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## The Real and the Ideal in RI National Guard Uniform Practices

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THE REAL AND THE IDEAL  
IN RI NATIONAL GUARD UNIFORM PRACTICES

BY  
CHRISTINE LEE CALLAGHAN

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OF

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## **ABSTRACT**

Dress and appearance are regulated in minute detail for members of the Rhode Island National Guard, as they are for all in the US military. In practice, adherence to these regulations is both imperfect and variable. This study explored the extent and form of variations from the ideal in Rhode Island National Guard uniform practices as well as the ideal military service-members are expected to emulate and how military uniform policies were enforced.

Individual interviews were conducted with thirteen former members of the RI National Guard. Topics of discussion included levels of strictness or laxity encountered, opinions on various uniforms worn, the ideal image of the military service-member, how uniforms were cared for, what individualizations were permitted, how rules differed for different groups within the military, and so forth. The principles of grounded theory, in which theory is induced from the data after generation and analysis, as described by Mayan (2009, 47-48), structured the analysis.

Interviewees agreed that recruiting imagery strongly reflected the ideal image they were expected to conform to. The researcher found that a consistent vocabulary was used to describe their experiences and opinions according to particular dichotomies. Both male and female interviewees described the particular difficulties had by female service-members. Uniform policies and designs were shown to have the power to integrate or to exclude. In the conclusion, specific recommendations are given for policies and designs that may help integrate various marginalized groups.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Dress and appearance are regulated in minute detail for members of the Rhode Island National Guard, as they are for all in the US military. Many parts of the dress and appearance codes are objective and quantifiable; for example, for male Airmen, “Hair will not exceed 1¼ inch in bulk, regardless of length,” (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014, 17). At the same time, other regulations and stipulations are subjective, such as “Females are authorized to wear cosmetics with all uniforms, provided they are applied modestly and conservatively, and that they complement both the Soldier’s complexion and the uniform. Leaders at all levels must exercise good judgment when interpreting and enforcing this policy,” (US Dept. of the Army 2014a, 6).

Furthermore, while the military places great emphasis on uniformity, many regulations detail differing requirements for various groups within the military. Male and female service-members are subject to differing grooming regulations; differently colored berets are prescribed by the Army to visually distinguish specific occupations. Those in command are given authority to both authorize some exceptions to the rules or to require practices above and beyond the standard regulations. They determine the “uniform of the day” and they set the tone that determines how strictly regulations are enforced.

Rules that are subject to individual interpretation may surely be expected to produce multiple outcomes. And in practice, adherence to these regulations is both imperfect and variable. This study explored the extent and form of variations from the



ideal in Rhode Island National Guard uniform practices as well as the ideal military service-members are expected to emulate and how military uniform policies were enforced. More generally, the researcher explored the experience of being in military uniform from the perspective of those who wore them, considering what service-members wanted or needed from their uniforms and in what ways this may have varied from what policymakers wanted from uniforms and their wearers. Individual interviews were conducted with thirteen former members of the RI National Guard to generate the primary research that was the basis for the study.

Discrepancies between the ideal and the practices of individuals in their day-to-day affairs are always a concern to both the creators of the military ideal as well as to creators of physical garments. The military is intensely concerned with the image projected by its members. As noted in the Air Force manual on the wear and appearance of Air Force uniforms and insignia:

The American public and its elected representatives draw certain conclusions on military effectiveness based on the image Airmen present. The image must instill public confidence and leave no doubt that Airmen live by a common standard and respond to military order and discipline. (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014, 9)

A gap between the regulated ideal and the actual practices of military service members would also be a concern for designers. A uniform that “creates barriers to performance” of the duties expected to be undertaken while in that uniform is likely to be rejected (Joseph 1986, 87-8). Uniform designers and those who pay for their services do not want to waste time designing a uniform that will not be accepted by its wearers.

