and disobey the chain of command. We had the right to refuse any immoral order. Officers could help prevent war crimes and remain the moral compasses of their unit if they were able to maintain control over their soldiers and demonstrate moral courage throughout their careers. The moral profile of an officer was not just a blanket acceptance of violence and killing. It was a nuanced approach that set contextual boundaries on moral and immoral behavior. Officers had the responsibility to role model this balance to their subordinates.

Demarcus Wright thought the articles were interesting. He confessed on our walk back to the barracks that he would love to be in companies as motivated as those in the stories. He thought it was valuable to have people on the team who would actually pull the trigger, "you need people that'll put that human in the scope and shoot."

He understood the perspective of the soldiers in "The Fall of the Warrior King." He thought they showed restraint in not shooting the two men out after curfew straight off the bat. He imagined what he would have done in the same situation:

> I'd approach them and say, 'arms up and state your name.' Or maybe I would have just shot on first instinct, but that probably would not have been my first move. If they're running, I'd probably gun them down. But seeing that it was five minutes after curfew, alright, give them some leeway, see what they're doing. Throwing them off the bridge, I see where they're coming from. When I first read that they threw them off the bridge, I thought, 'that's better than killing them. They must've learned their lesson.' But one of them died so it's like that liability thing. You basically killed someone out of your spectrum. You can't do that. He killed someone for no reason. You gotta be constantly thinking about, 'if I do this, what can happen.'

Lisbeth was comforted when Sergeant First Class Lee explained, "You can only kill the enemy if they are armed and if they have purposely tried to kill you." That felt reasonable to her. People could not kill enemies if they surrendered. She recognized that a lot of soldiers were sent to prison because they overstepped their boundaries and tortured people or killed civilians:

> Even if they're the bad guys, and they still torture them unnecessarily, I think that's really fucked up. If you really think about it, they're human too. They're also fighting for what they believed to be right. Just like we're fighting for what we believe to be right. There is no good guy and there is no bad guy. There's war. You're fighting for what you believe. You're fighting for your land like they are too. And that's just how it is. Of course, it's wrong if you cut off someone's head and mail it to their family—referencing ISIS right here— but, if they were unarmed, I can't kill them. I just have to take them hostage. Even though I want to beat the shit out of them, I can't. It's just the law. Even if they killed your closest friend, but they're unarmed, you still can't touch them because they don't have any weapons on them.

She did not want to think too much about killing until she had to. When the time came, she would ask herself: "Do I need to kill them? Is it necessary? Are they innocent? Are they unarmed? Are they armed? Is it against the humanitarian laws of the UN?" She did not want to go to jail for breaking the rules of engagement.

This conversation was the crux of the question for me—how could the military train us to dehumanize the enemy enough to pull the trigger but then (re)humanize them enough to prevent war crimes? If the rhetoric was such that the enemies were dangerous, evil, and "bad guys," why not just wipe out the entire nation? In times of unconventional warfare, the enemy did not wear a uniform. They blended in and shot from the corners. There was no battlefield. How can soldiers hold themselves back from shooting individuals who look like they could be the enemy out of fear for their own lives or the lives of their squad mates? How could soldiers restrain their anger and sadness when their battle buddies were shot by those dressed in civilian clothing or killed by an improvised explosive device? I did not how it was possible to perform this emotional, mental, and moral gymnastics, but I was glad we were trying to unpack the complexity together.

64 Jesus on the Battlefield

Demarcus Wright was not afraid to go to war. Having Jesus with him on the battlefield would change everything; he would not be afraid to die. Demarcus noticed that people without Jesus in their lives were afraid of dying because they did not know what came afterward. He knew that his beliefs would give him immense peace of mind in combat. He tried to share messages about Jesus with other candidates to help get their minds and souls in the right place before they were deployed. If people could trust that God would lead them into battle and they would be victorious with God on their side, then the fear would disappear. Death would only come when it was God's will. Demarcus was convinced that a belief in God and Jesus as the savior would make a more effective army.

65 How to Cope

On an early spring afternoon, we gathered as a company again in the auditorium for military science. This time Captain Edwards sat in front of us on the fold-up chair. Sergeant First Class Lee was on a stool that he swayed slightly back and forth on. He kept busy, moving around with his body or eyes.

Captain Edwards opened this discussion by asking if we had any questions about war or its aftermath. A candidate raised his hand and asked bluntly, "How do you cope after blowing someone's head off?"

Sergeant First Class Lee responded:

> You'll see a lot of shit. It's how you live with yourself. You need to remember it's a job. It's a bad idea to come back and get out right away. It is important to stay part of the unit and have other soldiers to talk to and let it out. Lifting weights is my way of letting it out.

He explained that upon returning home from combat it was important to keep soldiers busy and to very slowly deescalate them from the experience abroad. The soldiers would be coming down from a high, like they were on drugs with adrenaline 24/7, with an intense sense of purpose. It was important to not go from 100 to zero.

Sergeant First Class Lee shared that he would work his soldiers harder than ever the first week back to keep their bodies amped up. Then he would slowly bring them back down. As a leader, he had to keep ahead of the incoming feelings of listlessness, emptiness, and lack of purpose. He continued to keep himself busy, telling us that he had a clown in his head and if the clown got bored it would start going around opening boxes that needed to remain closed. He needed to keep the clown occupied.

I looked at his face with his giant smile and brilliant green eyes and had a flash of a vivid image of a clown that looked exactly like him but with overdramatic face paint—a white-painted

face, big red lips, and blue painted eyes. The clown had a red wig and clown shoes on and was pacing around a room. In the beginning, the clown was busy. It was on a stool, speaking to us, swaying back and forth with a big smile on its face. But then it got bored. It looked around and noticed a file cabinet and a door. It started opening things. A memory flew out like a ghost. There were blood-curdling screams and blood dripped out of the drawer. I shuddered. I did not want to know what memories lurked inside his brain. *Keep the clown busy. Keep that clown busy, Sergeant First Class Lee.* Would the candidates one day also have this clown that they had to continuously distract? What would happen when they went to sleep? Would the boxes and doors open in dreams?

Captain Edwards jumped in and snapped me out of my dark ponderings, "As future officers, you must bear the burden of killing authority." Before a mission, we should explain the reasoning behind actions and tell our soldiers that they are in that position because we put them there: "I planned the mission. I told you to do this." In these ways, we can shoulder some psychological burdens for soldiers by explaining the reasoning behind the need for the violence: "Give them the intelligence on why that person is bad; what they were involved in; and why they need to be taken out." Afterward, it was important to debrief with soldiers on what happened. These steps could help reduce some future feelings of guilt around the actions and prevent post-traumatic stress disorder.

Who then will bear the burden for the officers? Would it just go up and up the chain of command until the burden was diffused among dozens of people? My mind was spinning again. It was one thing to talk about killing in the hypothetical but something about this conversation made it feel so real. I had become surprisingly numb to the conversations about violence, able to talk about it and joke about it with others. But when I was forced to think about how the

candidates who I had become so close with over the year would likely one day be in war, see carnage, perhaps even ordering their soldiers into harm's way and to take others' lives, my new warrior heart started to quiver. *What would become of them? Who would they turn to?*

I thought back to when the chaplain spoke with us during basic training. I had been tired from the day of nonstop activity, but startled when he started his talk:

> What is going on right now? U.S. soldiers are still deployed, but this year and in past years there have been more suicides than casualties in war. The enemy is not killing us. We are killing ourselves. There is something very wrong there. When we are tired, we yawn. When we are cut, we naturally clot. When we drink too much, we throw up. Our bodies naturally want to survive, and yet, soldiers are killing themselves.

I nodded along sadly as he spoke. Department of Defense casualty statistics in 2021 reported there had been 7,035 troop deaths in all conflict zones since 9/11, but in 2018 alone there were 541 service members and 6,435 veterans who died by suicide (Department of Defense 2019c, 2021).

The chaplain reminded us that sometimes when there is stress, pressure, and overwhelming feelings in our lives, we might not know what to do. At those moments, some people take steps to end their lives. We needed to remember that everyone has issues, and it is okay to have trouble in academics or relationships, but we have to *live*:

> You only have one life. The Army cannot make someone feel worthless. Part of the system is to wear you down, so we can build you back up stronger. But if you already feel bad, this can break you. It really hurts and deep down there are feelings of no hope. Right now, we are going through the mud, but we have to know it will get better.

He begged us to have the moral courage to reach out for help if we were suffering. We had to remember to be faithful to what we believe in and know that someone, somewhere, believes in us: "We are brothers and sisters. When you hurt, I hurt. When you succeed, I succeed. Ask your teammates about their lives and generally care. You can help keep them alive by being part of a team." He paused for questions.

A candidate stood up and asked, “Sir, won’t being suicidal cause a medical discharge from West Point?”

The chaplain responded, “No, in most cases, people are not genuinely suicidal. they are lonely and depressed. There is a chemical imbalance in the brain. Don’t focus on what-ifs, focus on the resources you need to get help.”

Captain Kennedy jumped in:

> At no time will you ever be denied access to a chaplain or behavioral health. You will not be ostracized. Say something if something is not right. This is not the same as being yelled at. If something is wrong come to the cadre or straight to my office. You will never be held responsible: it will be confidential. It is not magically going on your permanent record. We are here to help you get help. We want the best for you. Asking for help is not weakness, the complete opposite is true. Do you know how much courage and strength it takes to ask for help? An inordinate amount of strength to humble yourself and ask for help. Every single one of us has lost brothers and sisters in arms to suicide. More are lost to suicide than on deployment.

Another candidate raised her hand to ask the best way to talk to a battle buddy who might be suicidal. The response was to be open, honest, and direct.

Another question: “Sir, what if your friend is suicidal, but doesn’t want help?”

“If they were getting mugged, would you help? In the chain of command, I count all the high risks: away from community, competitive environment, no friends, no network, no accountability. A place where failure is not an option. It is a bonfire waiting to happen.”

Yes, I had thought, *an emotional bonfire.* Fire and fury through which we were molded into steel. Yet, these steel and warrior hearts could still break.

66 Graduation

"Forward, MARCH. Left. Left. Left. Right 'on Left."

We marched out onto the parade field in formation for the last time as a battalion for the graduation ceremony. The late May sun beat down on us, yet by now we were accustomed to the heat. Our movements were more fluid, more in sync than on Reception Day. Standing still in parade rest and attention was not quite as painful, or perhaps we just knew the tricks to calm our minds in these positions. The ranks were slightly shorter. Candidates who had out-processed or been separated during the year and those who had recently discovered they were not accepted into the Academy were no longer with us. The ones who remained were united in that they had all received their acceptance letters to West Point and had confirmed their places.

Only a week ago, the last group of candidates to go before the admissions committee learned whether they would be attending the Academy. The top-ranked candidates in the battalion had received admission a month earlier, but those who did not meet the commandant's endorsement criteria had to go before a special admissions board. I had been enjoying macaroni and cheese at the celebratory barbecue after some company competitions when I saw some commotion to my right. A few candidates were off the side, crying. Eleanor Kidds, a mixed-race candidate from the Northeast, was one of them. Whispers started. The results from the first wave of decisions for at-risk candidates had been released. I was completely caught off guard when I found out Eleanor had not received her letter of admission. She seemed so put together and like the ideal soldier to me in terms of body, mind, and spirit. Apparently, she had been struggling in math all year but had not told anyone.

"I wish I would have known. I would have helped her," Athena Little lamented, "I don't

understand how they will not let her in but let in others who have not actually participated in a ruck all year because of supposed injuries. It doesn't make any sense."

A few candidates were left without answers, going up again to the final admissions committee meeting. They would not learn their fates until right before the final celebratory event of the year, the Yacht party. Claire Row was in limbo after her hip surgery. She and others with serious injuries did not know if they would be medically disqualified until right before the boat left the harbor.

The tactical teams arrived in serious moods at the pier. We gathered around at a distance as they went up to those who were remaining. For our company, there were cheers and tears of joy as we learned that those on the margin either made it in or at least were not completely disqualified. A couple would have to wait another year to heal before officially starting at West Point. A few yards over, there were more tears as Sergeant Compton had to tell one of her candidates that he, unfortunately, did not make it in. As we boarded the boat to celebrate the year, those who had not made the cut assured us that they were there to celebrate with us as we continued our journeys.

We were arranged by height for the graduation parade, except for those who were receiving awards. Kelly Carter, Lisbeth Sokolov, and Lily Rose were positioned to the side with those on the Dean's List. It felt full circle to me that the ones that were ranked last during basic training were now at the top of the class. I could not help but notice that the award winners for the top-performing candidate in each company were men and mostly White. Marcell Artist was disappointed when he did not win the top leadership award but a White leader from the second semester did. Marcell had worked tirelessly to set the right conditions for the battalion in the first

half of the year and the second leader had reaped the benefits of all this foundational work. He wondered why the tactical team had not given him the award. Why were Black leaders always seen as less competent or impressive? He did not want to make it about race, but it was hard to see other explanations for the consistent pattern.[171]

The chaplain came to speak, "The cadet candidates have been fighting battles with themselves all year, against wanting to sleep and against not wanting to do the right thing."

Yes, I reflected. It had been a battle. A battle to grow physically and push through pain. A battle to push our minds past preconceived limits and take on new systems of thought and values. I was proud of how I had discovered some of the weakest parts of myself physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually during the year and now felt stronger. There was something about this place that made me want to become a better person. And yes, I understood the irony that this system I felt was molding me into a better person was a system designed to teach people to kill and destroy enemies abroad. But it felt damn good to feel like a hero.

I thought back to the last student development course when candidates were able to share reflections on the year. The first presentation was by a Black football player from a military family. The candidate shared that he had never wanted to be in the military, but he was offered a spot at West Point and was thrilled to have a place on a Division I sports team. His parents were ecstatic and told their friends. He knew, "if I made the decision to come here, it would make my family proud."

In the first quarter, he had almost been separated because of his lack of time management. He was not studying enough or completing assignments. He was struggling to balance his multiple and often competing responsibilities as a student, athlete, and soldier. He

[171] See Nacoste 2001 on different narrative evaluations for White and Black officers. See Ridgeway 2019 on how status inequalities persist in ostensibly meritocratic institutions.

had to work with the peer tutors to improve his study skills and attend Additional Instruction.

Over the year, he had improved in his math fundamentals and writing. His grades went up substantially. He said that his company mates helped him: they "all stuck together" and asked him every night how he was doing and what he needed help with. This started his goal of going to West Point; it felt like a family here:

> Over the last 10 months, I believe I have found my true calling. I was not invested in this dream, but after being around the Destroyers—and we do awesome at everything—I really feel like it changed my mindset. It's a great place, it's like a family here, I love the atmosphere, everyone is willing to help, and they have my back.

Then the teacher opened it up for questions.

"How did it affect you when your friends left?" a classmate asked. Several of his friends had been separated for grades or disciplinary action.

> It really took a toll on me. It was a negative vibe. But I felt like I am my own man and I got to do it differently. I am not going to let him bring me down. My goal was to make my parents and my family proud, to prove everyone wrong about me. People don't think I deserve to be here, my goal is to prove everyone wrong. I feel I can be at the top of the class one day. Dream big.

Another candidate chimed in: "The reason you came here was only for football. Has that changed?"

"Yeah, definitely. My mindset now is that if I lose football today, I can fall back here. I have a job coming out of West Point."

Sergeant First Class Lee smiled and said that he was very proud. He shared that he could see how much the candidate had changed just from the way he was speaking now. Captain Kennedy told the candidate how well he had done. When listening to them speak, the candidate automatically moved into the positions of parade rest attention, embodying the military customs and courtesies. His use of language, military slang, and acronyms also showed the extent to which he had been (re)socialized as a soldier.

The next presentation started with pictures from Reception Day. We joked and laughed at the expressions on the neutral or anguished faces in the photos: “everyone looks so happy.”

The candidate explained that being at the preparatory school, “forced me to learn how to learn new things very quickly and implement them. They were good at finding things you sucked at and forcing you to get better.” She was now able to do more than she ever thought was possible. The military training prepared her mentally “more than anything”—discovering all the “little things” to check over. She noticed that she had started to check over the “little things” on tests as well. The dispositions developed in the field were complementary to those learned in the classroom.

When it was time for questions, a candidate asked her, “What did you learn about yourself as a leader that you are going to take with you down the hill?”

“Not everyone thinks the way I do. Not everyone has the same background. You cannot talk to all people the same way. You might have to ask people differently.”

Ah, I thought, *the empathetic imagination had also taken root within her.*

Grace Ives came up to give her presentation. She laughed when she told us that she had joined the Army so she would not have to do any more school. Grace had enlisted after high school, partially because she had always loved the military and wanted to follow in her dad’s footsteps, and partially because she did not want to go to college. A part of her thought she had lost her mind when she listened to her commanding officer and decided to apply to West Point. After picking up her math textbook at the beginning of the year, she called her dad, nearly in tears. “It’s been four years since I did math! I am going to fail and not make it into West Point.” He assured her she would be fine. She was smart and a hard worker.

The trouble for Grace had been balancing relearning math with her leadership position.

Every time she sat down to do her homework, her phone would buzz. A message from the candidate company commander, a message for the tactical team, another thing she needed to do before the end of the day. Then she had her meetings with candidates who were under her in the chain of command. She would relay to them the messages and their phones would also buzz during the study period. Her leadership position made her feel competent and useful, a perfect distraction from the coursework that made her feel insecure. Grace often spent the designated study periods doing her leadership work and making sure everything was set up for the next day. She would start her homework after others went to sleep—staying up late and waking up early to finish it before class. During this period, Grace struggled to remind herself why she wanted to be at the preparatory school. Why not go back to the "big army" and be a noncommissioned officer? There she could also develop as a leader. She would not have to deal with soldiers who ignored her corrections.

By the end of the second quarter, Grace found her groove. She was able to pull her grades up from the Academic Improvement Program and felt like she could balance her leadership position with her homework. There were not any new policies or standards to put in place. Most of the candidates in the company had decided to comply with the rules and she now knew that there was no point to correcting the ones who ignored her. When it was time to switch out her leadership position with another candidate halfway through the year, she wondered how she would feel.

As she started to focus more on classes, she began to excel. Grace realized she had learned a lot about academics from her military experiences. The sentiment "when I thought it was the last mile I could walk, I realized I could keep going" was as true for rucks as it was for school. Her math grades went from Ds to Cs to As and Bs. At the end of the year, she received

As on her midterms and finals. It was the highest math grade she had in her life. She concluded by sharing, “I love being a part of an organization that is constantly trying to better itself. I know I want to go down the hill because I want to help the Army help itself.”

Lily Rose was next. She spoke about how while the other candidates had academic problems, she had struggled with a medical issue: “I dislocated my ankle during basic training.” A candidate started laughing so hard his face turned red. He tried to hide his face. *Really?* Lily thought this was extremely disrespectful; it was not funny that she was injured so badly that she needed surgery. She continued talking. Lily shared that her peers would make fun of her and call her “broken.” Others would tell her that the only reason she got good grades was because she was not on a sports team during mass athletics. She thought that was ignorant because she spent so much time doing physical therapy in the afternoons, nights, and weekends. She had relearned how to walk. Now Lily felt ready to take on anything for basic training at West Point—nothing could get an emotional reaction out of her again.

Deon L’Condo, a Black man from the South, presented last. His PowerPoint was entitled, “the road to glory.” Deon had been the battalion commander of his Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program. In high school, he was able to get As and Bs without studying or completing homework. He had short-term academic success but suffered from the illusion of knowing—thinking he knew more than he really did. In the first quarter at the preparatory school, he had Ds and Fs. Now he had all C+s and Bs. Deon had almost been ready to leave in the second quarter because it had been his first time with an F, but he knew he had to stay and prevail over the hardship. He was willing to do whatever necessary to go to West Point.

Deon noted, “I am here for football. Football has always been important to me and something I wanted to do in college”

A candidate asked him, “Well, why West Point then?”

“I wanted to give back to my community. For me, it was choosing a university to play football and no financial burden for my family and a guaranteed job. No other football visits stood close to West Point.”

During basic training, a hometown friend who was later separated was in his platoon but, Deon explained, “this friendship turned into a curse because we would lose sight of military bearing and get in trouble.”

A candidate asked Deon how it felt when the friend left.

“You can’t focus on one person’s decision. You got to focus on what is best for you.”

“Did it impact you negatively or positively when he left?”

“I think negatively a bit because I had to find a new friend group but also positively because I found a new friend group that had the same goals as me.”

Deon ended with motivation for the class: “the sky is the limit for the vanguards. We have been driven enough to complete a year that does not even count!”

After the presentations, I wondered whether candidates identified as soldiers now. I mostly felt confused. I felt like a soldier some days but had to constantly remind myself that I was not actually in the armed forces just because I was dressed like a soldier, looked like a soldier, spoke like a soldier, participated in soldierly activities, and was surrounded by soldiers. My identity had blurred through months of using my body, mind, and spirit in new ways that were all designed to help me take on a soldier identity—even though I was undoubtedly still a civilian researcher. Lisbeth told me that maybe I was like a veteran: I had been through the training but no longer had a commitment to the Army. I appreciated her words but knew I had done nothing

compared to real military veterans.

Lisbeth found that her identity had changed through the months. She first felt like a soldier on the fall field exercises when her leg was healed and she was finally able to do land navigation, marksmanship, and finish a ruck. She had turned to me and said dramatically, “I am a real soldier now!” When I asked her if she was joking, she said, “well kinda, but no.” She felt much more like a soldier now that she had completed these milestones.