Currently, the US military as a whole is in a state of tentative transition as it attempts to reposition itself onto non-wartime footing after over a decade of conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and tries to embrace the increasing diversity of its members. Various policies have been implemented to create a more inclusive armed force, although they do not completely eliminate the marginalization of these groups relative to majority groups. The military has taken such actions as repealing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” in 2010, allowing openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual (but not transsexual) service-members to remain in service (Lee 2010). Same-sex military couples have been given some domestic partnership rights, though not the full suite of rights and privileges provided to married heterosexual couples (Hagel 2013). Channels have been created for religious minorities such as Sikhs, Muslims, and Orthodox Jews to apply for accommodations relative to military dress and appearance policies that are incompatible with their religious observance, but any service-member who so applies will be expected to comply with regulation until such an accommodation is issued, and must re-apply each time their commander or duty station changes (Alexander 2014, NPR Staff 2014). Women will no longer be expressly barred from “combat positions” by 2016, an action that effectively excluded them from many avenues for promotion available to male service-members (Lopez and Henning 2013).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that women have not been participating in active combat in recent conflicts. On the contrary, creative delineations of what are and are not combat military occupational specialties (MOS’s) and inventive paperwork tactics have seen female service-members participating in combat just as much as males, yet without the same recognition as male service-members. A woman who was in the same firefights as her male compatriots was not eligible to receive the same recognitions that they were, but the military has begun to retroactively award some such women in the researcher’s personal network.

By 2014, the US military was attempting to transition to non-wartime footing. As discussed in Thompson's (2014) article, "You're in the (Shrinking) Army Now," numbers had fallen from their 2010 peak and were expected to reduce from that number by 25% over the next few years. Thompson notes that appearance rules were relaxed at the height of the conflict in Iraq in order to bolster numbers, but, as of the article's publication, were being tightened again.

In the process of tightening dress and appearance standards, several missteps were made that seemed to alienate some minority service-members. One recent example is from March 31st, 2014, when the Army enacted an update to Army Regulation 670-1, "Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia" (US Dept. of the Army 2014a). These updated regulations singled out and banned or severely restricted hairstyles commonly worn by Black women with natural hair (i.e., not chemically straightened) Multiple braids were now required to be micro-braids less than ¼" in diameter, with no more than ¼" in of scalp showing in between, and twists of any kind were banned. That same day, the Army Times published an article noting the controversy (Tan 2014). In the article, Army spokesman Paul Prince was quoted as saying, "Many hairstyles are acceptable, as long as they are neat and conservative. In addition, headgear is expected to fit snugly and comfortably, without bulging or distortion from the intended shape of the headgear and without excessive gaps. Unfortunately, some hairstyles do not meet this standard or others listed in AR 670-1."

This would imply that Army leadership either noted incompatibility of the prohibited hairstyles with proper wear of headgear, or felt that these hairstyles

common amongst Black Americans were not “neat and conservative.” While the former is possible, in the same article one interviewee, a Black service-member who wears her hair in two-strand twists, states, “I’ve been in the military six years, I’ve had my hair natural four years, and it’s never been out of regulation. It’s never interfered with my head gear.” In one interviewee for the present study’s basic training “yearbook,” from 1999, in a section of stock photos meant to illustrate for civilian family and friends what basic training generally entails, a Black female service-member is depicted with her hair styled in several thick braids. It was clearly not considered out-of-regulation at the time the photo was taken, or the photo would not have been selected for inclusion.

In another photo, this one a personal photo shared with the researcher, another Black female service-member was shown with her hair styled very similarly. “I’m assuming if she had had any trouble fastening her headgear properly, you or someone else would have said something, right?” “Oh yeah. We would have been all over it,” the interviewee replied. This pattern of anecdotes from various sources, then, implies that the Army made a racially charged determination that these hairstyles were not considered neat, conservative, or professional enough, based on standards of appearance that did not take into account the physical differences between the hair of people of European descent and people of African descent.

By the next day, articles critical of the new policy were already appearing in various media outlets. In one such newspaper article published by Al-Jazeera America, “Tonya,” a Black female service-member, articulates her objection to the regulations:

This is how I was born, what my hair does naturally. So what they're telling me is that people who look like me, people who have these characteristics, don't belong in the military. You can't tell me that we're an army of one or that we're a brotherhood and a sisterhood, that we all bleed army green, if just one group of people's natural look is considered unacceptable. That isolates me.

In Tonya's case, her relationship to the regulated ideal has become negative and detrimental; instead of creating unity, the policies seemed to divide service-members along racial lines. Her statements are echoed in comments from Black female service-members in the many online articles about this controversy: for example, Shen 2014.

"Shame, good soldiers who are willing to risk their lives getting treated like they are less than their fellow soldiers because they were born with afro hair," lamented one commenter. "Had braids, passed the gas mask test every time. How many times would that have to be proven to stop using that as an excuse?" asked another commenter.