Lisbeth was surprised to discover that the more she took on the soldier identity, the less she tolerated “bullshit from the real world.” She had forgotten her customer service skills. When a customer complained to her in her family’s hair salon over spring break, she shot back, “What do you want me to do about it?” What did she care about someone’s haircut? She had more important things to worry about. People were in war and fighting around the world. She had gone days without a shower, who cared about highlights? *Oh shit, I forgot I’m in customer service right now, not the fucking U.S. Military.* Her mom had to retrain her in customer service. Her sisters told her that she was too uptight when she got home and kept forgetting that she was not in the Army. *Don’t fucking mess with me,* she often wanted to shout at them.

Demarcus Wright did not feel like a soldier by the end of the year. He felt we had been held back and not given sufficient opportunities to train. As an infantryman, he would need to be an expert in marksmanship and battlefield techniques. But at the preparatory school, he had spent more time on academics than on these military tasks and skills. He had improved in his critical thinking but not warfighting.

Yet, Demarcus did feel a difference between him and civilians. Over spring break, he was surprised about how much free time he had—*is this what it is like to be a civilian?* In those moments of freedom and boredom, he was appreciative to have a larger purpose in his life. He

started to feel like a servant to civilians, he was serving on their behalf. He now drew strong symbolic boundaries between himself and the civilian world, seeing clearly in his mind the dispositional differences between the two. When he encountered civilians that seemed to be disciplined and have the right mentality, he would point out that maybe they should consider enlisting.

The biggest change that Kelly saw in herself was that she did not post her thoughts on social media anymore. Before the preparatory school, she would always argue on social media about politics. Now she held her tongue as a member of the profession of arms. Her friends from home told her that she seemed more mature and thought through ideas more carefully. Kelly also had reconsidered her future. She had never wanted to be married or have children, but now she was eager to have a family. The Army culture of marrying young had rubbed off on her.

Over the year, Majdi Haddad, a White man from the West Coast whose family was from the Middle East, had built up his confidence. In his youth, he had a "fat boy mentality;" he perceived real limits on himself and his success. When he arrived at preparatory school and the tactical team told him he was doing well, he realized, *oh, maybe I am a good soldier. Maybe I can do this.* He enjoyed being in the infantry club because he felt like he was building real military skills. He wanted to learn his craft so he could take care of his future soldiers. Majdi was committed to this growth: "I need to be the best I can be so no one dies." He wanted to push himself to feel more and more like a soldier.

When Rich Rivers first finished basic training as an enlisted soldier, he felt split between his civilian and soldier identities. His first thought when he was on pass was, *wow, I do have my own life*. It was like he had two separate existences, one at home and one in the military. Over time, he learned to act the same way in both circumstances. He did not want to be two different

people. He felt that the candidates who were new to the military were still split.

Athena continued to struggle to understand her peers who desperately wanted to serve the United States in wartime. She wanted to know what it felt like to want to die for one's country, to love America so much. By graduation, she did not feel that the country was worth dying for. To her, the flag was still just a piece of cloth. The cloth would not come with her into her next life and God was not going to ask her—"Did you accept the flag?" If God did not care, she did not care. However, Athena worked to develop herself as a military leader physically and mentally even though she still had great resistance to warfighting. She hoped that one day the military might come to focus more on "building up" recruits in all their uniqueness and making them better, rather than trying to constrict them and erase past experiences to get them to fit into a singular mold.

My mind snapped back to the present as we were commanded to sing the Army song. The band started to play and, this time, we all knew the words. I belted them out proudly:

> March along, sing our song, with the Army of the free.
> Count the brave, count the true, who have fought to victory.
> We're the Army and proud of our name!
> We're the Army and proudly proclaim:
>
> First to fight for the right,
> And to build the Nation's might,
> And the Army goes rolling along.
> Proud of all we have done,
> Fighting till the battle's won,
> And the Army goes rolling along.

Silence rang out after the last beat of the drum. A pause. A breath.

"FORWARD MARCH."

We marched as a company one last time around the parade field, following the guidon flowing with colorful streamers from our company's accomplishments. The bleachers were full

of families cheering loudly for us.

We turned off the field and back up the road leading behind the preparatory school. When we were out of sight, Captain Kennedy told us to fall out of formation and gather around. He and Sergeant First Class Lee told us how proud they were of how far we had come and reminded us to stay healthy and smart over summer vacation: “Don’t do anything stupid.” We were still soldiers and the Uniform Code of Military Justice still applied. The uniform and its implications had seeped into our skin, becoming part of our flesh, that not even civilian clothing could cover. With one more congratulations, they released us to our families.

It was over. We were free to go. Candidates quickly dispersed in different directions, back to their families and friends, to cars and planes that would carry them back to the civilian world. There was no need for drawn-out goodbyes. They would all be reunited again in a month for West Point Reception Day. A new journey was about to begin.

Conclusion

This dissertation shared the stories of cadet candidates at the United States Military Academy Preparatory School, with a focus on their experiences being (re)socialized into soldiers and future officers. It followed them from their first day on post, through basic training and the academic year, until graduation. As a full participant, I joined the candidates in all aspects of their daily lives and experienced my own embodied changes. My ability to stand in the ranks allowed me to go beyond abstract, theoretical ideas about power and control within all-encompassing institutions to study these processes on a micro-interactional level. I witnessed how and when individuals complied with or resisted institutional control and investigated how formal, explicit displays of power and subtle, implicit power relations were negotiated. My focus on moments of tension revealed how candidates' life histories and characteristics interacted with the identities the preparatory school aimed to inscribe upon them.

Institutional Pressures

By investigating how the Army cultivates military bodies, officer minds, and warrior spirits, I showed how bodily and discursive control, as well as moral-ethical enculturation, are essential to military socialization. I came to imagine the preparatory school as a giant machine that exerted pressure on the candidates to mold them into a new form. It was like a factory for new bolts. In this case, the input materials were civilian bodies, and the outputs were ideal soldiers, officers, and warriors.

Developing military bodies occurred through authorities' control over dress and grooming, body compositions, expressions, and fitness. Appearance is an important vehicle to define and communicate selfhood. Thus, when our clothing and hairstyles were restricted by army regulations, our prior self-definitions were also constrained, and new identities started to

take shape. In the words of sociologist Erving Goffman (1961:21), we lost access to the tools in our old "identity kit[s]" and were forced to adopt new ones.

Although our new appearances felt strange at first, they became natural and taken for granted over time. Those who were not in uniform or in standard began to look bizarre. As our fields of perception changed, we started to notice minor deviances in each other's dress and grooming. These deviances also took on new valences. Compliance with appearance standards became an indicator of successfully adopting a soldier identity and group mentality. Discipline in appearance not only showed that one was adhering to regulations and gaining the skills to look like a soldier, but it also signaled appropriate character and self-concept. It was a physical manifestation of one's buy-in to the profession. When we exited the institution for pass, many candidates embraced the opportunity to express their individualities. Others continued to showcase their new self-images by wearing dog tags or clothing with West Point logos.

Changes in dress and grooming paralleled adaptions in expressions. We learned how to present the proper "military bearing" and adhere to "feeling rules" (Hochschild 1979). Our voices were restrained and we learned vocal techniques that signaled competence. Facial and voice control then gave way to control over the micro-movements of our full bodies. We learned to be silent and stoic during drill and ceremony and to adopt deferential postures and language when speaking with authorities. These new behaviors were not only a way to *communicate* subordination but also *produce* obedient soldiers (Butler 1997a:13; Rappaport 1979:100; Winfield In Press).

Over and over, authorities demanded that we put their commands before our comfort and override previously automatic behaviors. Unlike in childhood, when bodily practices are typically learned through observation and mimicking adults, our new rules for behavior were

explicitly verbalized to us and enforced throughout the day. Deviance was explicitly and often painfully 'corrected.' As the year progressed, military movements became increasingly instinctual, less painful, and did not require conscious thought. In terms of dual-process theory, we were moving from controlled (slow, conscious) to automatic cognition and behavior (fast, unconscious) (Smith and DeCoster 2016). Enforced fitness training also taught us to take on discipline in performance—to endure mental and physical discomfort to achieve an objective. We learned to sacrifice for the team.

Changes in our automatic behaviors meant that even when we reentered the civilian world, these new practices often remained. Candidates found themselves cupping their hands, standing in the position of attention or parade rest when speaking to others, removing headgear before entering buildings, and walking "with a purpose" out in the civilian world. Our habits had shifted from those of a civilian to those of a soldier. Civilians now seemed to many candidates as lazy, undisciplined, and without purpose.

Pressures to alter our physicality went hand in hand with pressures to alter our mental habits to cultivate an officer mind. Whereas all soldiers needed strong and docile bodies, officers also needed to make strategic decisions and foster ethical environments. In the academic classroom, our teachers helped us adopt officer "thought-models" (Winfield 2021b). We were asked to become aware of our existing mental habits so we could uproot and replace them with ones more conducive to officership. Teachers also used assignments to instill integrity, grit, problem-solving, independent learning, empathetic imagination, and transformational agility. The successful adoption of an officer mind was detected through language use—using military metaphors, terminology, acronyms, and abiding by the discursive norms of the institution. On a physiological level to achieve this, our brains likely had to neurologically rewire what was

automatic cognition, as in the theory of neurologist Donald Hebb, "neurons that fire together, wire together' (Lizardo 2016). Through repetition, new neural pathways in our brains were formed and reinforced.

Beyond altering our thinking and speaking patterns, institutional authorities wanted to ingrain in us new moral-ethical schemas. They explicitly and implicitly indicated what behavior would be tolerated in the military and redefined what is good/right and bad/wrong. Moral-ethical schemas usually form during childhood and manifest through automatic cognition. They lead to emotionally-laden snap judgments and moral intuitions about what is acceptable (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013); as such, changing our moral-ethical schema would reshape our gut reactions to certain behaviors.

At the beginning of the year, authorities told us that actions that may have seemed innocuous in the civilian world, like white lies, had life-and-death consequences for soldiers. They emphasized that our prior moral compasses would be inadequate for our new profession. Then they introduced new codes for behavior: the Cadet Candidate Honor Code and the equal opportunity and respect programs. Those who broke these codes underwent one-on-one mentorship to help them recalibrate morally and ethically to the new environment, except for individuals convicted of sexual assault who were separated immediately. Leaders emphasized again and again that our character, respect for others, honor, and moral courage would ultimately be what made us good officers. Refusing to tolerate our peers' misbehavior now would prevent them behaving that way as officers and risking the safety of their soldiers. We were urged to have the "moral courage" to act. As candidates became imbibed with this ideology, they began to parrot institutional language on these topics and enforce the codes themselves.

To inspire warrior spirits, authorities again relied on control over our embodied practices.

Competitions in academics, sports, and military training were designed to cultivate fighting and winning mentalities as well as commitment to the team. Taking the literal leap on the obstacle course and forcing our bodies to try tasks that seemed impossible were meant to build trust, courage, and willingness for sacrifice. We were required to first enact these dispositions physically, even if we did not yet have them, to gain them over time.

Repeated exposure to high-stress situations and battle drills were designed to desensitize us to chaos and cultivate instinctual, non-emotional reactions to chaotic events. The authorities used repetition to help us move from controlled to automatic behavior under pressure. Weapons training and qualification redefined our relationships with weapons, in terms of their meaning, value, emotional valence, and our ability to use them. Pulling the trigger was a way to enact and ingrain lethality and willingness to kill in combat. None of these activities were optional; they were part of our mission and refusal to participate was not an option. As such, the respective new behaviors, dispositions, and affordances began to take root in us.

Just as authorities used rhetoric to create boundaries between soldiers and civilians to emphasize that officership was the most important and meaningful profession, they also used it to separate between "good guys" and "bad guys" to help us overcome an aversion to killing in combat. Verbal distinctions between soldiers and enemies served to help candidates internalize an emotional distinction between the groups. Furthermore, violent mottos and explicit, frequent discussions about killing served to alter the moral and emotional valence of the topic. Through speaking like we were ready to destroy the enemy when we shouted the motto and Soldier's Creed and behaving like we were okay with killing each time we pulled the trigger, our moral intuitions altered. Towards the end of the year, military authorities used discussions and reading assignments to nuance the moral boundaries around killing. They worked to balance helping us

dehumanize the enemy enough to pull the trigger but have the restraint and empathy to prevent war crimes.

In these ways, the preparatory school exerted all-encompassing pressures to mold us into ideal service members. To continue a machinery metaphor, the institution applied 'heat'—which makes metals weaker—to all candidates, as they often told us, "If there's no fire, there's no steel on the other end." Basic training was the time of the most intense heat to try to override our existing behaviors. Yet, all aspects of preparatory life aimed to hold "our feet to the fire" to push us from our comfort zones and create change. As the common military phrase went, they wanted to "break us down so they could build us back up again stronger." Through *disinscribing* our civilian bodily practices and mental habits, they could then *inscribe* on us new behaviors and dispositions.

To some extent, candidates were already primed for change because they were entering a new stage in their adolescence, what psychologists call "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2006). Many were away from their family, friends, and communities for the first time. They did not have social structures and support to help them maintain and reinforce their outside group identities. Some candidates even applied additional 'heat' to themselves through preparations before arriving and through taking on more tasks and responsibilities throughout the year. These effective new 'bolts' then became part of the machinery to help socialize others. They applied pressure on their peers, increasing the all-encompassing nature of the institution and its ability to exert power on each candidate. And as such, the institution, which people were part of and made up, grew larger and stronger over the year.

Embodying Resistance

Candidates were not passive beings that sat idle as the preparatory school molded them into

soldiers and future officers. They creatively responded to, resisted, and navigated institutional pressures. Just as some agentively applied more 'heat' to themselves to change more quickly, others showed great agency in the private and public ways they pushed back against control.

When dress and grooming were restricted, some candidates continued to express their individualities through undergarments, tattoos, and make-up. Others showed resistance by ignoring details—allowing for frayed threads, crooked patches, or unbuttoned pockets—or mixing and matching uniforms. Some men grew their hair longer or did not shave every day and some women allowed for bumps or stray hairs in their buns. Others used tricks to pass height and weight if their bodies did not naturally fit within the limits. These seemingly small deviances were ways for candidates to go through the motions or at times signal that they were challenging institutional authority and refusing to comply. For some, resistance was not particularly intentional; they simply did not buy into the obsession with details. For others, resistance was more ideological; they believed that standards or enforcement of them was sexist or racist and refused to comply with an unjust system. Although they could not change the institutional structure, they could at least show their opposition on an individual level. In both cases, those who pushed back in these ways were not seen as particularly competent soldiers. Authorities and peers tried to correct their behaviors, but because the deviances were relatively minor, these candidates could remain within the institution.

When it came to bodily control, candidates regularly showed minor resistance by speaking under their breaths or finding tricks to avoid holding positions for too long. Although rarely admitted, some dropped out of rucks or exaggerated injuries to get out of training. More direct resistance occurred when candidates avoided embodying submission to authorities by refusing to take on the proper postures when speaking with them or saluting. Candidates also

avoided saying the Soldier's Creed or company greetings to refuse to endorse violence. Yet, these public rebellions were far rarer, and then when noticed, these explicit displays of insubordination would be met with "corrective action." Candidates could not noticeably act in this way for extended periods and stay within the institution. As such, some candidates would externally comply while internally resolving not to change. Those who were ideologically against killing internally resolved to never take a life but still pulled the trigger on the range. Or they would learn the necessary information in military science but voice contrary opinions in the classroom, over meals, or even in conversation with authorities. Still, I found that performance was so powerful that over time contested behaviors often became second nature for those who stayed within the all-encompassing institution, and ultimately, internal changes occurred as well.

In the academic sphere, none of the candidates I encountered resisted the value of higher education. Some were critical of the way White middle-class norms shape what is considered 'knowledge,' intelligence, and success within an officer-thought model (and American higher education as a whole), but they placed a high value on education. There were, however, candidates that resisted the honor code. A few 'cheating scandals' took place when candidates shared homework in an attempt to keep up with the pace of preparatory school life. For the most part lying, cheating, and stealing were not seen as appropriate ways to rebel but breaking other rules (such as underage drinking) and avoiding the 'toleration clause' of the honor code were much more common. Candidates who did not buy into the idea of "moral courage" did not see it as their place to police their peers, except in the most severe circumstances like harassment or assault.

No candidates explicitly shared with me resistance to the principles behind the respect and equal opportunity programs. They agreed that candidates should be treated equally and

respectfully. Yet, there was pushback to how these principles were practiced daily. Candidates regularly made fun of each other and told jokes that if reported to authority would be considered a "respect violation." Some Black candidates resisted White leadership's attempts to police their use of the n-word. These behaviors typically took place in more private settings like the barracks or on the weekends when there was less surveillance.

When it came to the Equal Opportunity Program, some candidates questioned whether diversity had inherent value. Several thought West Point and the military had "gone too far" with Affirmative Action and were passing over better soldiers in favor of increasing diversity. They thought that the best performing individuals should be selected for the job, regardless of the color of their skin or sex. If that meant that the whole army was White men, so be it; soldiers needed to win wars, not be politically correct.

On the other hand, some candidates did not buy the idea that the Army was a meritocracy where all anyone 'saw was green.' They saw constraints to equal treatment because of racial and gender bias: certain candidates had limited access to opportunities and experienced unequal treatment even within the institution. They felt that minoritized soldiers could achieve success, but that the cards might be stacked against them. Questioning these principles typically took place in private conversations, but occasionally in more public settings and conversations with the leadership.

Exploring Difference: Competing Authorities and Salient Identifications

If institutional pressures were so all-encompassing, why were there different outcomes among candidates? Why did we not all become identical bolts within the machinery? To continue the metaphor, I came to realize that the 'input material' was not homogenous. Candidates arrived with different life experiences and identifications that made them more or less amenable to being

(re)shaped into ideal 'bolts.' Moreover, specific and general status beliefs about who are competent soldiers and officers, and how these individuals look and behave, meant that pressures were not applied evenly to all candidates. Some were being squeezed into a mold that was not designed for their bodies. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that beliefs about the superiority of dominant groups' attributes become embedded into the structures, practices, and procedures of organizations (Acker 1990; Ely and Meyerson 2000; Stephens et al. 2012). These structures, practices, and procedures then imply an 'ideal worker,' 'ideal student,' or 'ideal officer' who reflects the characteristics of the high-status decision-makers (Janowitz 1960:218–19; Ridgeway 2011, 2019:159).

Incoming candidates arrived from all corners of the United States and territories with a wide variation of life experiences. They differed in their existing socializations—the habits, ideologies, and moral-ethical schemas that were forged in their communities of origin. Some candidates were entering the preparatory school with formed or nearly formed soldier identities. Prior-service candidates had already been through basic training. Some priors had spent several years in units and a handful had deployed overseas. Many candidates had participated in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps in high school to join the military after graduation. There were candidates from military families who grew up attending military events and living on post. Even those with no formal military exposure may have prepared themselves to some extent through movies, books, and media because they had dreamt of attending West Point from childhood or had always planned to join the armed forces.

Then, some candidates had no prior exposure to the military, but their communities of origin, schooling, or sports teams had already ingrained in them bodily practices and dispositions that mapped directly onto those the institution aimed to instill. Their parents may have strictly

enforced obedience, attention to detail, and responsibility. Their religious communities may have emphasized sacrifice for the greater good and the need to eradicate evil from the world. The discourse, ideologies, and behavioral standards present at their schools may have mirrored those at the preparatory school, as educational institutions typically share similar White, middle-class norms (Carter 2005). Their sports teams may have inculcated in them fighting and winning mentalities, grit, and teamwork. These candidates may not have been arriving with soldier identities or particularly strong desires to serve in the military, but they were well primed to adjust to army culture.

Finally, some candidates were entering the preparatory school for whom the embodied practices, ideologies, and structure were completely new and foreign. Their existing socialization was at odds with what was valued in military culture. Their communities may have advocated for challenging authorities or stressed freedom and individuality. Cultural rules for respect or emotional expressions may differ greatly from those employed in the military. Their schools may have been under-resourced and over-crowded, and the pedagogical approaches may have varied from those employed at the preparatory school. They may have never participated in competitive sports, been on teams whose activities did not translate into army fitness, or might have been relatively sedentary. Structurally, their family or neighborhood circumstances may have led to gaps in their education or lack of access to gyms, safe running areas, and swimming pools for physical development. Candidates in this group were entering with socializations that were different from, or even contrary to, military socialization. They also faced possible structural obstacles to their physical and academic success.

The backgrounds of real candidates of course did not fit neatly into the three categories listed above. Rather, they were on a spectrum, typically with some aspects falling into all three.

Across these categories, there was also the question of *competing identities*—identifications that conflicted with the identity the institution was trying to inscribe upon us. Many candidates had strong competing identifications that had been formed through being a minoritized, oppressed or marginalized person in the United States. Minoritized individuals have to actively think about holding these identities more often than those who belonged to dominant groups in America (White, heterosexual, Protestant, upper/middle-class men who are considered 'neutral' from which all others deviate) (Du Bois 1904; Fanon 2008; Piazza and Fasulo 2014). Thus, these identifications were very salient for many women, non-White, queer, and religious minorities when they arrived for Reception Day. These were parts of self that could not just be washed away in a sea of green. There was also the reality that these identifications conflicted with the traditional image of an officer—again, White, Protestant, upper/middle-class, heterosexual man—for which the machinery of West Point was originally designed.[172] Although West Point and the officer corps had expanded to include those from other backgrounds, and the standards had evolved accordingly, among candidates from historically marginalized groups there was still a sense that the original mold was not created with them in mind.