Further down, she tells another commenter:

This is not about beauty, this is being told what your born with is not good enough. If you showed all the approved hairstyles across the board you would notice one thing: black women with chemically altered straighten hair. Because even though it says we can have braids, for majority of us, because of the specifics it's impossible. So yeah you do see short hair or relaxed hair. People also don't factor the lack of education the leadership has. They will order you to take out your braids, cut your hair, relax it, do whatever because they believe it's out of regulations. So even when we follow the regulations to the T, we are constantly bombarded. I had one shipmate be forced to stand at attention while the chief pulled out a ruler and measured her hair. To add he didn't even bother to check a girl who clearly had a bun that was out of regs and should have equally been measured since he wanted to go that route.

Less than a month after the new regulations were enacted, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel issued orders for the heads of all branches of the service to review and

revise their hair regulations to “ensure standards are fair and respectful of our diverse force,” giving them three months in which to do so (Cooper 2014). In August 2014, the panel under Hagel’s direction issued new regulations (Hagel 2014). The terms “matted” and “unkempt” were determined offensive and removed from all regulations, as well as a reference to twists as “faddish” in Navy FAQ’s. Two-strand twists were authorized across the services. The Army also decided to permit braids larger than ¼” and eliminated the spacing requirement, and the Air Force opted to change the term “dreadlocks” to “locs<sup>2</sup>” in its regulations. However, the new regulations still do not yet seem to permit any form of locs at this time, and the Navy still chose to terminate a 12-year sailor with an exemplary service record in August 2014 because she refused an order to either cut off her locs or cover them with a wig. She argued that her locs were actually permitted under Navy hair regulations as they were worded when the order was given, but she was still discharged from the service, effectively ending her military career (Myers 2014).

These incidents seem to indicate that while the military is trying to be more sensitive to the needs of a diverse force, they still struggle to implement policies in line with this goal. The uniform policy-makers who created the short-lived hairstyle rules perhaps did not understand the detrimental and divisive effects of dress and appearance policies conceived in the way Kaiser refers to, where “White is the

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<sup>2</sup> The military uses a great deal of occupational jargon and acronyms as well as its own particular set of slang terms. Underlined words outside of section headings indicate terms which are included in the Appendix: Illustrated Glossary.

“unmarked” category with everyone else therefore marginalized as “other” (Kaiser 2012, 2, 80-1.)

In further recognition of changing social norms and perceptions, as of April 1, 2015, the Army has announced that it will be lifting most of the restrictions on tattoos, banning them only on the hands, face, and neck and only extremist, racist, and/or sexist tattoos elsewhere on the body (Rifkin 2015). Relaxation of appearance rules usually coincides with initiation of conflicts, to bolster numbers. It is not yet known if this was because the previous tattoo rules were complex and cumbersome to enforce, because it was excluding so many people at a time when recruitment was low and ostensibly Islamic militancy has increased in the Middle East, or because the ideology behind Army uniform policies is shifting.

In summary, this study articulates the both the regulated and the unspoken ideals of the contemporary National Guard service-member’s dress and appearance, based on official military literature and imagery as well as one-on-one interviews with former RI National Guard service-members. The paper explores the nature of variances in RI National Guard service-members' dress and appearance practices from regulations. The practical, physical factors leading to these variances as well as less tangible motivations are explored, and the implications for uniform designers and policy-makers are articulated in the conclusions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

An exploration of military uniform practices of this nature requires a certain knowledge of established theory relating to dress and appearance in general as well as uniforms in specific to make sense of the primary research. This study builds on the works of many scholars of dress and appearance, particularly those of Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne Eicher (1992), Nathan Joseph (1986), and Susan Kaiser (2012), to place the dress and appearance practices of the RI National Guard into a theoretical context. An understanding of the definition and uses of dress in general is essential to understanding the subset of uniforms. For the purposes of this study, the definition of dress put forth by Roach-Higgins and Eicher was used:

“Dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body. Dress, so defined, includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body as supplements.” (1992, 1)

Roach-Higgins and Eicher specifically include a number of “hand-held objects” as part of dress, with purses and parasols serving as examples. While the US military uses various phrases such as “appearance and grooming policies,” or “dress and personal appearance” rather than any one consistent, overarching term, their conceptualization is similarly inclusive to the way that Roach-Higgins and Eicher use the word “dress.”