Religious candidates entered the institution with alternative authorities over what they should be doing with their bodies (headgear, hair, dress, dietary restrictions, prayer time, fasting) and guidelines for moral-ethical behavior. While First Amendment rights granted religious accommodations whenever possible, the "mission" always came first—whether that mission defeating the enemy in combat, performing on the obstacle course, or attending a brief on character. Often tensions between military and religious identities were most acute for non-Christian candidates, but even some Christians struggled with the military's approach to killing

[172] See Janowitz 1960:218–19 for information on officers as "gentlemen."

which felt contrary to the commandment "do not murder" and Jesus' commitment to peace. Religious candidates varied on whether they felt their existing bodily practices and beliefs *complemented* military practices (e.g., submission to authority) and ideologies (e.g., protecting the weak, eradicating evil), or directly *conflicted* with them. Some atheists also sensed that an underlying (Protestant) religiosity remained in the armed forces even though contemporary soldiers were not forced to attend services. They sensed it in the blessings at parades, time allocated for religious services during basic training, Christian clubs, periodic prayer breakfasts, and the presence of chaplains on the post.

In terms of gender, women candidates had often been socialized as children to take on the bodily practices associated with American conventional femininity (Martin 1998). To perform their identities as women, they had to dress, look, and act in specific ways (West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987). While the socially acceptable performances of womanhood have substantially expanded and are culturally variant, they are still in many ways antithetical to the performance of the hyper-masculinity that remains prevalent in the military sphere. Hyper-masculinity amplifies conventionally "masculine traits" such as physical strength, aggression, dominance, heterosexuality, competition, and violence.

As such, to be acceptable soldiers, women candidates often had to change their existing gender performances. I found that this created less tension for the Black women because, as existing research suggests, they are not socialized into the same modes of femininity as White women.[173] Stereotypes about Black women having attitudes and being aggressive meant that

[173] Scholars have found that Black women experience "intersectional invisibility" wherein they are not expected to behave like White women or like Black men (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008). Black women may be protected from social sanctions when violating gender norms that are rooted in White womanhood and permitted to exhibit high-status behaviors like agency and aggression. But their actions may be perceived as less important and they are often seen as less legitimate leaders (Livingston et al. 2012; Ridgeway 2019:118; Rosette and Livingston 2012;

they were not expected to be as gentle, submissive, and demure as White women. Nevertheless, many Black women did relish the opportunity to wear makeup, do their hair, and perform more conventional forms of femininity while on pass. More than 'demilitarizing' themselves in these moments, they were 'de-masculinizing' their bodily practices.

Other women arrived with more non-conventional gender performances— the 'tomboys.' These women's existing gender practices complied quite well with hyper-masculinity. Then, some did not characterize certain behaviors as masculine at all; they were all gender-neutral behaviors for soldiers. Contrary to the existing literature (Berdahl 2007), I did not see examples of harassment and sexual violence against women who were violating conventional femininity in the institution.[174] Nevertheless, women had to deal with uncertainty as to how they might deal with sexual harassment or assault as soldiers given the high rates in the military and institutional emphasis on women as victims.[175]

The historical ban on homosexuality in the armed forces, the legacy of Don't Ask Don't Tell, and continued debate over the integration of transgender service members, meant that public LGBTQ+ identities were often perceived as conflicting with 'good' soldierhood. Many queer candidates struggled with when and if to disclose their sexual identifications for fear of social sanctions. I found, for the most part, that LGBTQ+ identities were tolerated if they were private or did not deviate from the performance of hyper-masculinity. Indeed, queer women were typically more accepted than queer men because they were perceived as performing the

---

Tinkler et al. 2019). Note that the studies showing that Black women are sometimes able to avoid backlash for agentic behavior were conducted in gender-neutral occupations (e.g., consulting), rather than male-typed occupations like the military (Livingston et al. 2012).

[174] Just because I did not witness or hear about sexual harassment or assault geared toward women who were violating gender norms at the preparatory school does mean that these are not used as tools to maintain hegemonic masculine power in the armed forces (Armstrong et al. 2018; McLaughlin et al. 2012; Uggen and Blackstone 2004). Dynamics may have been different at the preparatory school than in other military settings.

[175] See Hart 2021 for information on how women deal with uncertainty and ambiguity around sexual interactions.

appropriate military masculinity (i.e., sexual attraction towards women, masculine mannerism), whereas queer men who seemed 'feminine' received more severe social sanctions such as with comments about their "flamboyant" expressions. Some LGBTQ+ candidates themselves advocated for others in the queer community to not be too flamboyant and "reinforce" negative stereotypes about queer individuals. Experiences around gender and sexual identities also largely intersected with race and ethnicity, as each community has its cultural codes for normative behavior (Hill 2013). Black queer men seemed to face additional sanctions because of the intersection of hyper-masculinity in both the military setting and the Black community as well as the intersection of homophobia and racism both within and outside of the queer community (Han 2007; Hill 2013; Jones and Hill 1996).

Just as there were many ways for candidates to perform their religious, gender, and sexual identities, so too were there were a multiplicity of ways that candidates performed their racial and ethnic identities. Black, Hispanic/Latin-American, Asian, Indigenous, and mixed-race candidates had a myriad of experiences. The relevance and salience of racial identities differed greatly among candidates. For some, race was a defining way to interpret interactions in the preparatory school. For others, it was completely irrelevant. Because Black candidates made up almost 50% of the candidate population, my observations are mostly based on their experiences.

I found that Black candidates tended to fall into five clusters. These clusters are rooted in the three categories detailed by educational sociologist Prudence Carter (2005) in her work on Black and Latinx low-income youth's academic experiences. Carter's first category is "noncompliant believers:" students who have the widest gaps between their beliefs about the importance of education, school engagement, and actual school achievement. These students embrace the value of education, but their cultural and racial practices contrast with those

educational institutions associated with being 'good' students. They either lack knowledge of dominant practices or perceive their racial/ethnic identities as *conflicting* with institutional culture.[176] I found that Black candidates frequently perceived the officer identity and 'professional' behavior to be intertwined with the tacit performance of White, upper/middle-class culture.[177] The candidate population was almost majority Black, but the authorities were mostly White. Many saw the preparatory school as the "baby" of a predominantly White institution (West Point) and the military writ large in which the authorities remained over-representatively White men. Some candidates saw their Black peers who were embracing military culture as "acting White."

To translate Carter's first category to the full preparatory school, a "noncompliant believer" would also have to adopt the institutional belief that military achievement was valuable for future success. I expand on Carter's typology to refer to those who did not have this belief as "noncompliant nonbelievers." Noncompliant nonbelievers, like Dominic Campbell, did not adopt institutional ideologies about the military as an avenue for success and refused to embody cultural practices. They still, however, valued education. I moreover discuss the case of "compliant nonbelievers," like Addison Martin, who had the skills and willingness to adopt institutional culture but ultimately did not believe that the military was the path for him in life and chose to pursue civilian education.

Carter's second category is "cultural mainstreamers." Cultural mainstreamers embrace institutional ideologies and cultural practices and have the "bodily-know-how" to do so

[176] Groups vary in their access to critical forms of social capital and the personal connections that help to navigate dominant culture (Louie 2001; Stanton-Salazar 2001). Social capital usually corresponds to families' socioeconomic status, and thus, is frequently limited for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Wilson 1987). At the preparatory school, however, the majority of the Black candidates were coming from middle-class families and knew how to emulate the dominant culture.

[177] As sociologist Mark Gould (1999) argues, although American institutions are often presumed to be neutral, they are greatly influenced by the tacit culture of Anglo whites and the middle-class.

successfully. At the preparatory school, “cultural mainstreamers” often held salient racial identities but did not experience conflict between these identities and the soldier identity. They viewed educational and military culture as racially and ethnically neutral. The institutional dress, language, and hairstyles that the “noncompliant” candidates associated with the White, upper/middle class were to “cultural mainstreamers” natural and taken-for-granted. They differed on what it meant to be Black and what tastes, bodily practices, and beliefs performing ‘Blackness’ entailed.

Carter’s third category is “cultural straddlers.” Cultural straddlers can successfully enact institutional cultural practices while simultaneously performing their distinct ethnic and racial identities. Cultural straddlers are like the noncompliant candidates in that they were critical of how White, upper/middle-class norms inform institutional culture. They paid close attention to moments of implicit discrimination. At the same time, they intentionally and actively “played the game” for institutional authorities. Candidates in this category were able to navigate the institution in ways that let them hold on to their cultural tastes and practices, even if only in private. They often advocated for ways to *expand* the definition of successful officership. Cultural straddlers were successful at socializing with both Black and non-Black candidates. They were able to code-switch between cultural repertoires depending on the setting. They received both the affirmation from authorities that “cultural mainstreamers” benefited from, as well as a sense of belonging with their co-racial peers that helped them navigate moments of perceived discrimination.

In my analysis, class seemed less salient for shaping how people negotiated institutional life than gender or race. I posited this was because most candidates were coming from middle-class backgrounds and institution-issued clothing and equipment minimized typical class

markers. Unlike race and gender, class is also less essentialized in American society. It is viewed as a less 'inherent' physical trait and a more fluid, fuzzy 'achieved' state (Ridgeway 2014, 2019). Still, candidates from working-class and middle-class backgrounds shared how they perceived their class backgrounds to be compatible or in conflict with soldier and officer identities. Candidates with working-class identities noted how this background was compatible with the grit required in the profession of arms. Research on working-class child-rearing suggests that these candidates may also have had more exposure to hyper-masculinity and experience deferring to authorities (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Calarco 2018; Lareau 2002; Willis 1981). Moreover, most of the prior-enlisted candidates were coming from working-class families; thus, this background became linked with those who had the most military knowledge and skills.

At the same time, the officer corps was historically made up of those from upper/middle-class families and was imbued with the associated tastes and customs. Indeed, enlisted soldiers often enacted boundaries between themselves and the officers with phrases like, "We work for a living." Officers were feminized as "mom;" sergeants were "dad." The physical labor of the enlisted soldier was masculine, whereas the mental labor of the officer was feminine.[178] Though those from working-class backgrounds might fit seamlessly into the enlisted corps, there was a larger transition to the officer corps.

On the other hand, candidates from middle-class families were already socialized into the class culture of the officer corps and the American higher education system writ large. As research on class rearing further suggests, these candidates may be more likely to question and challenge authority in ways that can produce advantageous outcomes in institutions (Calarco 2018). Still, some authorities perceived them as entitled, lacking work ethic, and refusing to

[178] These distinctions are common in working-class culture (Willis 1981).

submit.

Candidates' religious, gender, sexual, racial, and class identifications interacted and intersected in many ways. Candidates often held one identity characteristic that complimented becoming a soldier and future officer, but others that conflicted with these processes. For example, White, prior men often came from working-class families, whereas Black candidates came from middle-class backgrounds. To be successful in the institution, candidates' competing salient identities had to be minimized, reconfigured, or abandoned to allow for compliance with and supremacy of the military identity (or at least make it seem supreme to the military authorities).

The ability to be a soldier above all else was not always up to individuals. Even after adjusting their gender performances, gender remained salient for many women candidates. While the institution tried to be 'color-blind,' the policies and procedures were highly gender conscious. Women were separated in the barracks and held to different fitness and appearance standards. They often expressed that they literally did not fit: uniforms, boots, and equipment were too large, shower heads were too high, and the types of strength that were valued and assessed were based on male physiology. Some Black and Hispanic/Latin-American women struggled to comply with a height and weight system that seemed to have first been designed for men's bodies and later only expanded to include White women's bodies. In academics, women did not experience the same conspicuousness or tensions. The "feminization" of academic success and mental labor in the United States meant that gender played out differently in the classroom (Carter 2005:7; Jacobs 1996; Mickelson 1989).

Class dynamics shaped interactions on weekends when candidates who had savings or family financial support would stay in hotels, go to restaurants, and buy new civilian clothing.

Those with less financial resources had to stay at the preparatory school under the watchful eyes of the authorities. Class also was visible when certain people could afford to buy designer boots or equipment that allowed them to perform better on rucks and in the field. Sexuality became salient when institutional authorities only referred to heterosexual assault and when candidates made jokes about homosexuality and used language like "that's gay," "no homo," or called someone a homophobic slur. Religion was salient on Sundays when an abundance of religious services for Christians were offered, and the entire basic training came to a standstill for celebration. Non-Christian and atheist candidates had to decide how to partake, if at all, in these festivities. Periodic prayer breakfasts, which were led by Christian clergy, also brought religion to the surface.

Although many authorities put forth a color-blind "all I see is green" ideology, race remained salient in the preparatory school across spheres. Math classes were largely separated by demographics. Black candidates from predominantly Black neighborhoods and low-resourced high schools were overrepresented in lower-level classes. White candidates or those from predominantly White high schools were in the higher-level classes. In this way, historical and contemporary racial inequalities in access to high-quality education legitimated existing stereotypes that Black candidates may be less intellectually fit for officership. Moreover, despite recent changes in appearance standards that accommodated more hair textures, the newness of these policies led to uneven enforcement. Braids and dreadlocks were perceived as less professional. Backgrounds and characteristics that made it more challenging for candidates to blend into a 'sea of green' or fit the ideal mold led to frustration and poorer performance outcomes.

Exploring Difference: Status Processes—What does an officer look like?

Beyond the candidates' individual identifications, the social identities that others ascribed to them shaped their experiences. Regardless of whether candidates identified with a specific gender, race, sexuality, or class, how others categorized them impacted their *perceived* competence and place in the institutional status hierarchy. Research from cognitive studies reveals that gender and race are primary categories of perception in American society (Brewer and Lui 1989; Ito and Urland 2003; Johnson, Freeman, and Pauker 2012). People use these traits to categorize, or attempt to categorize, one another at first glance. Individuals' race and gender remain salient in interactions even if they learn all of the cultural capital necessary for "fitting in" (Ridgeway 2019:139; Turco 2010). These are perceived as "essentialized" characteristics that are rooted in the body, cannot be erased through behavioral change, and greatly inform status advantages and disadvantages.

Although the allocation of status is a natural part of collective life, this process is particularly charged in the armed forces. The military's mission is to protect the United States against enemies foreign and domestic and the necessity of joint, coordinated behavior to achieve this mission, means that competencies have life-and-death implications. If soldiers are not strong enough to hold their weapons during extended firefights, or officers do not have the aptitudes to make the right strategic decisions, American lives will be lost. Thus, candidates who were perceived as highly competent were esteemed as 'good' warfighters and those who were perceived as less competent were seen as major liabilities.

Shared status beliefs from American society meant that those with certain ascribed social identities (White, men, and professionals) were generally seen as more competent across tasks than others (non-White, women, and blue-collar workers). As the officer corps was historically comprised of White, upper/middle-class men, even mission-specific competencies, like physical

strength and intellectual acumen, were more likely to be awarded to candidates from those backgrounds. Although the mental labor of officers was considered slightly more 'feminine' than the manual labor of enlisted soldiers, officership remained a masculine, White, and upper/middle-class "typed" task (Ridgeway 2019).

Moreover, status processes inform organizational practices and procedures by determining whose opinions are present and valued when standards are set. These standards then serve as additional obstacles for people from lower-status social groups, even when they are just as competent as others. Low-status candidates had to repeatedly perform *above* standard and demonstrate their goal-relevant skills to rise in the status hierarchy (Ridgeway 2019:109). Those who ultimately gained status were thought of as exceptions to a more general rule. These small moments of status biases accumulate across settings and time to generate large cumulative effects that shape organizational outcomes (Korver-Glenn 2018).

The preparatory school's commitment to a formal meritocracy[179] in some ways reduced status inequalities but in others made them more insidious.[180] Public displays of physical and academic performance through awards and rankings meant that candidates had more information about others' *actual* skills. Thus, perceived competencies could be adjusted to take into consideration actual performance rather than just assumptions. Research has shown the use of explicit evaluation criteria and more formal promotion processes also help reduce the impact of status bias (Anderson and Cowan 2014; Berger, Ridgeway, et al. 1998; Goar and Sell 2005). Public test scores and documented training experience are socially valid signs of competence that

[179] Meritocracy—the belief that individual achievement through talent, hard work, and character alone should shape opportunities and rewards—is baked into American ideology as the "land of opportunities" (Kluegel and Smith 2017). This ideology is extremely powerful in the military, which sees itself as a great equalizer and a force that recognizes pure performance.
[180] See for example Castilla and Benard 2010 on the "paradox of meritocracy."

lead team members to challenge existing performance expectations, raising the position of low-status individuals and lowering the position of high-status individuals respectively. Candidates who publicly performed well on fitness tests, rucks, at the range, and in the classroom ultimately rose in official candidate rankings and won awards and public recognition, which then influenced their place in the implicit status hierarchy. As candidates spent more time together and moved into the academic year, a change in task orientation, increased observations, and public evaluations also reshaped the hierarchy (Bunderson 2003).

However, a belief that a meritocracy is identity-blind ("all I see is green") is misguided. As sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway (2019) argued, 'meritocracy' is deeply embedded with status inequalities. Social identities still do influence even the most explicit and clear evaluation programs and influence later judgments and behaviors in self-fulfilling ways, a process termed "status bias" (Ridgeway 2019:19). [181] As such, I found that candidates from high-status groups were still over-represented for the top awards. Furthermore, the connotations of status in terms of worthiness and esteem then *legitimate* unequal outcomes for those of different social groups because of perceived "merit" (Ridgeway 2019:5). Those who are high-status in a group are perceived as deserving of and earning their positions; their greater access to valuable resources and positions of power are seen as fair. [182] High-status people 'look right' and 'look the part' in positions of power because their positions align with shared status beliefs about who is competent. The perceived legitimacy of their positions means they can act with more assertiveness and with less resistance than those who are in the same positions because of proven

[181] See, for example, narrative differences in officer evaluations based on race (Johnson 2001).
[182] This process relates to durable inequality because when status hierarchies develop in workplaces, schools, government and health institutions, and other organizations that distribute valued life resources (income, education, healthcare) those who are perceived as low status gain less access to these resources, which later reinforces to shared social beliefs about their lower competences in an achievement orientated society like the United States (Ridgeway 2019; Tilly 1998).

skill but do not have the backing of shared status beliefs (Berger, Ridgeway, et al. 1998).

In a 'meritocracy,' it is more difficult to address inequalities in outcomes because they are seen as natural and fair because of innate capacities. People justify social inequality because of the different merit of those from different social groups. Individuals are also incentivized not to recognize status or legitimacy bias because this recognition often leads to negative emotions for both those from high-status groups—who may no longer feel that they deserve their positions or rewards—and low-status groups—who are more aware of the discrimination that thwarts their achievements (Major and Kaiser 2017). Through these mechanisms, status beliefs continue to perpetuate and legitimate inequalities even within the most ideologically meritocratic institutions like the military (Castilla and Benard 2010).

Candidates' multiplicity of identities meant that they could experience cumulative disadvantages or advantages for their low-status or high-status characteristics. Nevertheless, they were typically perceived as having high competence in one area but low competence in another. Candidates had been deemed "high potential but not yet qualified" for admission to a highly prestigious institution. They had some attributes that made them stand out as worthy of consideration but others that indicated that they were not ready for direct admission. For example, Black men, in particular football players, were as a group perceived to be highly fit, strong, and team players but as lacking the competencies for military bearing, discipline, and devotion to the profession. White men priors too were perceived as high status from their racial and gender identities, but lower status for 'officership' because they were from more blue-collar backgrounds. Women were often seen as lower status in the physical realm but higher status in the classroom, where shared American status beliefs had shifted over time to reflect women's academic success. The split between the officer-specific competencies of physical strength,

intellectual aptitude, and proper moral-ethical orientation meant that those who excelled in each of these spheres advocated that their respective strengths were the most essential for fulfilling the Army's mission. They dealt with feelings of inadequacy or failure in one area by diminishing the importance of that area for the overall mission.

Holding status in the preparatory school was important because it came with increased influence in the group, better peer evaluations, and ultimately, positive emotions and a sense of belonging in the profession. Those with high status received more positive evaluations from others and awards (visible status signals), emphasizing that they were in the right profession and that their success was legitimate. On the other hand, those with low status received poorer evaluations and fewer awards, and when they were successful, it was seen as less legitimate. Low-status candidates often experienced additional pressures from the institution, as there was more surveillance, attention, and intervention for those perceived to be poor and incompetent soldiers. As in existing research, low-status candidates felt that they were judged more harshly for their mistakes (Rosette and Livingston 2012). In these ways, candidates' low-status positions were legitimated, and they were less likely to experience positive emotions and have a sense of belonging at the preparatory school. It was much more challenging to sustain institutional pressures and perform well when one already did not feel like one belonged.[183] Some candidates accepted their positions to gain the cognitive and emotional benefits of being part of a high-status institution, like West Point, while others brought attention to implicit discrimination and advocated for change.[184]

In all, status functioned as a powerful motivator in the military socialization process for

[183] This finding is in line with literature such as Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015; Carter 2005; Hogg, Abrams, and Brewer 2017; Tajfel and Turner 2004.
[184] See, for example, Jost and Banaji 1994; Major and Kaiser 2017.

individual soldiers. People across settings care about deeply about how much they are valued in their communities. The all-encompassing nature of the preparatory school and candidates' high dependence on the group in daily life made them especially sensitive to how others evaluated them. Military leaders were able to manipulate these dynamics to get candidates to change their behavior and sense of selves to be positively assessed by the group. Whether candidates resisted or complied with military 'ideals,' they felt these evaluations acutely across all spheres of life in the preparatory school—which was a powerful motivating force to change themselves or exit the institution.

Amalgamated Selfhood

The analysis above explores how and why candidates' experiences varied at the preparatory school. Yet, concluding that experiences were homogenous within identity groups or that *all* candidates from specific gender, racial, sexual, religious, or class backgrounds struggled to take on a soldier and future officer identity would be far from accurate and dangerous. Such a conclusion is inaccurate because candidates held a multiplicity of identities that interacted and intersected across settings. One was not simply a woman, Muslim, or Black; one was an amalgamation of many attributes that combined to create their unique experiences.