Regulations encompass hairstyles, tattoos, piercings, jewelry, cosmetics, and even what items may be held in the hand while walking in uniform. (US Dept. of the Army 2014a, 13; US Dept. of the Air Force, 16)

Barnard (2002, 51-68), in his book *Fashion as Communication* posits fashion and clothing (from which dress is constituted) to have many functions: protection, modesty/concealment, immodesty/attraction, communication of such things as social and/or economic standing or magico-religious condition, definition of social role, individualistic expression, recreation, social ritual, political symbolism. While a few functions are categorized as “material,” most are considered by Barnard to be “cultural,” which he takes to mean as “to do with communicating.” Barnard articulates that clothes and their cultural functions make society possible because they are an essential part “of the production and reproduction of positions of relative power within a society” (Barnard 2002, 52).

This creation and reinforcement of hierarchies and relationships can be related to Susan Kaiser’s exploration of the various intersectional “subject positions” that are understood themselves to be “shifting through complex power relations” (Kaiser 2012, 1). All persons participate in the “style-fashion-dress” cultural circuit via dress, but the ways in which they participate vary greatly, reflecting such positions as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, national identity, age/generation, and place as they use dress and appearance to articulate their individual identities within the power structure (Kaiser 2012, 6-7).

Those in uniform are no exception, although their sartorial options are somewhat limited. “Military service-member” is another such subject position for the purposes of this study. In a military context, dress creates, maintains, and mediates both official, overt power relations relating to the hierarchy of ranks as well as unofficial, unwritten hierarchies affecting military service-members. Dress can reproduce hierarchies present in the civilian world or, alternatively, alter these power relations within the military context.

Joseph (1986, 1) opens *Uniforms and Nonuniforms: Communication Through Clothing*, by stating that clothing is both a social artifact and a form of communication using signs (anything that stands for something else). The signs that make up this communication all derive meaning from their contexts. He divides these signs into signals (a simple cognitive link between things, such as a red coat designating membership in a specific army) and symbols (more abstract, conveying information about values, beliefs, emotions, etc.), while acknowledging that the line between the two is not absolute or wholly distinct (Joseph 1986, 9). It is this language of signs with which uniformed personnel (and all persons wearing clothes and grooming themselves) can communicate amongst themselves and with others outside the group.

Uniforms by their nature limit the signs with which wearers can communicate via their dress and appearance. The messages broadcast by the uniform are, for the most part, chosen by those members of the organization tasked with creating uniforms and policies, thus suppressing the individuality of its wearers. The US military is quite aware

of this: “Although Airmen have the right, within established limits, to express their individuality through their appearance, the Air Force has defined what is and what is not an acceptable, professional military image for Airmen,” the Air Force uniform guide states flatly (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014, 17).

This suppression of individuality is one of the four essential characteristics of uniforms articulated by Joseph (the uniform is a group emblem, the uniform reveals and conceals status position, the uniform is a certificate of legitimacy, and the uniform suppresses individuality) (1986, 66-69). The “group emblem” and “certificate of legitimacy” functions can be understood as intimately linked; the level to which the uniform serves as certificate of legitimacy depends largely on the level of legitimacy accorded the accompanying organization. In some cases, such as with the military, the uniform may pass beyond mere emblem or certificate into a metonym for being part of that organization: veterans often describe their military careers as their “time in uniform.” The uniform is a key component in constituting group identity.

The uniform’s ability to both reveal and conceal status or subject positions stems from its visual emphasis on one particular status or subject position, such as military service-member, prisoner, or student (Joseph 1986, 66-69 Membership in the group associated with the uniform is given sartorial center stage and cannot be suppressed or hidden while in uniform. Characteristics such as class and gender could be de-emphasized by, for example, requiring the same items of dress regardless of income level or by the uniforms themselves being cut in a way that minimizes the appearance of

secondary sexual characteristics, but they can also be part of the identity broadcast by the uniform if, for example, grooming codes specify different permissible hairstyles for different genders.