In my case, my identity as a White, upper-middle-class individual with abundant experience in well-resourced educational facilities meant that I was able to navigate some aspects of the organization smoothly without a second thought and was generally perceived as high status. The dispositions that had been ingrained in me since childhood of 'hard work' and desire to be the best also seemed to transition easily to what I was expected to do in the field; however, I struggled with not being able to speak and negotiate with the authorities during basic training because I was accustomed to treating authorities casually. As a woman, I was acutely

aware that my gender identity lowered others' expectations for my performance in the physical and military realms of preparatory school life, I found that the intersection of being a White woman worked to my advantage as a researcher. I was generally perceived as being friendly, warm, and low threat. Because people expected little of me physically and militarily, when I did perform well, they thought it was amusing and surprising. I suspected that if I were a man, candidates might have felt a greater need to compete with me or been disappointed with my performance. My identity as a religiously observant Jew felt the most in conflict with the institutional identities; I felt torn between my religious obligations and my responsibilities as a 'soldier.' I was okay making some religious or soldierly concessions for the short term but felt that if it was my actual profession, I would have had to choose between my religious and my military lives. It was one of the main reasons that despite my adoption of many military beliefs and practices, I knew the profession would always remain off-limits for me. Even as a civilian researcher, I felt pressure to improve and change myself across spheres of institutional life to gain positive evaluations—pushing myself physically past the point of injury to show I had the potential to be a 'good soldier' and not a liability to the team. In such ways, the candidates' identities also intersected and interacted to create their unique experiences.

Furthermore, the conclusion that soldiers with certain identity characteristics will *always* struggle is dangerous because it would legitimate and perpetuate stereotypes that certain groups are not cut out to be soldiers or officers. Thus, I will be clear: there were candidates from all social identity groups who transitioned easily and smoothly into the military body, officer mind, and warrior spirit. There were also candidates from all social identity groups who failed to acculturate and were separated or chose to leave.

To return to the metal metaphor, some candidates were like tungsten—the hardest

metal—and nearly impossible to reshape. The institutional machinery could barely scratch their surface. These tungsten candidates would fit into the mold only if being a soldier was already core to their sense of self. They may have been building towards this identity their whole lives or have existing dispositions that closely matched institutional values. Others tungsten candidates could not or would not fit regardless of institutional pressures.

Then there were candidates who, regardless of their backgrounds, were extremely malleable, like lead. They easily melted into the mold and the soldier identity took saliency over other aspects of self. Typically, I found that candidates fell in the middle-metal categories, like a bronze. They were not too hard to let the military etch on them, but parts of their prior identities remained core to their sense of selves. They often experienced contestation—conflict between their pre-institutional selves and the aims of the institution—but when they vocalized this conflict, they were able to find a pathway towards resolution. These candidates were not completely (re)formed, but they fit into well enough to survive and even thrive in the system. Acknowledging that each candidate's experience was multilayered and multidimensional moves beyond simple assumptions and generalization to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the (re)socialization process and pave the way for a more equitable future.

Looking Forward

Despite historical and contemporary challenges individuals from minoritized groups face in the military, they continue to enter the armed forces in larger numbers. Indeed, some have referred to the influx of poor and marginalized Americans into the military as a "poverty draft" (Mariscal 2007). Nevertheless, there remains value in improving conditions for those from low-status and marginalized backgrounds in the armed forces because those who join often have better outcomes than their civilian counterparts.

There is extensive evidence that the military serves as an avenue for stable employment for those who experience poor economic and social conditions, and the resulting income equality has led to particularly positive outcomes in Black military families (Burk and Espinoza 2012; Teachman and Tedrow 2008). Sociologist Jennifer Lundquist (2004) found that the marriage rates of Black/African American service members on active duty are more similar to White Americans than to Black/African American civilians. Given the benefits of being raised in a two-parent household, higher marriage rates suggest improved childhood development for Black children in military families.[185] Infant mortality and preterm births are also considerably lower for Black women in the military compared to their civilian counterparts (Lundquist et al. 2014). Moreover, participation in the military may help reduce mass incarceration, as sociologists Becky Pettit and Bruce Western (2004:156) argued that the military is a "major institutional competitor" to prison for Black men with low education. There is an inverse relationship between Black men in the military and Black men in prison (JooHee 2017). Overall, Lundquist (2008) found that Black and Hispanic service members rank higher in terms of job satisfaction, perceived benefits, and quality of life compared to their White counterparts.[186]

Participation in the armed forces additionally provides an avenue for citizenship for permanent residents. Sociologist Deensh Sohoni (2017:57) posited that the military is, "one of the most crucial institutions in setting the parameters of national citizenship, and in helping facilitate the expansion of those boundaries to include racial minorities." Immigrants can demonstrate their patriotism through military service and gain access to citizenship and social membership. Since the Immigration and Nationality Act in 2002—which expedited the citizenship of non-citizens serving in the military—37,250 soldiers have become U.S. citizens

[185] See, for example, Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan 2005; McLanahan and Percheski 2008.
[186] Also see Mershon 1998:88.

and 111 received posthumous citizenship (Batalova, Fix, and Creticos 2008). Citizenship through service is an especially popular pathway for Asians and Hispanic/Latin-American immigrants (De Angelis 2017; Sohoni 2017).

Whether scholars want to perpetuate the military as an institution that provides 'first-class citizenship' or hold it to different standards because it measures success through war, they must contend with the fact that military participation continues to provide a "bridging environment" for less advantaged groups to gain social legitimacy in the United States and the skills needed to enter in the civilian workforce (Browning et al. 1973; De Angelis 2017:49; Fredland and Little 1985; Lopreato and Poston 1977). Regardless of one's personal or political opinion of the military, conflicting identities and status bias in institutional settings can produce damaging outcomes when knowledge about the dynamics of identity formation is slim, and it is beneficial to better understand and respond to the experiences of these groups in the military to create better policies.[187]

To investigate how the military may be able to better support soldiers who were historically excluded from and marginalized in the armed forces, it is important to first recognize that the military is a microcosm of the larger United States. The identity conflicts and status beliefs that exist along gender, racial/ethnic, religious, sexual, and class lines within the military also exist in educational, government, and healthcare institutions as well as private-sector workplaces. As long as those in power belong to high-status groups, the practices and policies at these "gateway institutions" will reflect their tastes and tacit culture (Nelson and Bridges 1999; Ridgeway 2019:135). Who looks like 'ideal' students, workers, and officers will reflect their characteristics—creating cumulative disadvantages for those from other identity groups as they

[187] See Bosworth 1999; Carter 2005; Dubler 2013; Konieczny and Rogers 2016 for information on conflicting identities and status bias in institutions.

navigate the settings that matter most for life outcomes and material resources. Identity conflicts and status may be more pronounced in the military because of the life-and-death consequences of its mission, but the same overarching processes and inequalities are at play.

Although status processes are not going to disappear, Cecilia Ridgeway (2019) offers some possible avenues through which individuals and groups can better match perceived status to actual status.[188] For low-status individuals, one of the first steps to counter poor self-expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies is to gain task-relevant skills and expertise that will raise their confidence. Then to gain legitimacy in the group and alter other members' low-performance expectations of them, they can rely on socially valid proof of their skills, such as test scores and degrees.[189] The explicit support of authority figures can also help reshape expectations; for example, when 'powerful men' mentored women and vouched for their abilities, these women were perceived as more competent leaders and gained leadership positions in corporations and the military.[190] Low-status members with these skills can then strive to balance assertive, agentic behavior that shows competence with group-oriented behavior, such as generosity towards others and explicit commitment to the overarching goal, to show that they are

[188] Status as a sociocultural blueprint that organizes human relationships is unlikely to disappear. Indeed, scholars consider the allocation of influence based on perceived competence as one of the most effective and efficient ways to organize task-oriented groups. Status hierarchies offer a "boundedly functional organizational solution to the collective action problem" because the hierarchy incentives group members to work hard to contribute and give those who 'know' the most about the task the most influence over decisions (Ridgeway 2019:160). Lower-status members might receive a smaller share of the rewards, but they still gain the benefits and self-esteem from success. If, like in the military, the goal is winning a war, success has life-or-death consequences. Status hierarchies are considered more effective than those based on prestige or dominance (Anderson and Willer 2014; Halevy et al. 2012).

However, status hierarchies are only "boundedly" beneficial because *perceived* competence does perfectly align with *actual* competence. Those who actually have the most to contribute may be silenced if they belong to low-status groups. Status and legitimacy biases not only lead to unequal outcomes within the group but also makes it less effective overall. In the words of the military, bias interferes with mission effectiveness.

[189] See Cohen and Lotan 1997.

[190] See, for example, Cohen and Lotan 1997; Johnson and Smith 2019; Ridgeway 1982.

not just vying for power for selfish reasons.[191] As Ridgeway noted (2019:120), these extra burdens on low-status individuals are not "fair" because they require, "work[ing] harder, be[ing] nicer, and provid[ing] more clear-cut evidence of competence to be treated the same." Still, they are a proven way to move up the status hierarchy and gain influential positions.

Shared status beliefs that lead to social inequality may be diminished in another two ways. First, groups can undermine the perceived consensually of beliefs about the 'essentialism' of certain social differences. For example, the idea that gender is fixed at birth and essentialized in the body is weakened through public stories and advocacy for transgender and genderqueer individuals (Risman 2018). The less essentialized a category—like race or gender—becomes, the more easily status beliefs about people in that group will gradually change. The second way is to narrow the gap in competencies that a social identity indicates. For instance, women's entrance into the workforce and their elevation into positions of power have narrowed the influence of gender on perceived ability to labor and exercise leadership (Ridgeway 2019:163). In the military, more public attention to successful women in combat roles could function similarly. The narrower the gaps in perceive competencies, the less relevant gender, race, class, and other social differences become to accomplishing the group goal.

The military as an all-encompassing institution has several significant advantages in its ability to reduce status inequalities when compared to the civilian world. The armed forces reduce visible signs of material inequality because service members wear uniforms and standard issued gear as well as receive the same pay and housing allocations based on seniority. It is when visible group differences are systematically correlated with differences in material resources that status beliefs are created and reinforced; therefore, minimizing visible material inequality can

[191] See Eagly and Carli 2007; Ridgeway 1982.

minimize the efficacy of society-wide status beliefs. When there are no gaps in groups' material resources, beliefs about differing abilities will gradually weaken. However, if those in leadership positions remain majority White men from the upper/middle class these beliefs will not disappear entirely. In the meantime, the military at least reduces structural inequalities for soldiers at the same level.

In a similar vein, research on intergroup contact suggests that encounters across cultural and identity lines can improve relationships between dominant and non-dominant groups and undermine stereotypes (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). As one of the most diverse professions in the United States, and one in which employees often live, eat, train, and study together, the military has the potential to leverage this diversity to create bonding experiences between service members from different backgrounds. The more interactions people have that conflict with existing status beliefs that certain groups are or less competent soldiers and officers, the faster these beliefs start to erode. Confirmation bias suggests that these beliefs are highly resistant to change, but overwhelming evidence cannot be ignored.[192] Over time, the gap in competency that social identities indicate will narrow. The narrower these gaps become, the less relevant gender, race/ethnicity, class, and other social differences become to accomplishing the mission.

These interactions can also help reduce associational preference bias, in which people prefer to associate with those from similar social backgrounds or high-status groups because they benefit from the halo of high status (Ridgeway 2019:121).[193] Soldiers, at least during training,

[192] Confirmation bias is when people see low or high-status people performing poorly or well respectively as 'confirming' that these beliefs are correct, but then discounting those who act contrary to beliefs as 'exceptions' to a more general rule.
[193] For information on association bias and how it undercuts solidarity in low-status groups see also Cabrera and Thomas-Hunt 2007; Hysom 2009; Rivera 2016; Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny 2012; Tajfel and Turner 2004; Thye 2000, 2000.

are forced to associate with and communicate with those from other backgrounds. The chain of command has the power to increase this contact by asking soldiers to interact at social events and across settings.

Although status characteristics will still impact evaluations and promotions, the use of explicit criteria on fitness and intellectual tests and publicly sharing results help group members adjust perceived competence to better match actual competence. Visible markers on uniforms that highlight battlefield accomplishments and specialized training function similarly. Wearing a rank on one's chest may also help confront legitimacy bias. Soldiers may continue to think certain people 'look' more like leaders, but under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, they ultimately have to defer to those with higher ranks regardless of how they 'look.'

Official mentorship programs and the power that leaders hold over their units also offer ways for authorities to intentionally support and vouch for soldiers who might otherwise be perceived as less competent. Associational preference bias suggests that leaders will prefer soldiers with similar backgrounds and prefer to give them opportunities; however, with the right training, it is possible to reorient leaders to also focus on soldiers with low-status characteristics. For example, the preparatory school matched each candidate with a high-ranking mentor of their choice to help them navigate the institution.

Given that the military holds immense control over the physical and verbal actions of its service members, new policies have the potential to create rapid and pervasive change.[194] These policies directly influence soldiers' views. For example, Academy cadets and Reserve Officer Training Corps students decreased support for banning homosexual service members after the 2010 repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (Rohall et al. 2017:194). Similarly, although service

[194] See Rohall, Ender, and Matthews 2017:2, 191.

members are still less likely than civilians to support women in combat positions, there has been a general increase in acceptance over time corresponding with official policies on full gender integration. As sociology of the body suggests, equal opportunity programs that require soldiers to treat others equally and respectfully likely alter behavior and attitudes over time (Mahmood 2012; Winchester 2008). Acting and speaking in a specific way cultivates specific dispositions.

By controlling public and official rhetoric in the institution, military leaders have the power to erode the perceived consensually of beliefs and the 'essentialism' of certain social differences. If leaders are intentional about regularly highlighting the skills of those belonging to low-status groups and explicitly counter speech about their incompetencies, they too can begin to erode to the consensus around status beliefs. Authorities speaking about women soldiers excelling on rucks or physical fitness tests and Black soldiers making brilliant tactical decisions and their academic successes may alter beliefs and disrupt self-fulfilling prophecies. In the classroom at military preparatory schools, academies, and training facilities, instructors can draw on authors and leadership from lower-status groups and broaden their curriculum to show highlight diverse knowledge. Many faculty at the preparatory school has already started this work and continuing to do so may help alter status beliefs as more service members recognize the valuable contributions of those lower-status groups.[195] Although there are structural constraints limiting the diversification of faculty and staff, these strategies offer a few pathways forward.[196]

[195] To be clear, highlighting the high performance of low-status groups is not a form of 'reverse' racism, sexism, or classism. These "isms" refer to the systematic and social-wide advantages dominant groups have over non-dominant groups. Paying attention to the successes of non-dominant groups may reduce some of dominant groups' 'advantages' but it does not systematically disadvantage them in the same way.

[196] When applying to preparatory school jobs, high-level military veterans gain significant points on their applications. As such, many teachers are retired senior officers, who are typically White men. While there is benefit in honoring veterans through employment benefits, these need to be weighted with the benefits of having a diverse and representative faculty population.

Those with an "all I see is green," color-blind, and 'meritocratic' approaches to institutional life often have good intentions. Nevertheless, these approaches leave leaders less cognitively aware of bias when it does occur and can also make historically marginalized groups feel alone in their challenges (Carter et al. 2017; Nacoste 2001; Portocarrero and Carter 2022; Tatum 2017). Color-blind ideologies make racism and other intersectional inequalities more difficult to combat and can undermine diversity and inclusion efforts.[197] Rhetoric that moves beyond focusing on 'equal opportunity' in behavior and actions, and draws attention to status bias and status advantage, can help authorities and subordinates become more aware of how these processes can create systematic advantages and disadvantages for groups in society and the military. Prudence Carter and colleagues (2017) in their article, "You Can't Fix What You Don't Look At," recommend that conversations about race include:

> (a) examin[ing] disaggregated data to determine where racial/ethnic differences occur, (b) thoroughly discuss[ing] the contexts and interactions creating those data, (c) craft[ing] interventions to erase those disparities, and (d) follow[ing] through to ensure that we have truly made a difference, by monitoring the disaggregated data to evaluate the impact of our actions (p. 225).

Direct training can help authorities develop the skills to lead these discussions. West Point already has most of their tactical officers undergo a master's degree in organizational psychology that may aid them with this work. This was the program that helped Captain Kennedy gain the language to discuss these topics with the battalion and his chain of command. As the case of Captain Kennedy shows, leaders do not have to be members of specific identity groups to be allies and make their subordinates feel seen and gain a stronger sense of purpose in the institution. His 'empathetic imagination' allowed for deeper cross-cultural conversations and mentorship.

[197] See Portocarrero and Carter 2022 for a review of this literature. See also (Block 2016; Bonilla-Silva 2021; Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011; Bonilla-Silva et al. 2004; Burke 2017; Ray and Purifoy 2019)

An "all I see is green" ideology can also make identity conflicts more acute. If all soldiers need to be *only* 'green,' it means all other parts of self must be suppressed. There is no question that it is a major benefit for soldiers to feel like they belong to the same team and have a strong group identification. But the underlying message that all soldiers must *only* be 'green' reinforces that they must look and act exactly the same. A singular soldier identity ultimately reinforces the supremacy of specific codes of 'professionalism' and behavior that are tacitly rooted in Whiteness, maleness, and upper/middle-class logic. Practically, it means overlooking that certain soldiers might benefit from training in different ways that will make them more effective members of the team, such as, looking at the physiological strengths of female bodies and creating training programs to optimize these strengths, rather than just training and assessing them on programs designed for male bodies.

An alternative approach to "all I see is green" is to take a closer look at the Army uniform. The uniform is camouflage. It has light and dark brown, tan, black, yellow, cream, and white in many different shapes.[198] Each of these colors and shapes is essential for the uniform's combat effectiveness. If it was only green, it would be easy to spot on the battlefield. Research has shown that diverse teams are more creative, resourceful, and perform better; but if that diversity is suppressed and ignored, then the benefit is also lost. The most effective teams are ones in which multiple types of knowledge and strength do exist and are leveraged to their full advantage, while still cultivating a shared group identity and culture that helps people work together. The balance is establishing a 'culture of camouflage' where the specific shapes and colors may be different, but all the parts are essential for mission success.

[198] Other branches can do the same with all the shades in their uniforms.

The ability to acknowledge and celebrate differences while still creating a strong common culture and overarching identity is a delicate balance. The military will need to continue to grapple with what are the specific behaviors and competencies required for warfighting, versus what are traditional elements that might be able to be altered without compromising the mission. For example, what aspects of personal appearance may vary in a unit without creating health or safety risks? The military has been increasingly moving in this direction, such as introducing new standards for hair and facial hair and allowing for name tapes with accent marks. These small changes may seem 'strange' or 'bizarre' to those who have been in the military for decades, but they have the power to communicate to those from historically marginalized or excluded groups that they are valued as soldiers and their cultural practices are legitimate.

The military can further consider how certain external identifications—such as being an athlete, student, or religious individual—can complement rather than conflict with soldiers' tasks and skills. These considerations can increase sense of inclusion and belonging for soldiers from multiple backgrounds. They are not a matter of changing the duties of a soldier or decreasing discipline in appearance. Rather, they are about *expanding* notions of what a soldier can look like and who makes a 'good' officer. They can also help develop a system that allows individuals to *integrate* their existing selves into the soldier identity, building on and refining what is already there, without needing for a full breaking down and building back up anew.

Just as the institution may need to expand rhetoric and protocols, soldiers too may need support expanding their definitions of self and ways of being. Recruits need guidance on how to refine their previous behaviors and how to balance their external identifications with what is required of them as service members. Prudence Carter's (2005) conception of "multicultural

navigators" is useful for imagining what types of leaders might help achieve this balance. Multicultural navigators can help recruits from non-dominant groups learn the skills and knowledge that are required to successfully navigate the military, while still recognizing that these recruits have their own tastes that give them status and a sense of belonging in their respective communities. Since multicultural navigators are aware of how institutional outcomes shape life trajectories, and how bias can inhibit these trajectories, they call attention to these dynamics to create more equal and equitable outcomes. The preparatory school already has several multicultural navigators in the military, academic, and physical spheres. The mentorship program provides candidates with additional support. These navigators can help them figure out how to integrate other parts of themselves into their military lives, as well as determine what behavior is appropriate where and when.

In these ways, developing policies and leadership training programs that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion in the armed forces have enormous potential. These steps may support the military in moving past desegregation and assimilation towards "true integration" (powell 2002, 2008)—becoming an organization that does more than just put people together, becoming an institution that fully integrates the norms and structures of its constituent members and facilitates equal participation in social life. As history has shown, changes in the military not only can improve the day-to-day experience of marginalized and minoritized service members but also radiate change into civilian society.

Afterward: Home Visits

We all went our separate way for the summer, scattering across North America. I packed my bags and went on a road trip, driving along most of what was once the Freedom Ride from South Carolina across the Southern states to Texas.

I met Athena Little in front of her yellow, two-story home in the Dallas suburbs. I admired the African statues, often of Black biblical figures, around her house. We walked through her large, red-brick high school. She pointed out pictures of the principal and the school board. Had I noticed they were all Black? She showed me the places where the school was rundown. We went behind back to see the area where she had trained in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps. I went with her family to church and watched her worship God passionately in the small wooden sanctuary that was filled with music and ecstatic song. Afterward, we went to brunch and I spoke to her parents and sisters as they reflected on the ways Athena had grown and developed over the year. To them, she seemed much calmer, less argumentative, a better listener, and more mature. Her sister commented that Athena's leadership skills had been "beefed up" and "she's definitely grown as a person—attitude-wise, mentally, emotionally, everything." Her father told me, "I see slightly the soldier that she should be, and more so that she can be."