Such limitation and suppression, however, is not total and all-encompassing. Hertz (2007, 43-44) describes how uniforms, with their overt and specific codes for both what must and must not be worn, impart a “*degree* of formality, restriction, and external control” (emphasis added). While successful integration into the group is at least partially contingent upon accepting and adopting these codes, Hertz is careful to note that compliance with uniform codes does not inherently equate to complete suppression of individual choice. Craik (2005, 6-7) observes that there is a “constant play” between the intended message communicated through the uniform, and that which is actually transmitted by the wearer who may add their own individual interpretations and eventually received and further interpreted by viewers. These differences between the intended message, the one actually sent by the individual wearers, and the interpretation eventually elicited from observers are key aspects of the real-ideal gap in military uniform practices.

One non-military example of this play between intended message and the individually reinterpreted message is that of the late-1940s stewardesses’ uniforms issued by the airline Qantas, in which one wearer recalls that “we soon learned to tilt our caps at a provocative angle, not regulation, and cover our legs in sheer rather than heavy-duty stockings, and slip our feet into seductively styled high heels instead of

sensible lace-ups” (Craik 2005, 111-2). Another example, this one of the military kind, is provided by Matthews David (2003), in which French officers chose to have their uniforms exquisitely tailored in high quality wools or wool-cashmere blends and lined with silk satin to broadcast their class position, while infantry had to make do with coarse wool and jute versions of the same uniforms.

Furthermore, it would seem likely that within any organization, especially a large one, there will be transgressions against a code. The fact that some sections of Army Regulation 670-1 (US Dept. of the Army 2014a) are punitive, with punishments laid out in the Uniform Code of Military Justice, would seem to imply that these transgressions happen regularly. Joseph (1986, 85-101) devotes an entire chapter to “Nonconformity: The Actual Uses of the Uniform.” Care is taken to avoid generalizing meanings onto these transgressions where context may be key. Joseph points out that poor grooming may indicate lowered morale, as in the case with New York City Police in the late 1970s, and Lomawaima (1993) details how students in the compulsory Federal Indian boarding schools created a subversive solidarity borne of coordinated group efforts to defy the hierarchy and circumvent rules on dress and appearance. On the other hand, Joseph notes that raggedness can sometimes in fact be a form of “esprit d’corps in lower echelon groups in opposition to official policies” (1986, 86, 101). Sometimes, a non-regulation appearance can be the result of practical frustration: a uniform that “creates barriers to performance” of the duties expected to be undertaken while in that uniform is likely to be rejected (Joseph 1986, 87-8).

Research in the past five years relating to military dress has not explored sociocultural aspects, and while a small number of studies have recently been published that explore contemporary or relatively recent uniforms, these were not about military uniforms, but rather those of flight attendants and Korean schoolchildren, respectively (Black 2013, Park 2013). Instead, researchers of military dress have been focused on high-tech additions or modifications to military uniforms, for example on clothing's physically protective function as described by Barnard (2002). Lee and Cho (2014) describe experiments aiming to increase water resistance and decrease the sounds made by military uniform fabrics. "A Soldier's Wish List" (Musante 2013), describes a number of high-tech research projects being undertaken by the Department of Defense (DoD) ranging from antimicrobial finishes to spider silk body armor. Rather than consulting any military service-members, the interviewee was a civilian DoD official, and it was implied that soldiers wished for these types of advances.<sup>3</sup> These articles comprise a fairly representative sample of the direction of current research into military uniforms.

The literature above helps us to understand that uniforms are not just garments, and dress is more than just clothes. Dress is the expression and embodiment of individual and group identity and a form of communication. Uniforms must be understood as a subset within the conceptual framework of dress; uniforms by their nature emphasize group identity and obscure individual identity, but cannot erase individual identity completely. Dress in uniform is not limited to communicating not just

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<sup>3</sup> One interviewee dismissed this type of research as "Batman shit" and "for the civilians... to make them feel better," in pre-interview conversation.

the message desired by their creators, but can transmit a whole range of beliefs, actions, and attitudes of the wearer through each choice made within the confines of the regulation—or through choices that diverge from the letter or intent of the regulation. While variations from the regulated ideal can constitute a rejection of the value set that accompanies the uniform, they may also represent an articulation of the individual identity with the group identity or even attempt to indicate the desired message in a non-regulation manner. It is essential to not assume complete rejection of the group's values due to the presence of variations from regulation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study investigated the experiences, priorities, and concerns of former of RI National Guard service-members with military uniforms and dress and appearance regulations by conducting one-on-one interviews with RI National Guard veterans. The researcher examined official military literature and images and actual uniform items (jackets, helmets, boots, etc.) to place the interview data in context and articulate the ideals that military service-members were expected to embody. The principles of grounded theory, in which theory is induced from the data after generation, as described by Mayan (2009, 47-48), structured the analysis. Interview transcripts were coded or tagged, line by line, before established theory was consulted in depth to place the data in context.

### **Sample Selection**

The researcher conducted thirteen one-on-one interviews with former members of the RI National Guard after IRB approval (URI IRB Project #686348-3). In regard to “How many interviews are enough?” the researcher Henry Wolcott is quoted in Baker and Edwards (2012, 3-4) thusly: “The old rule seems to hold that you keep asking as long as you are getting different answers, and that is a reminder that with our little samples we can’t establish frequencies but we should be able to find the RANGE of responses.” In the case of this study, the interviews began to produce very little new data and responses began to become repetitive by the time thirteen interviews had been conducted.



Snowball sampling, in which the initial group of contacts refers more potential participants, was employed to select interviewees (as described by Morgan (2008.))

Snowball sampling can lead to a non-representative selection of participants, for example, when a certain demographic group only points to members within itself, while diversity in the initial set of interviewees may create a more even sampling. An uneven sample does not necessarily invalidate a study, but must be considered when evaluating the results. With this in mind, participants were asked to complete a short demographic survey in order to assess and monitor the diversity of the sample. The survey was divided into two portions: mandatory questions about the specifics of their military service, and optional general demographic questions relating to race, religion, educational background, and sexual orientation. Many participants chose not to answer some or all of the optional demographic questions. A question on sexual orientation was, for example, not answered by four of thirteen interviewees. Precise demographic reporting was therefore not possible. However, general characteristics of the initial and overall sample are described below in the following table.

Table 1 – Interviewee Demographics

| <b>Interviewee</b>             | <b>1</b>                 | <b>2</b>                     | <b>3</b>                                 | <b>4</b>           | <b>5</b>                         | <b>6</b>                     |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|--------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Branch(es)</b>              | Army NG,<br>Air NG       | Army<br>AD, R,<br>NG         | Army NG                                  | Air Force-<br>NG   | Army-<br>NG, Air<br>Force-<br>NG | Army-NG,<br>Air Force-<br>NG |
| <b>Military<br/>Occupation</b> | Mechanic,<br>electrician | Telecom<br>(Signal<br>Corps) | MP,<br>telecom,<br>fitness<br>instructor | Security<br>Forces | MP,<br>Security<br>Forces        | MP,<br>Security<br>Forces    |

|                            |             |           |                    |               |           |                |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| <b>Civilian Occupation</b> | Various     | Teacher   | Fitness instructor | Social Worker | None      | Wealth Manager |
| <b>Deployed?</b>           | Iraq 2008   | Training  | Bosnia 1999        | Qatar 2006    | Training  | Iraq 2003      |
| <b>Age (Joined)</b>        | 18          | 19        | 22                 | 17            | 18        | 18             |
| <b>Age (Separation)</b>    | 59          | 43        | 37                 | 23            | 54        | 34             |
| <b>Age (At Interview)</b>  | 62          | 52        | 47                 | 30            | 54        | 48             |
| <b>Gender</b>              | M           | M         | F                  | F             | M         | M              |
| <b>Religion</b>            | [decline]   | Catholic  | [decline]          | Catholic      | Catholic  | None           |
| <b>Race</b>                | [decline]   | White     | White              | Caucasian     | White     | White          |
| <b>Education</b>           | [decline]   | M. Ed.    | M.S.               | B.A.          | M.S.      | M.B.A.         |
| <b>Highest Rank</b>        | CMSgt (E-9) | LtC (O-5) | SFC (E-7)          | SSgt (E-5)    | Col (O-6) | SSgt (E-5)     |