Lisbeth Sokolov showed me around her city and had me get my hair done at her family salon. We drove to the beach, and she laughed at how I drove with my left leg crossed underneath me, making fun of me as usual. She no longer could make fun of my bun so anything else would do. We picked up another candidate on the way at his house tucked in a gated, rural estate. We walked around the sandy beaches, letting the water come up and touch our toes. On the drive back, she showed me her church. It was a small white building sitting in a large field with long grass. She did not like it there, she told me. It was all phony and way too insular. Her

mom was always telling the whole community about her personal business. And had I noticed the way her stepfather had asked me if I had read the New Testament when he found out I was Jewish? All the Jesus stuff was just too much for her.

We went to lunch with her older sister, who told me stories of Lisbeth growing up. The sister glowed with pride at Lisbeth's accomplishments. I sat with her mother on their family couch, the little white family dog huddled in her lap. Her mother told me how proud she was to have a daughter in the U.S. Army as a new immigrant. She had Lisbeth translate a few words for her from their native tongue. Afterward, Lisbeth said it was all bullshit: her mother had hated that she was joining the Army. Why could she not just be a perfect Asian girl and go marry an Asian (or White) man and be a doctor? Why did she have to behave like a man?

I drove to Chelsea Melton's lake house and joined her family for a day on the boat. The lake was immense and surrounded by lush forest. I had just missed Claire Row who had visited from the Midwest to spend a few days with her a week or so earlier. At sunset, Chelsea and I sat outside and watched the sun fade on the water. She told me how she was ready for West Point basic training. Chelsea had loved every moment of basic training before—the discipline, the schedule, the shooting, even the yelling. She was ready to go again. Chelsea's parents told me that they had not seen too many changes in Chelsea. She was the same as always, and she was able to be herself wherever she went and thrive. Her mother laughed and said that Chelsea had always had basically a drill sergeant for a mom, so she was accustomed to discipline and being lectured on character. Her father cheered, "Bring it on West Point!" His daughter could take whatever the Academy would throw at her.

As I drove from state to state and city to city, I saw houses that shocked me in their giant stature, trailers, apartments, and everything in between. Akele Martosas, a Black recruited

athlete, brought me to my first, as he called it, “rural ghetto.” There were small trailers scattered around a wide-open area in his hometown, a local bar, and, as Akele emphasized to me, a lot of violence. Yet, he had gone to the well-funded school a few miles away and been the star football player. Akele’s grandmother told me how proud she was when he had been recruited by West Point. She always knew Akele wanted to have a better lifestyle and she knew he had the intelligence to get there. His mother concurred: she was excited that he had made it out of the hood. They would not otherwise have had the money to pay for college. His grandmother mentioned that she had not noticed any major changes in Akele but knew that he would continue to go on and thrive. Akele laughed and brought up some changes that he had seen in himself. He was less self-centered and tried to pay attention to how his actions affected others. He had learned how to take instructions and lost some of his rebellious streak. His mother agreed again; he was a lot more mature now, more responsible, and had more confidence in himself. Though, she noted, he did curse a lot more. She just prayed he would change his mind about branching infantry.

I came to Raphael Lewis’ house—a white two-bedroom home on a street of abandoned buildings. He told me to be careful, as there were often gun shots taking place around the area. He showed me his school which was positioned next to a graveyard. The next day, when I was at the local civil rights museum, I saw a textbook from his school behind glass. It was listed as a book from a previously segregated, all-Black high school. The school was still majority Black, bearing forward the legacy of educational segregation.

Raphael told me how it was hard to be home. His childhood friends had never really left the area, so it was hard to share with them his experiences. They did not seem to understand the importance of his admission to West Point. Raphael’s mother was still upset that he had decided

to attend the preparatory school without consulting her first. She did not want him to join the Army. Her biggest fear was losing a child and she knew how possible that was if he were sent off to war. My mind flashed back to a similar conversation I had recently had with Malcom Cole's mother. Eventually, Raphael's mom had acquiesced to his decision, as long as he could indeed get that engineering degree he had wanted since first grade. She laughed telling me that her son had not changed at all. He had been uptight since he was a child and needed to loosen up. She wanted him to enjoy his life as a young man but knew he had an incredible drive and was proud of his grit.

Raphael's mother continued that she knew he was ready to take on West Point. She just hoped he would continue to set the standard:

> Black men are always judged. Being a Black man in a predominantly White setting, he's going to have to work harder to get to where he got to get to, you know what I'm saying? He's just going to have to set that bar and set it higher for himself, so he doesn't be that statistic that's out there that they put on Black men. When my son was young, I would tell him, 'Let me tell you something. I'm not raising a thug. I'm raisin' a kid and I'm always going to raise a kid. You're going to set your standards higher than half these Black men out here. Because you don't want to be judged like every other Black man. Because you're not that Black man. I have always raised him like that and that's where his standards stand.

Raphael and I went to a free concert together in an art museum after speaking to his mother. I noticed that almost everyone who attended was White. It was Raphael's first time attending one of these free summer cultural events and he told me was experiencing his whole city in a new light now that he had a visitor. I went back to my hotel that night and wrote about color bursting from music and the art in the city. But also, about cultural clashes; how things still felt so separate and unequal even at free events. The city was mostly Black but why were there only White folks at the event? Was the problem transportation, publicity, desire to attend, or feeling out of place? I thought back to the beautiful homes, airy and bright I had seen over the last few

weeks, and the dark and cramped spaces. I thought of sprawling manicured lawns of some schools and the ragged bushes and cemeteries in the back of others. What was wealth? Was it land? Was it passed down through generations? Was it homes—owned or rented? Was it light? Brightness from windows? Drawn shades to keep a house cool in the summer.

I thought of smooth streets and pothole-ridden streets. Abandoned houses, burned houses, identical houses lined up brick by brick. I thought how racial identity by no stretch of the imagination had predicted the houses I had seen during my travels. Mansions and trailers, all belong to everyone. But mostly I had seen large houses, middle-class homes. I wondered if the preparatory school was still for just the elite few. Maybe it was not a great equalizer after all. Yes, there were a handful of students like Raphael, Akele, and Malcom, who were from less well-off areas, but they had been determined, talented, and blessed with mentors. What about all the others? Invisible from lack of gifts or who still held invisible gifts that are left to excavate? It was all too easy to forget about others stuck in the cycle of poverty, to go back to homes, with windows, and flowers blooming like futures, and breathe clean air. And sleep soundly in places where gunshots or passing trains did not disturb sleep.

I flew west, stopping in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and all the small towns that housed candidates in between. I admired the rolling hills and peaking mountains, and ventured into some ethnic enclaves and *barrios*, stopping to eat at the restaurants candidates recommended to me. I wandered around the neighborhood in Northern California where Demarcus Wright had been followed by the police for simply being a Black man in a White space. I traced the areas where Sam Anderson's family had lived from when he was a child, seeing his family move between trailer parks with a doublewide to a large house on top of a

mountain that his father had recently built. I went out to dinner with his parents and brothers. They reminisced about how frustrated Sam had been when he first came to the preparatory school. Sam had vented to them that the other candidates had not done the dirty work of enlisted soldiers and they did not seem to be scholastically or physically equal to those who had already devoted themselves to the Army. Worst of all, they did not care about the profession. Over time, however, his family noticed that Sam had mellowed and adjusted his way of trying to communicate with the others. He was now softer and more friendly rather than defaulting to his drill-sergeant mode. Still, Sam continued to devote himself to teaching new soldiers about what the Army does and the importance of serving. Sometimes this approach was received well; other times, he continued to encounter resistance.

I visited Grace Ives' family and went with them to church, where we sang songs of praise together that were projected on a large screen. Over lunch, one sister told me she was grateful that Grace seemed to have widened her bubble and broadened her horizons since her last army unit. For the first few years Grace was in the Army, the sister had felt that she had lost her best friend but now Grace seemed to be coming back to who she was before she enlisted. Her mother shared that Grace seemed to have figured out her priorities—the importance of family and God in her life. The family laughed talking about how physically strong Grace had become over the last few years and how she would often send them photos of her bulging biceps from the gym. Her father admired Grace's new confidence and upright posture. They had no doubt she would continue to excel at West Point.

Majdi Haddad's family insisted I come over for a traditional dinner and we spoke and laughed for hours as they told me stories of him growing up. He had always had such a strong mind and drive. His father brought me into the garage where he had hung up all Majdi's trophies,

football pictures, and academic awards. I went the next day and spoke to his coaches at the high school about how he had always shown such leadership potential, even from a young age. The story of how he had broken his hand during the first half of a football game but refused to go out of the play until the team had won the championship was repeated to me over and over as a testament to his grit, even to extremes.

I flew to the Midwest, stopping in Claire Row's hometown, a quaint college town surrounded by lush farmland. I visited the horse stables where she worked and rode, her primary and high schools, and went out to dinner with her adopted mother. The mother shared how difficult it had been to be away when Claire needed hip surgery, but how happy she was that Claire persevered and things were improving now.

I then made my way to mining and steel country, driving through the Midwest. I met with candidates' families who had worked in the mines and steel mills for generations. I joined Kelly Carter's family for a barbecue. As I helped her mom stoke the flames, we talked about how hard she had tried to convince Kelly not to join the Army, but that Kelly had been steadfast that West Point was the best option for her: free college, a paycheck every month, and healthcare for life. Her mom had expected to see differences when Kelly came home for the summer, but it seemed like she was still her messy little girl, avoiding making her bed or cleaning up. I chuckled and assured her that almost all of the candidates who I had seen over the summer were also enjoying their vacations by letting their rooms get messy and sleeping in. Her mom commented on how buff Kelly had become, "I wouldn't mess with her too much!" She just prayed that Kelly would be able to get a desk job with the military, maybe recruiting other "unsuspecting girls," and staying far away from war.

I sat with Kelly's grandmother at dessert. She shared that she was relieved when Kelly

came home for the first breaks and things had not too changed too much, except that she kept her hair tied back in a little bun instead of flat ironing it straight. Kelly seemed happy and more independent, independence that seemed beyond what she would have achieved at a civilian school.

The next morning Kelly showed me her small private Catholic high school. She reminisced about how she was one of the only Black students in all the top classes and was selected as valedictorian. She had been popular, cheerleading, playing volleyball, socializing, and prom queen. We went over to her father's house and sat on big beige couches, as he gushed about how ecstatic he had been when Kelly was first recruited by West Point. He promised her the sky would be the limit for her career if she chose to attend. He explained he was glad Kelly had the opportunity to go to the preparatory school first because it had prepared her mentally and emotionally for the Academy and introduced her to a great support system of friends. I nodded; this was like what other parents had told me. Despite initial reservations about the preparatory school, ultimately, they were glad their children had an extra year of training and adjustment. He echoed her grandmother in saying that she now seemed much more independent and mature, ready to take on anything.

In North Carolina, Hassan Ahmed's parents cooked me a traditional dinner and told me how proud they were as immigrants to have a son in the American military. They had been concerned at first when he left the house to enlist without telling them—leaving only a letter—but now that he was at West Point, they knew that his future was bright and secure.

I went as far as Hawaii and Europe to visit more hometowns and the military bases where candidates had been raised or stationed, trying to grasp who they were and are outside of the

preparatory school. I looked at the faces of the Swiss and tried to see within them the same neutrality as Lily Rose's face, the expressions that created so many challenges during basic training. To her parents, Lily seemed even more hardened now. Yet, this was a positive change; nothing seemed to faze her. She was no longer worried about what was to come. Lily had been through the worst and now had the maturity and perspective to make it through anything.

As I traveled around North America and the world, I basked in all the richness and depth of the individuals I had come to know and care for over the year. I wanted to soak it all in. How could I possibly share all of these stories in only one book?

When the candidates reported for West Point Reception Day on July 1st, I could no longer follow their experiences as a researcher. They belonged to a new institution, one that did not permit me to research cadets' experiences. Athena had been furious that I was blocked. Who was she going to talk to about all her big ideas now? Who was going to share her stories for future Black, women soldiers? I encouraged her to write them all down and to write her own book. She did not need me. Her voice was strong enough on its own.

The candidates' families stayed in touch and continued to give me updates on their progress. Athena went on to become one of the top cadets in her company. She was the top performer physically, excelled in her course, and was put in leadership positions. She still often thought of her place as a Black woman within a predominantly White institution but sought out friends and communities that recognized and celebrated this identity while still admiring her decision to be a committed and an excellent soldier. She kept a journal of her stories.

Lily's ankles healed fully, and she joined an athletic team where she found a community of friends and purpose. Classes remained manageable for her, and she did not have trouble

maintaining a high class rank. Life at West Point was much easier for her than life at the preparatory school. She settled in with ease. Kelly also found her routine and was able to continue to be at the top of her class academically and pass her physical tests and height and weight. However, Kelly decided mid-way through West Point to pursue her interests at a civilian university.

Lisbeth struggled her first year to find a sense of belonging within the Academy and considered leaving at one point. Yet, over time she found friends whom she valued and was able to block out her frustration at those who she thought were just too obsessed with the regulations and rude about enforcing them.

Marcell Artist took on a top leadership position in the class. He continued to stand out as a leader and a mentor for Black cadets and candidates. He was brought on recruiting trips to areas across the United States to speak to Black youth about the benefits of an army career. Majdi was also awarded a top leadership position.

Malcom left the Academy in his first year because he was failing several classes and had lost his motivation to stay. He was listless for a few months at home, trying to find a new purpose after having dedicated his whole life thus far to the idea of an army career. Yet, he was able to find a job and re-imagine what came next. Perhaps he would find a profession in the civilian sector or enlist in the Army or try for a Reserve Officer Training Corps program at a civilian university. He considered all his options and eventually decided to enlist. He rose quickly in the chain of command.

Carlos Estrada enlisted and was soon promoted to sergeant. Saul also left to pursue a career as an enlisted soldier. Barbara was separated for medical issues. Others like Claire, Sam, Grace, and Judy excelled at the Academy taking on more and more leadership positions.

All their stories continued, their identities fluxed and stabilized, and I felt deeply honored and privileged to have been there to witness a small part of their journeys.

Works Cited

Acker, Joan. 1990. “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations.” *Gender and Society* 4(2):139–58.

Alang, Sirry, Donna McAlpine, Ellen McCreedy, and Rachel Hardeman. 2017. “Police Brutality and Black Health: Setting the Agenda for Public Health Scholars.” *American Journal of Public Health* 107(5):662–65. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2017.303691.

Alexander, Karl L., Doris R. Entwisle, and Maxine S. Thompson. 1987. “School Performance, Status Relations, and the Structure of Sentiment: Bringing the Teacher Back In.” *American Sociological Review* 52(5):665–82. doi: 10.2307/2095602.

Alexander, Michelle. 2020. *The New Jim Crow : Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. La Vergne, TN: The New Press.

Allport, Gordon Willard. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Althusser, Louis. 2014. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. New York, NY: Verso.

Anderson, Cameron, and Jon Cowan. 2014. “Personality and Status Attainment: A Micropolitics Perspective.” Pp. 99–117 in *The Psychology of Social Status*, edited by J. T. Cheng, J. L. Tracy, and C. Anderson. New York, NY: Springer New York.

Anderson, Cameron, John Angus D. Hildreth, and Laura Howland. 2015. “Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive? A Review of the Empirical Literature.” *Psychological Bulletin* 141(3):574–601. doi: 10.1037/a0038781.

Anderson, Cameron, Michael W. Kraus, Adam D. Galinsky, and Dacher Keltner. 2012. “The Local-Ladder Effect: Social Status and Subjective Well-Being.” *Psychological Science* 23(7):764–71.

Anderson, Cameron, and Robb Willer. 2014. “Do Status Hierarchies Benefit Groups? A Bounded Functionalist Account of Status.” Pp. 47–70 in *The Psychology of Social Status*, edited by J. T. Cheng, J. L. Tracy, and C. Anderson. New York, NY: Springer.

Anderson, Elijah. 2000. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Anderson, Elijah. 2022. *Black in White Space: The Enduring Impact of Color in Everyday Life*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Anheyer, Dennis, Heidemarie Haller, Jurgen Barth, Romy Lauche, Gustav Dobos, and Holger Cramer. 2017. “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Treating Low Back Pain A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 166(11):799–807. doi: 10.7326/M16-1997.

Armstrong, Elizabeth A., Miriam Gleckman-Krut, and Lanora Johnson. 2018. “Silence, Power, and Inequality: An Intersectional Approach to Sexual Violence.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 44(1):99–122. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041410.

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2006. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Aymer, Samuel R. 2016. “‘I Can’t Breathe’: A Case Study—Helping Black Men Cope with Race-Related Trauma Stemming from Police Killing and Brutality.” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 26(3–4):367–76. doi: 10.1080/10911359.2015.1132828.

Badillo, Gilbert, and G. David Curry. 1976. “The Social Incidence of Vietnam Casualties: Social Class or Race?” *Armed Forces & Society* 2(3):397–406. doi: 10.1177/0095327X7600200305.

Ball, Elizabeth F., Emira Nur Shafina Muhammad Sharizan, Genny Franklin, and Ewelina Rogozinska. 2017. “Does Mindfulness Meditation Improve Chronic Pain? A Systematic Review.” *Current Opinion in Obstetrics & Gynecology* 29(6):359–66. doi: 10.1097/GCO.0000000000000417.

Banaji, Mahzarin R., Curtis Hardin, and Alexander J. Rothman. 1993. “Implicit Stereotyping in Person Judgment.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65(2):272–81.

Barone, Tom. 2008. “Creative Nonfiction and Social Research.” Pp. 106–16 in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, edited by J. Knowles and A. Cole. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Bashkow, Ira. 2006. *The Meaning of Whitemen: Race and Modernity in the Orokaiva Cultural World*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Batalova, Jeanne, Michael Fix, and Peter Creticos. 2008. *Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States*. National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, Migration Policy Institute.

Bell, Margret E., Christina M. Dardis, Stephanie A. Vento, and Amy E. Street. 2018. “Victims of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault in the Military: Understanding Risks and Promoting Recovery.” *Military Psychology* 30(3):219–28. doi: 10.1037/mil0000144.

Berdahl, Jennifer L. 2007. “The Sexual Harassment of Uppity Women.” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92(2):425–37. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.92.2.425.

Berger, Joseph, M. Hamit Fisek, Robert Z. Norman, and David G. Wagner. 1998. “Formation of Reward Expectations in Status Situations.” in *Status, Power and Legitimacy*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Berger, Joseph, M. Hamit Fisek, Robert Z. Norman, and Morris Zelditch. 1977. *Status Characteristics and Social Interaction: An Expectation-States Approach*. New York, NY: Elsevier Scientific Publishing.

Berger, Joseph, Cecilia L. Ridgeway, M. Hamit Fisek, and Robert Z. Norman. 1998. "The Legitimation and Delegitimation of Power and Prestige Orders." *American Sociological Review* 63(3):379–405. doi: 10.2307/2657555.

Berger, Joseph, Susan J. Rosenholtz, and Morris Zelditch. 1980. "Status Organizing Processes." *Annual Review of Sociology* 6(1):479–508. doi: 10.1146/annurev.so.06.080180.002403.

Berger, Joseph, and Murray Webster. 2018. "Expectations, Status, and Behavior." Pp. 268–300 in *Contemporary Social Psychological Theories*, edited by P. J. Burke. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. 1991. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Biernat, Monica, and Diane Kobrynowicz. 1997. "Gender- and Race-Based Standards of Competence: Lower Minimum Standards but Higher Ability Standards for Devalued Groups." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 72(3):544–57. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.72.3.544.

Birkenstein, Cathy, and Gerald Graff. 2018. *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Blair, John, and David Segal. 1978. *Perceptions and Evaluations of the Army Training System*. Washington, DC: Army Training Study.

Blanchard, Fletcher A., Teri Lilly, and Leigh Ann Vaughn. 1991. "Reducing the Expression of Racial Prejudice." *Psychological Science* 2(2):101–5. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.1991.tb00108.x.

Block, Caryn J. 2016. "The Impact of Color-Blind Racial Ideology on Maintaining Racial Disparities in Organizations." Pp. 243–59 in *The myth of racial color blindness: Manifestations, dynamics, and impact*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

Blommaert, Jan, and Chris Bulcaen. 2000. "Critical Discourse Analysis." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29(1):447–66. doi: 10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.447.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2021. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, and David Dietrich. 2011. "The Sweet Enchantment of Color-Blind Racism in Obamerica." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 634:190–206.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, Amanda Lewis, and David G. Embrick. 2004. "'I Did Not Get That Job Because of a Black Man...': The Story Lines and Testimonies of Color-Blind Racism." *Sociological Forum* 19(4):555–81.

Bosk, Charles L. 2008. *What Would You Do?: Juggling Bioethics and Ethnography*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Bosworth, Mary. 1999. *Engendering Resistance: Agency and Power in Women's Prisons*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1969. "Intellectual Field and Creative Project." *Social Science Information* 8(2):89–119. doi: 10.1177/053901846900800205.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1973. "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction." in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change*, edited by R. Brown. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2013. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bowles, Samuel, and Herbert Gintis. 1976. *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Breslin, Rachel A., Lisa Davis, Kimberly Hylton, Ariel Hill, William Klauberg, and Ashlea Klahr. 2019. *Annex 1: 2018 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members Overview Report*. 2019–027. Arlington, VA: Department of Defense.

Brewer, Marilynn B., and Layton N. Lui. 1989. "The Primacy of Age and Sex in the Structure of Person Categories." *Social Cognition* 7(3):262–74. doi: 10.1521/soco.1989.7.3.262.

Brewer, Mrilynn B. 1996. "When Contact Is Not Enough: Social Identity and Intergroup Cooperation." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 20(3):291–303. doi: 10.1016/0147-1767(96)00020-X.

Brook, Tom Vanden. 2020. "Sexual Assault Reports by Cadets, Midshipmen at Military Academies Surge by 32%." *USA TODAY*.