|                            | <b>7</b>               | <b>8</b>        | <b>9</b>               | <b>10</b>              | <b>11</b>                    | <b>12</b>              | <b>13</b>       |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Branch(es)</b>          | Army-NG                | Air Force-NG    | Army-NG                | Marines-R, Army-R, NG  | Army-NG                      | Army-NG                | Army-NG         |
| <b>Military Occupation</b> | MP                     | Security Forces | Medic                  | MP                     | MP, small arms instructor    | MP                     | Warrant Officer |
| <b>Civilian Occupation</b> | Safety officer, artist | Police Officer  | Corrections Officer    | Police Officer         | Head of Non Profit Org       | Various                | None            |
| <b>Deployed?</b>           | Iraq 2003, 2008        | Training        | Bosnia 1999, Iraq 2003 | Iraq 1990, Bosnia 1999 | Bosnia 1999, Iraq 2003, 2008 | Bosnia 1999, Iraq 2003 | Training        |
| <b>Age (Joined)</b>        | 28                     | 26              | 17                     | 18                     | 25                           | 19                     | 21              |
| <b>Age (Separation)</b>    | 31                     | 34              | 24                     | 47                     | 45                           | 25                     | 58              |
| <b>Age (At Interview)</b>  | 35                     | 35              | 34                     | 49                     | 46                           | 34                     | 60              |

|                         |                 |           |                 |                    |                            |           |                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>           | M               | M         | M               | M                  | M                          | M         | F               |
| <b>Religion</b>         | Buddhist        | None      | Catholic        | Catholic           | Agnostic<br>Jedi           | None      | Catholic        |
| <b>Race</b>             | White           | White     | White           | White,<br>Hispanic | White,<br>Non-<br>Hispanic | White     | White/Caucasian |
| <b>Education</b>        | Some<br>college | A.S.      | Some<br>college | M.S.               | Some<br>college            | B.F.A     | PhD             |
| <b>Highest<br/>Rank</b> | Sgt (E-5)       | SrA (E-4) | Spc (E-4)       | LtC (O-5)          | Sgt (E-5)                  | Spc (E-4) | CW5 (W-5)       |

In order to maximize relevance to current practices, the study sample was limited to those who served in the RI National Guard after the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001. The researcher chose this cutoff date because the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and subsequent military responses radically altered the mission, tactics, and makeup of the US military, making “post-9/11” as distinctive an era as “post-Vietnam.” Scarborough (2011) discusses the many ways in which the US military’s tactics and strategies had to change to reflect the more mobile and less structured nature of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan: “The Sept. 11 attacks jolted the U.S. armed forces into a new era of war-fighting in which commando strikes, intelligence collection and manhunts often overshadowed heavy armor and big bombers of yesteryear’s conflicts.” Strategies rooted in the Cold War were abandoned when the main enemy shifted from communist to terrorist and the most common terrain for fighting changed from forests and jungles to arid mountains and deserts. Conflicts no longer primarily involved large, organized armies squaring off, but small groups of people often working independently of each other.

Tactics were not the only change for the armed forces. Morrison (2011) describes the significant demographic shifts in military enlistment after September 11<sup>th</sup>, with proportional increases in female, Asian, and Hispanic Americans signing up. The armed forces are now increasingly made up of women and minorities, whose specific needs and desires were not previously a high priority and whose perspectives may have differed from their white, male counterparts. Because of these changes, the post-9/11 military experience likely differed from the pre-9/11 experience. Indeed, interviewees who had served long before that date as well as after it reported changes in practices and attitudes.

All interviewees were former members of the RI National Guard who had served post-9/11 but were now separated from the military. Eleven of the thirteen interviewees were separated for less than ten years, seven for five or fewer years, and five for two years or less. Service-members who were still under contract to the military were omitted from the study, as they would have incurred a slight risk of occupational consequences. If, despite confidentiality measures, current military personnel were recognized as the source of quotes or images utilized in the final paper or presentation that describe violations of regulations, they may have been subjected to disciplinary measures. Punishments ranging from a verbal dressing-down or public shaming, negative “counseling statements” (part of the permanent personnel record which delay eligibility for promotions for about a year), all the way to involuntary separation from the military, can be enacted for violations of dress and appearance regulations.

In an example of latter, Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Jessica Sims was recently rejected from the Navy after twelve exemplary years in the service because her commanding officer ordered her to cut her locs (the way she had worn her hair previously, without complaint) or cover them with a wig, and Sims refused the order because Navy regulation did not actually, technically forbid locs at the time (Myers 2014). Current service-members may not have felt able to speak freely because of this, and the researcher preferred not to have interviewees incur the risk of punishment, however small it was likely to be.

Those who are now separated from the military do not run this risk of punishment, as negative notations cannot be added to one's record after separation. They are likelier to feel able to speak freely, and those who are recently separated will presumably have had similar experiences to those currently enlisted.