Browning, Harley L., Sally C. Lopreato, and Dudley L. Poston. 1973. "Income and Veteran Status: Variations Among Mexican Americans, Blacks and Anglos." *American Sociological Review* 38(1):74–85. doi: 10.2307/2094332.

Bryk, Anthony S., Valerie E. Lee, and Peter Blakeley Holland. 1993. *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bunderson, J. Stuart. 2003. "Recognizing and Utilizing Expertise in Work Groups: A Status Characteristics Perspective." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 48(4):557–91. doi: 10.2307/3556637.

Burawoy, Michael. 2003. “Revisits: An Outline of a Theory of Reflexive Ethnography.” *American Sociological Review* 68(5):645–79. doi: 10.2307/1519757.

Burdette, Amy M., Victor Wang, Glen H. Elder, Terrence D. Hill, and Janel Benson. 2009. “Serving God and Country? Religious Involvement and Military Service among Young Adult Men.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48(4):794–804.

Burk, James, and Evelyn Espinoza. 2012. “Race Relations Within the US Military.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 38:401–22.

Burke, Meghan A. 2017. “Colorblind Racism: Identities, Ideologies, and Shifting Subjectivities.” *Sociological Perspectives* 60(5):857–65. doi: 10.1177/0731121417723827.

Butler, John Sibley. 1976. “Inequality in the Military: An Examination of Promotion Time for Black and White Enlisted Men.” *American Sociological Review* 41(5):807–18. doi: 10.2307/2094728.

Butler, Judith. 1997a. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1997b. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Butler, Judith. 2011. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cabrera, Susan F., and Melissa C. Thomas-Hunt. 2007. “‘Street Cred’ and the Executive Woman: The Effects of Gender Differences in Social Networks on Career Advancement.” in *Social Psychology of Gender*. Vol. 24, edited by S. J. Correll. Bingley, U.K.: Emerald Group Publishing.

Calarco, Jessica McCrory. 2018. *Negotiating Opportunities : How the Middle Class Secures Advantages in School*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Campbell, Fiona, Maria Hudspith, Melissa Anderson, Manon Choinière, Hani El-Gabalawy, Jacques Laliberté, Jaris Swidrovich, and Linda J. Wilhelm. 2019. “Canadian Pain Task Force Report: June 2019.” Retrieved November 14, 2019 (https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/about-health-canada/public-engagement/external-advisory-bodies/canadian-pain-task-force/report-2019.html#a1.1).

Campbell, Rebecca. 2013. “The Psychological Impact of Rape Victims’ Experiences with the Legal, Medical, and Mental Health Systems.” in *Applied Ethics in Mental Health Care*. Boston, MA: The MIT Press.

Campbell, Rebecca, Courtney E. Ahrens, Tracy Sefl, Sharon M. Wasco, and Holly E. Barnes. 2001. “Social Reactions to Rape Victims: Healing and Hurtful Effects on Psychological and Physical Health Outcomes.” *Violence and Victims* 16(3):287–302. doi: 10.1891/0886-6708.16.3.287.

Campbell, Rebecca, Emily Dworkin, and Giannina Cabral. 2009. “An Ecological Model of the Impact of Sexual Assault on Women’s Mental Health.” *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 10(3):225–46. doi: 10.1177/1524838009334456.

Cannella, Gaile S., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2017. “Ethics, Research Regulations, and Critical Social Science.” Pp. 172–94 in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Carter, Prudence L. 2005. *Keepin’ It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Carter, Prudence L. 2012. *Stubborn Roots: Race, Culture, and Inequality in U.S. and South African Schools*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Carter, Prudence L., Russell Skiba, Mariella I. Arredondo, and Mica Pollock. 2017. “You Can’t Fix What You Don’t Look At: Acknowledging Race in Addressing Racial Discipline Disparities.” *Urban Education* 52(2):207–35. doi: 10.1177/0042085916660350.

Castilla, Emilio J., and Stephen Benard. 2010. “The Paradox of Meritocracy in Organizations.” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 55(4):543–676. doi: 10.2189/asqu.2010.55.4.543.

Castro, Carl Andrew, Sara Kintzle, Ashley C. Schuyler, Carrie L. Lucas, and Christopher H. Warner. 2015. “Sexual Assault in the Military.” *Current Psychiatry Reports* 17(7):54. doi: 10.1007/s11920-015-0596-7.

Caulley, Darrel N. 2008. “Making Qualitative Research Reports Less Boring: The Techniques of Writing Creative Nonfiction.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 14(3):424–49. doi: 10.1177/1077800407311961.

Centeno, Miguel A., and Elaine Enriquez. 2016. *War and Society*. Malden, MA: Policy Press.

Chaiken, Shelly, and Yaacov Trope. 1999. “Overview.” Pp. xiii, 657 in *Dual-process theories in social psychology*, *Dual-process theories in social psychology*, edited by S. Chaiken and Y. Trope. New York, NY, US: The Guilford Press.

Clair, Matthew. 2020. *Privilege and Punishment: How Race and Class Matter in Criminal Court*. Princeton University, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cleve, Nicole Gonzalez Van. 2016. *Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America’s Largest Criminal Court*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Cohen, Elizabeth G., and Rachel A. Lotan. 1997. *Working for Equity in Heterogeneous Classrooms: Sociological Theory in Practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2002. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Colloca, L., M. Sigaudo, and F. Benedetti. 2008. “The Role of Learning in Nocebo and Placebo Effects.” *Pain* 136(1–2):211–18. doi: 10.1016/j.pain.2008.02.006.

Colloca, Luana, and Fabrizio Benedetti. 2005. “Placebos and Painkillers: Is Mind as Real as Matter?” *Nature Reviews. Neuroscience* 6(7):545–52. doi: 10.1038/nrn1705.

Conley, Dalton, Kate W. Strully, and Neil G. Bennett. 2003. *The Starting Gate : Birth Weight and Life Chances*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Conway, Michael, M. Teresa Pizzamiglio, and Lauren Mount. 1996. “Status, Communality, and Agency: Implications for Stereotypes of Gender and Other Groups.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71(1):25–38. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.71.1.25.

Cooley, Erin, Hannah Winslow, Andrew Vojt, Jonathan Shein, and Jennifer Ho. 2018. “Bias at the Intersection of Identity: Conflicting Social Stereotypes of Gender and Race Augment the Perceived Femininity and Interpersonal Warmth of Smiling Black Women.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 74:43–49. doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2017.08.007.

Correll, Shelley J. 2004. “Constraints into Preferences: Gender, Status, and Emerging Career Aspirations.” *American Sociological Review* 69(1):93–113. doi: 10.1177/000312240406900106.

Correll, Shelley J., Stephen Benard, and In Paik. 2007. “Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?” *American Journal of Sociology* 112(5):1297–1338. doi: 10.1086/511799.

Correll, Shelley J., and Cecilia L. Ridgeway. 2003. “Expectation States Theory.” Pp. 29–51 in *Handbook of social psychology*, *Handbooks of sociology and social research*, edited by J. Delamater. New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 2017. *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Cuddy, Amy J. C., Susan T. Fiske, and Peter Glick. 2007. “The BIAS Map: Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92(4):631–48. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.92.4.631.

Cunha, Manuela. 2014. “The Ethnography of Prisons and Penal Confinement.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43(1):217–33. doi: 10.1146/annurev-anthro-102313-030349.

Da Silva, Denise Ferreira. 2007. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Dansby, Mickey R., James B. Stewart, and Schuyler C. Webb, eds. 2001. *Managing Diversity in the Military: Research Perspectives from the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Davidman, Lynn. 1991. *Tradition in a Rootless World : Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Berkeley, CA: University Of California Press.

Davidman, Lynn. 2015. *Becoming Un-Orthodox : Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Davies, Christie. 1989. “Goffman’s Concept of the Total Institution: Criticisms and Revisions.” *Human Studies* 12(1/2):77–95.

De Angelis, Karin. 2017. “Rising Minority: Hispanics in the US Military.” Pp. 37–56 in *Inclusion in the American military : a force for diversity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

De Welde, Kristine. 2003. “Getting Physical: Subverting Gender through Self-Defense.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 32(3):247–78. doi: 10.1177/0891241603032003001.

Department of Defense. 1993. *Department of Defense Directive 1304.26: Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*. Arlington, VA: Department of Defense.

Department of Defense. 2013. *The Armed Forces Officer: Edition of 1950*. Tucson, AZ: Quiet Creek Corporation.

Department of Defense. 2019a. *2019 Demographic Profile of the Military Community*. Arlington, VA: Department of Defense.

Department of Defense. 2019b. *Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies: Academic Program Year 2018-2019*. Arlington, VA: Department of Defense.

Department of Defense. 2019c. *Annual Suicide Report*. Arlington, VA: Department of Defense.

Department of Defense. 2021. *Casualty Status*. Arlington, VA: Department of Defense.

Department of the Army. 2021. *Army Regulations 670-1: Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*. Washington, DC: Department of the Army.

Devine, Patricia G. 1989. “Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56(1):5–18. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.56.1.5.

Devine, Patricia G., and Margo J. Monteith. 1999. “Automaticity and Control in Stereotyping.” Pp. 339–60 in *Dual-process theories in social psychology*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

van Dijk, Teun A. 1993. “Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis.” *Discourse & Society* 4(2):249–83.

DiPrete, Thomas A., Andrew Gelman, Tyler McCormick, Julien Teitler, and Tian Zheng. 2011. “Segregation in Social Networks Based on Acquaintanceship and Trust.” *American Journal of Sociology* 116(4):1234–83. doi: 10.1086/659100.

Donahoo, Saran. 2022. “Working with Style: Black Women, Black Hair, and Professionalism.” *Gender, Work & Organization* Online First:1–16. doi: 10.1111/gwao.12838.

Donahoo, Saran, and Asia D. Smith. 2022. “Controlling the Crown: Legal Efforts to Professionalize Black Hair.” *Race and Justice* 12(1):182–203. doi: 10.1177/2153368719888264.

Dover, Tessa L., Brenda Major, and Cheryl R. Kaiser. 2016. “Members of High-Status Groups Are Threatened by pro-Diversity Organizational Messages.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 62:58–67. doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2015.10.006.

Dovidio, John F., Clifford E. Brown, Karen Heltman, Steve L. Ellyson, and Caroline F. Keating. 1988. “Power Displays between Women and Men in Discussions of Gender-Linked Tasks: A Multichannel Study.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55(4):580–87. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.55.4.580.

Dovidio, John F., and Samuel L. Gaertner. 2004. “Aversive Racism.” Pp. 1–52 in *Advances in experimental social psychology, Vol. 36*. Vol. 36, edited by M. P. Zanna. San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1904. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Toronto, CA: Blue Heron Press.

Dubler, Joshua. 2013. *Down in the Chapel: Religious Life in an American Prison*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Duncan, Birt L. 1976. “Differential Social Perception and Attribution of Intergroup Violence: Testing the Lower Limits of Stereotyping of Blacks.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34(4):590–98. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.34.4.590.

Dweck, Carol S. 2008. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Dyer, Gwynne. 2002. “Anybody’s Son Will Do.” Pp. 144–54 in *Mapping the social landscape : readings in sociology*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Eagly, Alice H., and Linda L. Carli. 2007. *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

EdBuild. 2019. *$23 Billion*. Jersey City, NJ: EdBuild.

Eippert, Falk, Jürgen Finsterbusch, Ulrike Bingel, and Christian Büchel. 2009. “Direct Evidence for Spinal Cord Involvement in Placebo Analgesia.” *Science (New York, N.Y.)* 326(5951):404. doi: 10.1126/science.1180142.

Ellis, Rachel. 2021. “Prisons as Porous Institutions.” *Theory and Society* 50(2):175–99. doi: 10.1007/s11186-020-09426-w.

Elsayed, Essam F., Mark J. Sarnak, Hocine Tighiouart, John L. Griffith, Tobias Kurth, Deeb N. Salem, Andrew S. Levey, and Daniel E. Weiner. 2008. "Waist-to-Hip Ratio, Body Mass Index, and Subsequent Kidney Disease and Death." *American Journal of Kidney Diseases* 52(1):29–38. doi: 10.1053/j.ajkd.2008.02.363.

Ely, Robin J., and Debra E. Meyerson. 2000. "Theories of Gender in Organizations: A New Approach to Organizational Analysis and Change." *Research in Organizational Behavior* 22:103–51. doi: 10.1016/S0191-3085(00)22004-2.

Ender, Morten G., Raymond A. Kimball, Rachel M. Sondheimer, and Jakob C. Bruhl. 2021. *Teaching and Learning the West Point Way: Educating the Next Generation of Leaders*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Ender, Morten G., David E. Rohall, and Michael D. Matthews. 2016. "Cadet and Civilian Undergraduate Attitudes toward Transgender People: A Research Note." *Armed Forces & Society* 42(2):427–35. doi: 10.1177/0095327X15575278.

Enloe, Cynthia. 2000. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Enloe, Cynthia. 2015. "The Recruiter and the Sceptic: A Critical Feminist Approach to Military Studies." *Critical Military Studies* 1(1):3–10. doi: 10.1080/23337486.2014.961746.

Enloe, Cynthia H. 1983. *Does Khaki Become You?: The Militarization of Women's Lives*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Enloe, Cynthia H. 2010. *Nimo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Evans, Jonathan St. B. T. 2008. "Dual-Processing Accounts of Reasoning, Judgment, and Social Cognition." *Annual Review of Psychology* 59(1):255–78. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093629.

Ewing, Eve L. 2020. "I'm a Black Scholar Who Studies Race. Here's Why I Capitalize 'White.'" *Medium*. Retrieved June 11, 2021 (https://zora.medium.com/im-a-black-scholar-who-studies-race-here-s-why-i-capitalize-white-f94883aa2dd3).

Fairclough, Norman. 2013. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Fanon, Frantz. 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

Ferguson, Ronald F. 2003. "Teachers' Perceptions and Expectations and the Black-White Test Score Gap." *Urban Education* 38(4):460–507. doi: 10.1177/0042085903038004006.

Filkins, Dexter. 2005. "The Fall of the Warrior King." *The New York Times*, October 23.

Finseraas, Henning, Torbjørn Hanson, Åshild A. Johnsen, Andreas Kotsadam, and Gaute Torsvik. 2019. “Trust, Ethnic Diversity, and Personal Contact: A Field Experiment.” *Journal of Public Economics* 173:72–84. doi: 10.1016/j.jpubeco.2019.02.002.

Firat, Rengin B., Hye Won Kwon, and Steven Hitlin. 2018. “A Novel Measure of Moral Boundaries: Testing Perceived In-Group/Out-Group Value Differences in a Midwestern Sample.” *Socius* 4:2378023118818741. doi: 10.1177/2378023118818741.

Fiske, Susan T. 2011. *Envy up, Scorn down : How Status Divides Us*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Fiske, Susan T., Amy J. C. Cuddy, Peter Glick, and Jun Xu. 2002. “A Model of (Often Mixed) Stereotype Content: Competence and Warmth Respectively Follow from Perceived Status and Competition.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82(6):878–902. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878.

Folke, Olle, Johanna Rickne, Seiki Tanaka, and Yasuka Tateishi. 2020. “Sexual Harassment of Women Leaders.” *Daedalus* 149(1):180–97. doi: 10.1162/daed_a_01781.

Fordham, Signithia. 1988. “Racelessness as a Factor in Black Students’ School Success: Pragmatic Strategy or Pyrrhic Victory?” *Harvard Educational Review* 58(1):54–85. doi: 10.17763/haer.58.1.c5r77323145r7831.

Fordham, Signithia. 1996. *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity, and Success at Capital High*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Foschi, Martha. 2000. “Double Standards for Competence: Theory and Research.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:21–42.

Foucault, Michel. 2012. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Frazier, Franklin. 1997. *Black Bourgeoisie*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Frazier, Kathryn E. 2021. “‘Up for It’ or ‘Asking for It’? Violence against Women in the Age of Postfeminism.” *Feminism & Psychology* 31(3):404–23. doi: 10.1177/0959353520963975.

Fredland, J. Eric, and Roger D. Little. 1985. “Socioeconomic Status of World War II Veterans by Race: An Empirical Test of the Bridging Hypothesis.” *Social Science Quarterly* 66(3):533–51.

Freeman, Fanta. 2018. “Do I Look like I Have an Attitude: How Stereotypes of Black Women on Television Adversely Impact Black Female Defendants through the Implicit Bias of Jurors Notes.” *Drexel Law Review* 11(2):651–704.

Fuller, Robert C. 2008. *Spirituality in the Flesh Bodily Sources of Religious Experience*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Gaertner, Samuel L., Mary C. Rust, John F. Dovidio, and Betty A. Bachman. 1996. “The Contact Hypothesis: The Role of a Common Ingroup Identity on Reducing Intergroup Bias among Majority and Minority Group Members.” Pp. 230–60 in *What’s social about social cognition? Research on socially shared cognition in small groups*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Gamoran, Adam. 1987. “The Stratification of High School Learning Opportunities.” *Sociology of Education* 60(3):135–55. doi: 10.2307/2112271.

Garland, David. 2001. *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*. Vol. 367. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Garland, Eric L., Carrie E. Brintz, Adam W. Hanley, Eric J. Roseen, Rachel M. Atchley, Susan A. Gaylord, Keturah R. Faurot, Joanne Yaffe, Michelle Fiander, and Francis J. Keefe. 2019. “Mind-Body Therapies for Opioid-Treated Pain: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” *JAMA Internal Medicine*. doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2019.4917.

Geronimus, Arline T., Margaret Hicken, Danya Keene, and John Bound. 2006. “‘Weathering’ and Age Patterns of Allostatic Load Scores Among Blacks and Whites in the United States.” *American Journal of Public Health* 96(5):826–33. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2004.060749.

Gershenson, Seth, Stephen B. Holt, and Nicholas W. Papageorge. 2016. “Who Believes in Me? The Effect of Student–Teacher Demographic Match on Teacher Expectations.” *Economics of Education Review* 52:209–24. doi: 10.1016/j.econedurev.2016.03.002.

Gibson, Eleanor J., and Anne D. Pick. 2003. *An Ecological Approach to Perceptual Learning and Development*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Gibson, James. 1977. “The Theory of Affordances.” Pp. 67-82. in *Perceiving, acting, and knowing : toward an ecological psychology*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Gibson, James J. 1979. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Gibson-Davis, Christina M., Kathryn Edin, and Sara McLanahan. 2005. “High Hopes but Even Higher Expectations: The Retreat From Marriage Among Low-Income Couples.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(5):1301–12. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00218.x.

Gilchrist, Julie, and Erin Parker. 2014. *Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Fatal Unintentional Drowning Among Persons Aged ≤29 Years — United States, 1999–2010*. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Center for Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Goar, Carla, and Jane Sell. 2005. “Using Task Definition to Modify Racial Inequality Within Task Groups.” *The Sociological Quarterly* 46(3):525–43. doi: 10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00025.x.

Goffman, Erving. 1961. *Asylums; Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Gonzales, Roberto G. 2011. "Learning to Be Illegal: Undocumented Youth and Shifting Legal Contexts in the Transition to Adulthood." *American Sociological Review* 76(4):602–19. doi: 10.1177/0003122411411901.

Gould, Mark. 1999. "Race and Theory: Culture, Poverty, and Adaptation To Discrimination In Wilson and Ogbu." *Sociological Theory* 17(2):171–200. doi: 10.1111/0735-2751.00074.

Greenwald, Anthony G., and Mahzarin R. Banaji. 1995. "Implicit Social Cognition: Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Stereotypes." *Psychological Review* 102(1):4–27.

Gupta, S., and Jennifer Hicks Lundquist. 2013."The Converging Proportions of the U.S. Adult Population in the Military and in Prison, 1960 and 2010." Presented at the Population Association of American, New Orleans.

Haidt, Jonathan. 2007. "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology." *Science* 316(5827):998–1002. doi: 10.1126/science.1137651.

Hale, Janice. 1991. "The Transmission of Cultural Values to Young African American Children." *Young Children* 46(6):7–15.

Halevy, Nir, Eileen Y. Chou, Taya R. Cohen, and Robert W. Livingston. 2012. "Status Conferral in Intergroup Social Dilemmas: Behavioral Antecedents and Consequences of Prestige and Dominance." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102(2):351–66. doi: 10.1037/a0025515.

Halevy, Nir, Eileen Y. Chou, and Adam D. Galinsky. 2011. "A Functional Model of Hierarchy: Why, How, and When Vertical Differentiation Enhances Group Performance." *Organizational Psychology Review* 1(1):32–52. doi: 10.1177/2041386610380991.

Hall, Rachel. 2004. "'It Can Happen to You': Rape Prevention in the Age of Risk Management." *Hypatia* 19(3):1–18. doi: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.2004.tb01299.x.

Han, Chong-suk. 2007. "They Don't Want To Cruise Your Type: Gay Men of Color and the Racial Politics of Exclusion." *Social Identities* 13(1):51–67. doi: 10.1080/13504630601163379.

Hansen, Kim Philip. 2012. *Military Chaplains and Religious Diversity*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harding, Susan Friend. 2000. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hart, Chloe Grace. 2019. "The Penalties For Self-Reporting Sexual Harassment." *Gender & Society* 33(4):534–59. doi: 10.1177/0891243219842147.

Hart, Chloe Grace. 2021. “Trajectory Guarding: Managing Unwanted, Ambiguously Sexual Interactions at Work.” *American Sociological Review* 86(2):256–78. doi: 10.1177/0003122421993809.

Hartigan, John. 1997. “Establishing the Fact of Whiteness.” *American Anthropologist* 99(3):495–505.

Harvey, David. 2005. *The New Imperialism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hauser, Robert M. 1978. “On Inequality in the Military.” *American Sociological Review* 43(1):115–18. doi: 10.2307/2094767.

Hausrath, Alfred H. 1954. “Utilization of Negro Manpower in the Army.” *Journal of the Operations Research Society of America*. doi: 10.1287/opre.2.1.17.

Heinecken, Lindy. 2015. “The Military, War and Society: The Need for Critical Sociological Engagement.” *Scientia Militaria - South African Journal of Military Studies* 43(1). doi: 10.5787/43-1-1107.

Hill, Marjorie J. 2013. “Is the Black Community More Homophobic?: Reflections on the Intersectionality of Race, Class, Gender, Culture and Religiosity of the Perception of Homophobia in the Black Community.” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 17(2):208–14. doi: 10.1080/19359705.2013.768089.

Hilliard, Asa G. 1978. “Equal Educational Opportunity and Quality Education.” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 9(2):110–26.

Hitlin, Steven, and Stephen Vaisey. 2013. *The New Sociology of Morality*. *SSRN Scholarly Paper*. ID 2298452. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145628.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1979. “Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure.” *American Journal of Sociology* 85(3):551–75.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. *The Managed Heart : Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land : Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Hoffman, Kelly M., Sophie Trawalter, Jordan R. Axt, and M. Norman Oliver. 2016. “Racial Bias in Pain Assessment and Treatment Recommendations, and False Beliefs about Biological Differences between Blacks and Whites.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113(16):4296–4301. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1516047113.

Hogg, Michael A., Dominic Abrams, and Marilynn B. Brewer. 2017. “Social Identity: The Role of Self in Group Processes and Intergroup Relations.” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 20(5):570–81. doi: 10.1177/1368430217690909.

Holland, Kathryn J., and Lilia M. Cortina. 2013. “When Sexism and Feminism Collide: The Sexual Harassment of Feminist Working Women.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 37(2):192–208. doi: 10.1177/0361684313482873.

Huang, Francis L. 2018. “Do Black Students Misbehave More? Investigating the Differential Involvement Hypothesis and out-of-School Suspensions.” *The Journal of Educational Research* 111(3):284–94. doi: 10.1080/00220671.2016.1253538.

Hugenberg, Kurt, and Galen V. Bodenhausen. 2003. “Facing Prejudice: Implicit Prejudice and the Perception of Facial Threat.” *Psychological Science* 14(6):640–43. doi: 10.1046/j.0956-7976.2003.psci_1478.x.

Hunt, Krista, and Kim Rygiel. 2006. *(En)Gendering the War on Terror : War Stories and Camouflaged Politics*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Hysom, Stuart J. 2009. “Status Valued Goal Objects and Performance Expectations.” *Social Forces* 87(3):1623–48.

Ignatow, Gabriel. 2007. “Theories of Embodied Knowledge: New Directions for Cultural and Cognitive Sociology?” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 37(2):115–35. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5914.2007.00328.x.

Institute of Medicine. 2011. *Relieving Pain in America: A Blueprint for Transforming Prevention, Care, Education, and Research*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Ito, Tiffany A., and Geoffrey R. Urland. 2003. “Race and Gender on the Brain: Electrocortical Measures of Attention to the Race and Gender of Multiply Categorizable Individuals.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85(4):616–26. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.85.4.616.

Jackman, Mary R. 1994. *The Velvet Glove: Paternalism and Conflict in Gender, Class, and Race Relations*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Jacobs, Jerry A. 1996. “Gender Inequality and Higher Education.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 22:153–85.

Janowitz, Morris. 1960. *The Professional Soldier, a Social and Political Portrait*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Johnson, Kerri L., Jonathan B. Freeman, and Kristin Pauker. 2012. “Race Is Gendered: How Covarying Phenotypes and Stereotypes Bias Sex Categorization.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102(1):116–31. doi: 10.1037/a0025335.

Johnson, Olenda E. 2001. "'The Content of Our Character': Value Differences in the Narrative Comments of Navy Officer Fitness Reports." in *Managing diversity in the military: research perspectives from the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute*, edited by M. R. Dansby, J. B. Stewart, and S. C. Webb. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Johnson, W. Brad, and David G. Smith. 2019. *Athena Rising: How and Why Men Should Mentor Women*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Jones, Billy E., and Marjorie J. Hill. 1996. "African American Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals." Pp. 549–61 in *Textbook of homosexuality and mental health*. Arlington, VA, US: American Psychiatric Association.

JooHee, Han. 2017. "African-Americans in the US Military." in *Inclusion in the American military : a force for diversity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Jost, John T., and Mahzarin R. Banaji. 1994. "The Role of Stereotyping in System-Justification and the Production of False Consciousness." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 33(1):1–27. doi: 10.1111/j.2044-8309.1994.tb01008.x.

Kendrick, Cassie, Jim Sliwinski, Yimin Yu, Aimee Johnson, William Fisher, Zoltán Kekecs, and Gary Elkins. 2016. "Hypnosis for Acute Procedural Pain: A Critical Review." *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 64(1):75–115. doi: 10.1080/00207144.2015.1099405.

Khatchadourian, Raffi. 2009. "The Kill Company." *The New Yorker*. Retrieved August 26, 2020 (https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/07/06/the-kill-company).

Kincheloe, Joe L., Peter McLaren, Shirley R. Steinberg, and Lilia D. Monzó. 2017. "Critical Pedagogy and Qualitative Research: Advancing the Bricolage." Pp. 418–65 in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research,* edited by N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Kinder, Donald R., and Cindy D. Kam. 2009. *Us Against Them*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Kluegel, James R., and Eliot R. Smith. 2017. *Beliefs about Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Konieczny, Mary Ellen, and Christophe Bertossi. 2017. "Religious Conflict and the Chain of Command in the American and French Militaries." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56(2):248–54. doi: 10.1111/jssr.12348.

Konieczny, Mary Ellen, and Megan C. Rogers. 2016. "Religion, Secular Humanism, and Atheism: Multi-Institutional Politics and the USAFA Cadets' Freethinkers Group." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55(4):821–38. doi: 10.1111/jssr.12296.

Korver-Glenn, Elizabeth. 2018. “Compounding Inequalities: How Racial Stereotypes and Discrimination Accumulate across the Stages of Housing Exchange.” *American Sociological Review* 83(4):627–56. doi: 10.1177/0003122418781774.

Kropotov, J. D., H. J. Crawford, and Y. I. Polyakov. 1997. “Somatosensory Event-Related Potential Changes to Painful Stimuli during Hypnotic Analgesia: Anterior Cingulate Cortex and Anterior Temporal Cortex Intracranial Recordings.” *International Journal of Psychophysiology: Official Journal of the International Organization of Psychophysiology* 27(1):1–8. doi: 10.1016/s0167-8760(97)00785-x.

LaFrance, Marianne. 2011. *Why Smile?: The Science Behind Facial Expressions*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Lafrance, Marianne, Marvin A. Hecht, and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. 2003. “The Contingent Smile: A Meta-Analysis of Sex Differences in Smiling.” *Psychological Bulletin* 305–34.

Lamont, Michèle. 2012. *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Landis, Dan. 2001. “The Future of Intercultural Research.” Pp. 513–42 in *Managing diversity in the military: research perspectives from the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute*, edited by M. R. Dansby, J. B. Stewart, and S. C. Webb. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Lareau, Annette. 2002. “Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families.” *American Sociological Review* 67(5):747–76. doi: 10.2307/3088916.

Lee, Jennifer, and Min Zhou. 2015. *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lee, Stacy J. 2015. *Unraveling the “Model Minority” Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth, 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Leskinen, Emily A., Lilia M. Cortina, and Dana B. Kabat. 2011. “Gender Harassment: Broadening Our Understanding of Sex-Based Harassment at Work.” *Law and Human Behavior* 35(1):25–39. doi: 10.1007/s10979-010-9241-5.

Lewis, Amanda E., and John B. Diamond. 2015. *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Liamputtong, Pranee. 2007. *Researching the Vulnerable*. London, UK: SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Livingston, Robert W., Ashleigh Shelby Rosette, and Ella F. Washington. 2012. “Can an Agentic Black Woman Get Ahead? The Impact of Race and Interpersonal Dominance on Perceptions of Female Leaders.” *Psychological Science* 23(4):354–58.

Lizardo, Omar. 2004. “The Cognitive Origins of Bourdieu’s Habitus.” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 34(4):375–401. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5914.2004.00255.x.

Lizardo, Omar. 2016. “Improving Cultural Analysis: Considering Personal Culture in Its Declarative and Nondeclarative Modes.” *American Sociological Review* 81(1):88–115. doi: 10.1177/0003122416675175.

Lopreato, Sally Cook, and Dudley L. Poston. 1977. “Differences in Earning and Earnings Ability Between Black Veterans and Nonveterans in the United States.” *Social Science Quarterly* 57(4):750–66.

Louie, Vivian. 2001. “Parents’ Aspirations and Investment: The Role of Social Class in the Educational Experiences of 1.5- and Second-Generation Chinese Americans.” *Harvard Educational Review* 71(3):438–75. doi: 10.17763/haer.71.3.lv51475vjk600h38.

Lovaglia, Michael J., Jeffrey W. Lucas, Jeffrey A. Houser, Shane R. Thye, and Barry Markovsky. 1998. “Status Processes and Mental Ability Test Scores.” *American Journal of Sociology* 104(1):195–228. doi: 10.1086/210006.

Lucal, Betsy, and Morten G. Ender. 2005. “The (Un)Lucky Seven: An Introduction to Inequalities: Readings in Diversity and Social Life.” P. 12 in *Inequalities: Readings in Diversity and Social Life*, edited by B. Lucal and M. G. Ender. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Lucas, Samuel Roundfield. 1999. *Tracking Inequality: Stratification and Mobility in American High Schools. Sociology of Education Series*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Lundquist, Jennifer, Irma Elo, Wanda Barfield, and Zhun Xu. 2014. “Racial Disparities in US Infant Birth Outcomes: A Protective Effect of Military Affiliation?” *Race and Social Problems* 6(2):161–80. doi: 10.1007/s12552-013-9108-8.

Lundquist, Jennifer Hickes. 2004. “When Race Makes No Difference: Marriage and the Military.” *Social Forces* 83(2):731–57. doi: 10.1353/sof.2005.0017.

Lundquist, Jennifer Hickes. 2008. “Ethnic and Gender Satisfaction in the Military: The Effect of a Meritocratic Institution.” *American Sociological Review* 73(3):477–96.

Lutz, Catherine. 2001. *Homefront : A Military City and the American Twentieth Century*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

MacCoun, Robert J., and William M. Hix. 2010. “Unit Cohesion and Military Performance.” Pp. 137–65 in *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy: An Update of RAND’s 1993 Study*, edited by National Defense Institute. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

MacLeod, Jay. 2009. *Ain’t No Makin’ It : Aspirations & Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. 3rd ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Mahmood, Saba. 2012. *Politics of Piety : The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Major, Brenda, and Cheryl R. Kaiser. 2017. "Ideology and the Maintenance of Group Inequality." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 20(5):582–92. doi: 10.1177/1368430217712051.

Majors, Richard, and Janet Mancini Billson. 1993. *Cool Pose: The Dilemma of Black Manhood in America*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Maldonado-Estrada, Alyssa. 2020. "Men, Tattoos, and Catholic Devotion in Brooklyn." *Material Religion* 0(0):1–20. doi: 10.1080/17432200.2020.1756169.

Maner, Jon K., and Nicole L. Mead. 2010. "The Essential Tension between Leadership and Power: When Leaders Sacrifice Group Goals for the Sake of Self-Interest." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 99(3):482–97. doi: 10.1037/a0018559.

Mannheim, Karl. 1927. *Conservatism : A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York, NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Mariscal, Jorge. 2007. "The Poverty Draft." *Sojourners Magazine*, 32–35.

Martin, Karin A. 1998. "Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools." *American Sociological Review* 63(4):494–511. doi: 10.2307/2657264.

Massey, Douglas S. 1993. *American Apartheid : Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Massey, Douglas S. 2007. *Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Massey, Douglas S., Jonathan Rothwell, and Thurston Domina. 2009. "The Changing Bases of Segregation in the United States." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 626(1):74–90. doi: 10.1177/0002716209343558.

Matthews, Michael D., Morten G. Ender, Janice H. Laurence, and David E. Rohall. 2009. "Role of Group Affiliation and Gender on Attitudes Toward Women in the Military." *Military Psychology* 21(2):241–51. doi: 10.1080/08995600902768750.

Mbilishaka, Afiya M., and Danielle Apugo. 2020. "Brushed aside: African American Women's Narratives of Hair Bias in School." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 23(5):634–53. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2020.1718075.

McLanahan, Sara, and Christine Percheski. 2008. "Family Structure and the Reproduction of Inequalities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34:257–76.

McLaughlin, Heather, Christopher Uggen, and Amy Blackstone. 2012. “Sexual Harassment, Workplace Authority, and the Paradox of Power.” *American Sociological Review* 77(4):625–47. doi: 10.1177/0003122412451728.

Melzack, Ronald, and Patrick D. Wall. 1965. “Pain Mechanisms: A New Theory.” *Science* 150(3699):971–79. doi: 10.1126/science.150.3699.971.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York, NY: Humanities Press.

Mershon, Sherie. 1998. *Foxholes & Color Lines : Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Metz, Mary Haywood. 1989. “Real School: A Universal Drama amid Disparate Experience.” *Journal of Education Policy* 4(5):75–91. doi: 10.1080/0268093890040505.

Mickelson, Roslyn Arlin. 1989. “Why Does Jane Read and Write so Well? The Anomaly of Women’s Achievement.” *Sociology of Education* 62(1):47–63. doi: 10.2307/2112823.

Mickelson, Roslyn Arlin. 2001. “Subverting Swann: First- and Second-Generation Segregation in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.” *American Educational Research Journal* 38(2):215–52.

Miller, Dale T. 2001. “Disrespect and the Experience of Injustice.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 52:527–53. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.princeton.edu/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.527.

Mitchell, Claudia, Naydene De Lange, and Relebohile Moletsane. 2018. *Participatory Visual Methodologies: Social Change, Community and Policy*. London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Moayedi, Massieh, and Karen D. Davis. 2013. “Theories of Pain: From Specificity to Gate Control.” *Journal of Neurophysiology* 109(1):5–12. doi: 10.1152/jn.00457.2012.

Moor, Avigail. 2013. “She Dresses to Attract, He Perceives Seduction: A Gender Gap in Attribution of Intent to Women’s Revealing Style of Dress and Its Relation to Blaming the Victims of Sexual Violence.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 11(4):115–27.

Moosaie, Fatemeh, Seyede Marzie Fatemi Abhari, Niloofar Deravi, Arman Karimi Behnagh, Sadaf Esteghamati, Fatemeh Dehghani Firouzabadi, Soghra Rabizadeh, Manouchehr Nakhjavani, and Alireza Esteghamati. 2021. “Waist-To-Height Ratio Is a More Accurate Tool for Predicting Hypertension Than Waist-To-Hip Circumference and BMI in Patients With Type 2 Diabetes: A Prospective Study.” *Frontiers in Public Health* 9.

Morgan, Marcyliena. 2002. *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Moskos, Charles C. 1973. “The American Dilemma in Uniform: Race in the Armed Forces.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 406:94–106.

Moskos, Charles C. 1977. “From Institution to Occupation: Trends in Military Organization.” *Armed Forces & Society* 4(1):41–50. doi: 10.1177/0095327X7700400103.

Moskos, Charles C. 1986. “Institutional/Occupational Trends in Armed Forces: An Update.” *Armed Forces & Society* 12(3):377–82. doi: 10.1177/0095327X8601200303.

Moskos, Charles C., and John Whiteclay Chambers. 1993. *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Moskos, Charles C., and Frank R. Wood. 1988. *The Military: More than Just a Job?* Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey’s International Defense Publishers.

Motro, Daphna, Jonathan B. Evans, Aleksander P. J. Ellis, and Lehman Benson III. 2022. “Race and Reactions to Women’s Expressions of Anger at Work: Examining the Effects of the ‘Angry Black Woman’ Stereotype.” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 107(1):142–52. doi: 10.1037/apl0000884.

Mousa, Salma. 2020. “Building Social Cohesion between Christians and Muslims through Soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq.” *Science* 369(6505):866–70. doi: 10.1126/science.abb3153.

Nacoste, Rupert. 2001. “See No Evil, Hear No Evil: Senior Leaders’ Social Comparisons, and the Low Salience of Racial Issues.” Pp. 133–44 in *Managing diversity in the military: research perspectives from the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute*, edited by M. R. Dansby, J. B. Stewart, and S. C. Webb. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Nelson, Robert L., and William P. Bridges. 1999. *Legalizing Gender Inequality: Courts, Markets and Unequal Pay for Women in America*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Nicholson-Crotty, Sean, Jason A. Grissom, Jill Nicholson-Crotty, and Christopher Redding. 2016. “Disentangling the Causal Mechanisms of Representative Bureaucracy: Evidence From Assignment of Students to Gifted Programs.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 26(4):745–57. doi: 10.1093/jopart/muw024.

Nisbett, Richard E., and Timothy D. Wilson. 1977. “Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes.” *Psychological Review* 84(3):231–59. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.84.3.231.

Noble, Rudolf E. 2001. “Waist-to-Hip Ratio versus BMI as Predictors of Cardiac Risk in Obese Adult Women.” *Western Journal of Medicine* 174(4):240–41.

Oakes, Jeannie. 1985. *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

O'Neil, Maggie. 1996. "Researching Prostitution and Violence: Towards a Feminist Praxis." Pp. 130–47 in *Women, Violence, and Male Power: Feminist Activism, Research, and Practice,* edited by M. Hester and J. Radford. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Pager, Devah, Bart Bonikowski, and Bruce Western. 2009. "Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment." *American Sociological Review* 74(5):777–99.

Paradis, Emily K. 2000. "Feminist and Community Psychology Ethics in Research with Homeless Women." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 28(6):839–58. doi: 10.1023/A:1005115901078.

Pascoe, C. J. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Payne, Charles M. 2008. *So Much Reform, so Little Change : The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Pérez-Aranda, Adrián, Jennifer Hofmann, Albert Feliu-Soler, Carmen Ramírez-Maestre, Laura Andrés-Rodríguez, Willibald Ruch, and Juan V. Luciano. 2019. "Laughing Away the Pain: A Narrative Review of Humour, Sense of Humour and Pain." *European Journal of Pain* 23(2):220–33. doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/ejp.1309.

Perry, Theresa, and Lisa Delpit. 1998. *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Pettigrew, Thomas F., and Linda R. Tropp. 2006. "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90(5):751–83. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751.

Pettit, Becky, and Bruce Western. 2004. "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration." *American Sociological Review* 69(2):151–69.

Piazza, R., and A. Fasulo. 2014. *Marked Identities: Narrating Lives between Social Labels and Individual Biographies*. New York, NY: Springer.

Portocarrero, Sandra, and James T. Carter. 2022. "Diversity Initiatives in the US Workplace: A Brief History, Their Intended and Unintended Consequences." *Sociology Compass* Online First:12. doi: 10.1111/soc4.13001.

powell, john a. 2002. *A "Integrated Theory" of Integrated Education*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Civil Rights Project.

powell, john a. 2008. "Is Integration Possible?" *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 15(2):42–44.

Purdie-Vaughns, Valerie, and Richard P. Eibach. 2008. "Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities." *Sex Roles* 59(5–6):377–91. doi: 10.1007/s11199-008-9424-4.

Pyett, Priscilla. 2001. “Innovation and Compromise: Responsibility and Reflexivity in Research with Vulnerable Groups.” Pp. 105–19 in *Technologies and Health: Critical Compromises*, edited by J. Daly, S. Hill, and M. Guillemin. Melbourne, AU: Oxford University Press.

Quadlin, Natasha. 2018. “The Mark of a Woman’s Record: Gender and Academic Performance in Hiring.” *American Sociological Review* 83(2):331–60. doi: 10.1177/0003122418762291.

Rainville, P., B. Carrier, R. K. Hofbauer, M. C. Bushnell, and G. H. Duncan. 1999. “Dissociation of Sensory and Affective Dimensions of Pain Using Hypnotic Modulation.” *Pain* 82(2):159–71. doi: 10.1016/s0304-3959(99)00048-2.

Rainville, P., G. H. Duncan, D. D. Price, B. Carrier, and M. C. Bushnell. 1997. “Pain Affect Encoded in Human Anterior Cingulate but Not Somatosensory Cortex.” *Science (New York, N.Y.)* 277(5328):968–71. doi: 10.1126/science.277.5328.968.

Raissi, Afsaneh, and Jennifer R. Steele. 2021. “Does Emotional Expression Moderate Implicit Racial Bias? Examining Bias Following Smiling and Angry Primes.” *Social Cognition* 39(5):570–90. doi: 10.1521/soco.2021.39.5.570.

Rappaport, Roy A. 1979. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*. Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Rappaport, Roy A. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Ray, Victor, and Danielle Purifoy. 2019. “The Colorblind Organization.” Pp. 131–50 in *Race, Organizations, and the Organizing Process*. Vol. 60, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 1982. “Status in Groups: The Importance of Motivation.” *American Sociological Review* 47(1):76–88. doi: 10.2307/2095043.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2011. *Framed by Gender : How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2014. “Why Status Matters for Inequality.” *American Sociological Review* 79(1):1–16.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2019. *Status : Why Is It Everywhere? Why Does It Matter?* New York, NY: The Russell Sage Foundation.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., Kristen Backor, Yan E. Li, Justine E. Tinkler, and Kristan G. Erickson. 2009. “How Easily Does a Social Difference Become a Status Distinction? Gender Matters.” *American Sociological Review* 74(1):44–62. doi: 10.1177/000312240907400103.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Sandra Nakagawa. 2017. “Is Deference the Price of Being Seen as Reasonable? How Status Hierarchies Incentivize Acceptance of Low Status.” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 80(2):132–52. doi: 10.1177/0190272517695213.

Risman, Barbara J. 2018. *Where the Millennials Will Take Us: A New Generation Wrestles with the Gender Structure*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Rivera, Lauren A. 2016. *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Robinson, Cynthia L. 2011. “Hair as Race: Why ‘Good Hair’ May Be Bad for Black Females.” *Howard Journal of Communications* 22(4):358–76. doi: 10.1080/10646175.2011.617212.

Rohall, David E., Morten G. Ender, and Michael D. Matthews. 2006. “The Effects of Military Affiliation, Gender, and Political Ideology on Attitudes toward the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.” *Armed Forces & Society* 33(1):59–77. doi: 10.1177/0095327X06289817.

Rohall, David E., Morten G. Ender, and Michael D. Matthews. 2017. *Inclusion in the American Military : A Force for Diversity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Rosette, Ashleigh Shelby, and Robert W. Livingston. 2012. “Failure Is Not an Option for Black Women: Effects of Organizational Performance on Leaders with Single versus Dual-Subordinate Identities.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48(5):1162–67. doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2012.05.002.

Rucker, Derek D., Adam D. Galinsky, and Joe C. Magee. 2018. “The Agentic–Communal Model of Advantage and Disadvantage: How Inequality Produces Similarities in the Psychology of Power, Social Class, Gender, and Race.” Pp. 71–125 in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*. Vol. 58. Elsevier.

Rudman, Laurie A., Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, Julie E. Phelan, and Sanne Nauts. 2012. “Status Incongruity and Backlash Effects: Defending the Gender Hierarchy Motivates Prejudice against Female Leaders.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48(1):165–79. doi: 10.1016/j.jesp.2011.10.008.

Salomons, Tim V., Tom Johnstone, Misha-Miroslav Backonja, and Richard J. Davidson. 2004. “Perceived Controllability Modulates the Neural Response to Pain.” *The Journal of Neuroscience* 24(32):7199–7203. doi: 10.1523/JNEUROSCI.1315-04.2004.

Sauder, Michael, Freda Lynn, and Joel M. Podolny. 2012. “Status: Insights from Organizational Sociology.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 38:267–83.

Sayeed, M. A., H. Mahtab, Z. A. Latif, P. A. Khanam, K. A. Ahsan, A. Banu, and Khan AK Azad. 2003. “Waist-to-Height Ratio Is a Better Obesity Index than Body Mass Index and Waist-to-Hip Ratio for Predicting Diabetes, Hypertension and Lipidemia.” *Bangladesh Medical Research Council Bulletin* 29(1):1–10.

Schmader, Toni, Michael Johns, and Chad Forbes. 2008. “An Integrated Process Model of Stereotype Threat Effects on Performance.” *Psychological Review* 115(2):336–56. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.115.2.336.

Schneider, Walter, and Richard M. Shiffrin. 1977. “Controlled and Automatic Human Information Processing: I. Detection, Search, and Attention.” *Psychological Review* 84(1):1–66. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.84.1.1.

Searle, John R. 2010. *Making the Social World : The Structure of Human Civilization*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Segal, David R. 1986. “Measuring The Institutional/Occupational Change Thesis.” *Armed Forces & Society* 12(3):351–75.

Segal, David R., and Mady Wechsler Segal. 1983. “Change in Military Organization.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9:151–70.

Sellers, Robert M., Mia A. Smith, J. Nicole Shelton, Stephanie A. J. Rowley, and Tabbye M. Chavous. 1998. “Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity: A Reconceptualization of African American Racial Identity.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2(1):18–39. doi: 10.1207/s15327957pspr0201_2.

Sharp, Timothy J. 2001. “Chronic Pain: A Reformulation of the Cognitive-Behavioural Model.” *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 39(7):787–800. doi: 10.1016/S0005-7967(00)00061-9.

Sherif, Muzafer. 1966. *In Common Predicament; Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Shields, Patricia M. 1993. “A New Paradigm for Military Policy: Socioeconomics.” *Armed Forces and Society; Chicago* 19(4):511.

Shih, Margaret, Todd L. Pittinsky, and Nalini Ambady. 1999. “Stereotype Susceptibility: Identity Salience and Shifts in Quantitative Performance.” *Psychological Science* 10(1):80–83. doi: 10.1111/1467-9280.00111.

Siebold, Guy L. 2007. “The Essence of Military Group Cohesion.” *Armed Forces & Society* 33(2):286–95. doi: 10.1177/0095327X06294173.

Sloman, Steven A. 1996. “The Empirical Case for Two Systems of Reasoning.” *Psychological Bulletin* 119(1):3–22. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.119.1.3.

Smith, Christian, and Amy Adamczyk. 2020. *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Smith, Christian, Bridget Ritz, and Michael Rotolo. 2020. *Religious Parenting : Transmitting Faith and Values in Contemporary America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Smith, Eliot R., and Jamie DeCoster. 2016. “Dual-Process Models in Social and Cognitive Psychology: Conceptual Integration and Links to Underlying Memory Systems:” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. doi: 10.1207/S15327957PSPR0402_01.

Smith Lee, Jocelyn R., and Michael A. Robinson. 2019. “‘That’s My Number One Fear in Life. It’s the Police’: Examining Young Black Men’s Exposures to Trauma and Loss Resulting From Police Violence and Police Killings.” *Journal of Black Psychology* 45(3):143–84. doi: 10.1177/0095798419865152.

Sohoni, Deensh. 2017. “Fighting to Belong: Asian-American Military Service and American Citizenship.” Pp. 37–56 in *Inclusion in the American military : a force for diversity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Spencer, Margaret Beale, Dena Phillips Swanson, and Michael Cunningham. 1991. “Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Competence Formation: Adolescent Transition and Cultural Transformation.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 60(3):366–87. doi: 10.2307/2295490.

Stahl, Ronit Y. 2017. *Enlisting Faith : How the Military Chaplaincy Shaped Religion and State in Modern America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Stanton-Salazar, Ricardo D. 2001. *Manufacturing Hope and Despair: The School and Kin Support Networks of U.S.-Mexican Youth*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Steele, Claude M., and Joshua Aronson. 1995. “Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69(5):797–811. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.69.5.797.

Stephens, Nicole M., Stephanie A. Fryberg, Hazel Rose Markus, Camille S. Johnson, and Rebecca Covarrubias. 2012. “Unseen Disadvantage: How American Universities’ Focus on Independence Undermines the Academic Performance of First-Generation College Students.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102(6):1178–97. doi: 10.1037/a0027143.

Stout, Rowland. 2006. *The Inner Life of a Rational Agent in Defence of Philosophical Behaviourism*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Svalastog, Anna-Lydia, and Stefan Eriksson. 2010. “You Can Use My Name; You Don’t Have to Steal My Story – a Critique of Anonymity in Indigenous Studies.” *Developing World Bioethics* 10(2):104–10. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-8847.2010.00276.x.

Sweet, Paige L. 2019. “The Sociology of Gaslighting.” *American Sociological Review* 84(5):851–75. doi: 10.1177/0003122419874843.

Tajfel, Henri, and Joseph P. Forgas. 2000. “Social Categorization: Cognitions, Values and Groups.” Pp. 49–63 in *Stereotypes and prejudice: Essential readings, Key readings in social psychology*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Tajfel, Henri, and John C. Turner. 2004. *The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Tatum, Beverly Daniel. 2017. *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations About Race*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Tavory, Iddo, and Daniel Winchester. 2012. "Experiential Careers: The Routinization and de-Routinization of Religious Life." *Theory and Society* 41(4):351–73. doi: 10.1007/s11186-012-9170-z.

Teachman, Jay D., and Lucky Tedrow. 2008. "Divorce, Race, and Military Service: More Than Equal Pay and Equal Opportunity." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70(4):1030–44. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00544.x.

Thompson, Trevor, Devin B. Terhune, Charlotte Oram, Joseph Sharangparni, Rommana Rouf, Marco Solmi, Nicola Veronese, and Brendon Stubbs. 2019. "The Effectiveness of Hypnosis for Pain Relief: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of 85 Controlled Experimental Trials." *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* 99:298–310. doi: 10.1016/j.neubiorev.2019.02.013.

Thye, Shane R. 2000. "A Status Value Theory of Power in Exchange Relations." *American Sociological Review* 65(3):407–32. doi: 10.2307/2657464.

Tilly, Charles. 1998. *Durable Inequality*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Tinkler, Justine, Jun Zhao, Yan Li, and Cecilia L. Ridgeway. 2019. "Honorary Whites? Asian American Women and the Dominance Penalty." *Socius* 5:2378023119836000. doi: 10.1177/2378023119836000.

Tsai, Jeanne L., Jen Ying Zhen Ang, Elizabeth Blevins, Julia Goernandt, Helene H. Fung, Da Jiang, Julian Elliott, Anna Kölzer, Yukiko Uchida, Yi-Chen Lee, Yicheng Lin, Xiulan Zhang, Yolande Govindama, and Lise Haddouk. 2016. "Leaders' Smiles Reflect Cultural Differences in Ideal Affect." *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)* 16(2):183–95. doi: 10.1037/emo0000133.

Turco, Catherine J. 2010. "Cultural Foundations of Tokenism: Evidence from the Leveraged Buyout Industry." *American Sociological Review* 75(6):894–913. doi: 10.1177/0003122410388491.

Turner, Jonathan H., and Jan E. Stets. 2005. *The Sociology of Emotions*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Tzeng, Oliver C. S., and Jay W. Jackson. 1994. "Effects of Contact, Conflict, and Social Identity on Interethnic Group Hostilities." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 18(2):259–76. doi: 10.1016/0147-1767(94)90031-0.

Uggen, Christopher, and Amy Blackstone. 2004. “Sexual Harassment as a Gendered Expression of Power.” *American Sociological Review* 69(1):64–92. doi: 10.1177/000312240406900105.

Uhlmann, Eric Luis, and Geoffrey L. Cohen. 2005. “Constructed Criteria: Redefining Merit to Justify Discrimination.” *Psychological Science* 16(6):474–80. doi: 10.1111/j.0956-7976.2005.01559.x.

Ullman, Sarah E. 2010. *Talking about Sexual Assault: Society’s Response to Survivors*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

U.S. Army. n.d. “Army Combat Fitness Test.” Retrieved May 11, 2022 (https://www.army.mil/acft/).

USA Swimming Foundation. 2017. “USA Swimming Foundation Announces 5-10% Increase in Swimming Ability Among U.S. Children.” *CISION PR Website*. Retrieved April 5, 2021 (https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/usa-swimming-foundation-announces-5-10-increase-in-swimming-ability-among-us-children-300463644.html).

Vaisey, Stephen. 2009. “Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action.” *American Journal of Sociology* 114(6):1675–1715. doi: 10.1086/597179.

Vaisey, Stephen, and Omar Lizardo. 2010. “Can Cultural Worldviews Influence Network Composition?” *Social Forces* 88(4):1595–1618. doi: 10.1353/sof.2010.0009.

Vertesi, Janet. 2015. *Seeing like a Rover : How Robots, Teams, and Images Craft Knowledge of Mars*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Wacquant, Loïc. 2003. *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Wager, Tor D., James K. Rilling, Edward E. Smith, Alex Sokolik, Kenneth L. Casey, Richard J. Davidson, Stephen M. Kosslyn, Robert M. Rose, and Jonathan D. Cohen. 2004. “Placebo-Induced Changes in FMRI in the Anticipation and Experience of Pain.” *Science (New York, N.Y.)* 303(5661):1162–67. doi: 10.1126/science.1093065.

Wakefield, Juliet R. H., Nick Hopkins, and Ronni M. Greenwood. 2012. “Thanks, But No Thanks: Women’s Avoidance of Help-Seeking in the Context of a Dependency-Related Stereotype.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 36(4):423–31. doi: 10.1177/0361684312457659.

Waldinger, Roger David, and Michael Ira Lichter. 2003. “Social Capital and Social Closure.” in *How the other half works: immigration and the social organization of labor*. Berkeley, CA: University Of California Press.

Ward, Elijah G. 2005. “Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church.” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 7(5):493–504. doi: 10.1080/13691050500151248.

Ward, Elizabeth Jane. 2015. *Not Gay : Sex between Straight White Men*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society*. edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Weininger, Elliot B., Annette Lareau, and Dalton Conley. 2015. "What Money Doesn't Buy: Class Resources and Children's Participation in Organized Extracurricular Activities." *Social Forces* 94(2):479–503. doi: 10.1093/sf/sov071.

West, Candace, and Sarah Fenstermaker. 1995. "Doing Difference." *Gender & Society* 9(1):8–37. doi: 10.1177/089124395009001002.

West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1(2):125–51. doi: 10.1177/0891243287001002002.

Whiting, Jason B., Jaclyn Cravens Pickens, Abby Luthi Sagers, Morgan PettyJohn, and Bria Davies. 2021. "Trauma, Social Media, and #WhyIDidntReport: An Analysis of Twitter Posts about Reluctance to Report Sexual Assault." *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 47(3):749–66. doi: 10.1111/jmft.12470.

Williams, David R., and Michelle Sternthal. 2010. "Understanding Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Health: Sociological Contributions." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 51:S15–27. doi: 10.1177/0022146510383838.

Williams, Joan C. 2017. *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Williams, Joan C., and Rachel Dempsey. 2014. *What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Working Women Need to Know*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Willie, Sarah Susannah. 2003. *Acting Black: College, Identity and the Performance of Race*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Willis, Paul E. 1981. *Learning to Labor : How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Wilson, Laura C. 2018. "The Prevalence of Military Sexual Trauma: A Meta-Analysis." *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 19(5):584–97. doi: 10.1177/1524838016683459.

Wilson, William J. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged : The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wiltse, Jeff. 2009. *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Winchester, Daniel. 2008. "Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus." *Social Forces* 86(4):1753–80. doi: 10.1353/sof.0.0038.

Winder, Terrell J. A. 2015. "'Shouting It Out': Religion and the Development of Black Gay Identities." *Qualitative Sociology* 38(4):375–94. doi: 10.1007/s11133-015-9316-1.

Winfield, Taylor Paige. 2021a. "Embodied Theodicy: From Conceptual to Bodily Engagements with Suffering." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89(1):204–39. doi: 10.1093/jaarel/lfaa070.

Winfield, Taylor Paige. 2021b. "Uncovering the Origins of a Sociologist's Thoughts: A Methodology to Identify and Analyze Thought-Models." *The American Sociologist*.

Winfield, Taylor Paige. 2021c. "Vulnerable Research: Competencies for Trauma and Justice-Informed Ethnography." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 51(2):135–70. doi: 10.1177/08912416211017254.

Winfield, Taylor Paige. 2022. "All-Encompassing Ethnography: Strategies for Feminist and Equity-Oriented Institutional Research." *Ethnography* Online First. doi: 10.1177/14661381221076267.

Winfield, Taylor Paige. In Press. "Interpellative Styles: The Choreographies of Identity Disruptions and Repairs." *Sociological Theory*.

Wingfield, Adia Harvey. 2021. "The (Un)Managed Heart: Racial Contours of Emotion Work in Gendered Occupations." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47(1):197–212. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-081320-114850.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations = Philosophische Untersuchungen*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Wodak, Ruth. 1995. "Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis." Pp. 204–10 in *Handbook of Pragmatics*, edited by J. Verschueren, J.-O. Östman, and J. Blommaert. Amsterdam, NL: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Wong, Paul, Chienping Faith Lai, Richard Nagasawa, and Tieming Lin. 1998. "Asian Americans as a Model Minority: Self-Perceptions and Perceptions by Other Racial Groups." *Sociological Perspectives* 41(1):95–118. doi: 10.2307/1389355.

Wuthnow, Robert. 2020. *What Happens When We Practice Religion? : Textures of Devotion in Everyday Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

York, Darlene Eleanor. 1996. "Growing Up African American in Catholic Schools." Pp. 11–46 in *Academic Achievement of African Americans in Catholic Schools: A Review of the Literature*, edited by J. J. Irvine and M. Foster. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 2009. *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zgierska, Aleksandra E., Cindy A. Burzinski, Jennifer Cox, John Kloke, Aaron Stegner, Dane B. Cook, Janice Singles, Shilagh Mirgain, Christopher L. Coe, and Miroslav Backonja.

2016. “Mindfulness Meditation and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Intervention Reduces Pain Severity and Sensitivity in Opioid-Treated Chronic Low Back Pain: Pilot Findings from a Randomized Controlled Trial.” *Pain Medicine; Oxford* 17(10):1865–81. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/pm/pnw006.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Self-Reported Participant Demographics

Table 1. Self-Reported Participant Demographics, N = 114

	N		*N*		*N*
Race *(some identify with > 1)*		**Religion**		**Recruited Athlete**	
Asian	8	Atheist/Agnostic	8	Yes	38
Black/African American	62	Christian	87	*Football*	*19*
Hispanic/Latin American	13	*Catholic*	*14*	*Track & Field*	*7*
Pacific Islander	2	*Protestant*	*71*	*Wrestling*	*5*
White	47	*Other Christian*	*2*	*Other*	*7*
Mixed	17	Jewish	2	No	76
		Muslim	3		
		Other	1		
		Unknown	10		
Gender		**Immigrant**		**Prior Service**	
Man	79	First Generation	4	Yes	27
Woman	35	Second Generation	13	No	87
		No	97		
Family Financial Status		**Region**		**Out-processed**	
Very Comfortable	14	Northeast	25	Yes	21
Comfortable	41	Midwest	14	*By choice*	*9*
Tight	13	South	17	*Academics*	*6*
Very Tight	14	West Çoast	58	*Injury/Health*	*3*
Fluctuating	26			*Other*	*3*
Unknown	6			No	93

Appendix 2: Character List

Adam Evans is a White man from the Midwest. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 1 'Uniforms.'

Addison Martin is a Black man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in the Introduction.

Akele Martosas is a Black and Hispanic man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in the Afterward.

Alexa McArthur is a Black woman who is a first-generation immigrant. Her family settled in the South. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 22 'Swimming.'

Alice Ramirez is a Hispanic woman from the South. She served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 19 'Don't Ask, Don't Show.'

Angela Lil Boat is a Black woman from the South. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 18 'Fitness Test.'

Athena Little is a Black woman from the South. She is first introduced in the Introduction.

Barbara Fenton is a Black and Hispanic woman from the South. She is first introduced in the Introduction.

Ben Hall is a Black man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in the Introduction.

Brandon Phillips is a White man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 25 'Pass.'

Carlos Estrada is an Africano (mix of Spanish, Native American, and African) man from the Northeast. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 1 'Uniforms.'

Catherine Poli is a White woman from the Northeast. She served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 5 'Muscles.'

Chelsea Melton is a White woman from the South. She was a recruited athlete. She is first introduced in the Introduction.

Claire Row is a White woman from the Midwest. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 16 'Rucking.'

Demarcus Wright is a Black man from the West Coast. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in in Part I, Chapter 16 'Rucking.'

Deon L'Condo is a Black man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 15 'Privacy, Respect, and Clashing Cultures.'

Dominic Campbell is a Black man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 3 'Height and Weight.'

Eleanor Kidds is a mixed-race Black and White woman from the Northeast. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 1 'Uniforms.'

Fernando Castro is a Hispanic man who is a first-generation immigrant. His family settled in the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 25 'Pass.'

Grace Ives a White woman from the West Coast. She served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 5 'Muscles.'

Hassan Ahmed an Asian man from the South. He is a second-generation immigrant. He served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 19 'Don't Ask, Don't Show.'

Isaac Peterson is a mixed-race Black and White man from the South. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 19 'Don't Ask, Don't Show.'

Jack Brown is a Black man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in Part II, Chapter 45 'SHARP'd.'

Jasmine Washington is a Black woman from the South. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 7 'Hair.'

Jocelyn Jones is a Black woman from the South. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 7 'Hair.'

Joshua Samson is a Black man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 13 'Smoked.'

Judy Watson is a White woman from the Northeast. She is first introduced in Part II, Chapter 45 'SHARP'd.'

Kelly Carter is a Black woman from the Midwest. She is first introduced in the Introduction.

Lennette Aaron is a mixed-race Black and Asian woman from the South. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 19 'Don't Ask, Don't Show.'

Lily Rose is a White woman from the South. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 1 'Uniforms.'

Lisbeth Sokolov is an Asian woman from the South. She is a second-generation immigrant. She is first introduced in the Introduction.

Majdi Haddad is a White man from the West Coast. He is a second-generation immigrant. He is first introduced in Part II, Chapter 6 'Toleration and Snitching.'

Malcom Cole is a Black man from the South. He is first introduced in Part II, Chapter 31 'Empathetic Imagination.'

Marcell Artist is a Black man from the South. He served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 25 'Pass.'

Matt Smith is a Black man from the South. He was a recruited athlete. He is first introduced in Part II, Chapter 41 'Equal Opportunity.'

Nadav Butler is a Black man from the South. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 7 'Hair.'

Nathan Cohen is a White man from the Northeast. He served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 1 'Uniforms.'

Olivia Greene is a White woman from the Midwest. She is a second-generation immigrant. She served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 5 'Muscles.'

Raphael Lewis is a Black man from the South. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 22 'Swimming.'

Renee Edmonds is a Black woman from the South. She is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 9 'Military Bearing.'

Rich Rivers is a White man from the Midwest. He served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 10 'Voices.'

Sam Anderson is a White man from the West Coast. He served as an enlisted soldier prior to attending the preparatory school. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 25 'Pass.'

Saul Alvarez is a mixed-race man from the South who identifies as Black, Asian, White, and Hispanic. He is first introduced in Part I, Chapter 5 'Muscles.'

Appendix 3: Preparatory School Map