The initial group consisted of four men and one woman, all from the researcher's personal network. In the initial group, none self-identified as a race or ethnicity other than white or Caucasian; three had served in the Army National Guard and three had served in the Air Force National Guard. Only one in the initial pool of interviewees identified a religious affiliation on the survey (Catholic) though several stated verbally that they had been raised Catholic but were not actively practicing at this time. Ages ranged from early thirties through to mid-fifties. One participant had chosen to serve only one eight-year term in the National Guard, and the rest were career military, though not necessarily full time.

The initial set of contacts, combined with those participants later referred to the study, yielded a sample that was fairly diverse and representative of the National Guard in many ways, such as gender, age, and enlisted-to-officer ratio, as compared to the most recently published demographics (US Department of Defense 2012b, 57-93). The total sample consisted of ten male and three female interviewees who had served in a wide range of military occupations: law enforcement, signal corps, medics, small arms instructors, fitness instructors, mechanics, and warrant officers were represented. Highest ranks achieved encompassed almost all levels of the enlisted (E-4 through E-9 out of E1-9, see Appendix A: Glossary s.n. military pay grade system for details), two lieutenant colonels and one colonel (O-5 and -6 out of O1-10), and a warrant officer at the W-5 grade (out of 5).

One particular aspect that did not closely mimic the demographics of the National Guard as a whole was military occupation: ten of thirteen had served in a military police (Army National Guard) or security police (Air Force National Guard) capacity, which fall under the broad category of “protective services” occupations (this includes firefighters as well as police). “Protective services” personnel comprise just under 6% of the entire Army and about 13.5% of the Air Force, according to US Dept. of Labor (2014), but represented 54% of the sample for this study. Snowball sampling likely contributed to this demographic disparity, as participants referred people that they had served with previously.

Snowball sampling very likely exaggerated this disparity, but could not have been solely responsible for it. The RI National Guard's demographics simply differ drastically from those of the National Guard as a whole.<sup>4</sup> The 43<sup>rd</sup> Military Police Brigade is a large RI Army National Guard unit, and it used to be larger: currently it incorporates the 115th and the 169th Military Police Companies as well as the 118<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion and a small headquarters company, but several interviewees had served in another MP unit that has since been dissolved, the 119<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company. Currently, there are about 2,600 service-members in the RI Army National Guard. The current units making up 43<sup>rd</sup> Military Police Brigade total about 435 service-members at present, or approximately 17% of the entire RI Army National Guard, according to the headquarters-assigned service-member queried about the topic. At the 43<sup>rd</sup>'s peak membership about 12 years ago, MPs could have been as much as 23% of the RI Army National Guard. The "results and analysis" section of this paper discusses the ways in which military law enforcement personnel's felt their experiences differed from the rest of the military.

### Data Generation

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<sup>4</sup> National Guard's makeup to differ markedly from state to state and from the whole of the National Guard. Any one state will only have so many units with a limited number of professions. RI happens to have MPs, motor pool (trucking), a medical command, an aviation regiment, and a special operations detachment. The Texas Army National Guard, for one example, has an infantry division, a medical command, an entire recruiting and retention battalion, a theatre information operations group, an engineer brigade, and a few other units; Illinois's Army National Guard has a sustainment brigade, a maneuver enhancement brigade, infantry, cavalry, and field artillery units, two aviation units and two special forces units, and a "mobile public affairs attachment." All unit information is from the respective states' official Army National Guard websites.

Preliminary data were generated relating to the overtly regulated ideal, the unspoken, implied ideal, and the experienced reality of RI National Guard dress and appearance practices. Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher reviewed official materials issued by the Army and Air Force, including books of regulations, recruitment images and literature, military press releases, and news stories in military publications in order to familiarize herself with the official military ideal image (see Literature Review and Results and Analysis: Describing the Ideal.)

The researcher then conducted and audio-recorded individual interviews ranging from 40 minutes to one hour and eight minutes in length.<sup>5</sup> The researcher requested permission to view and copy participants' photographs depicting both formal and informal uniforms. Not all interviewees chose to provide photos or were able to provide photographs. Some either did not have photos or could not easily access them and others seemed worried about privacy.<sup>6</sup> When provided, the contents and contexts of the photographs guided the interview. For interviews where photos were not provided, the researcher generally started by discussing informal uniforms and then worked upwards to the most formal before discussing undergarments and accessories.

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<sup>5</sup> With the exception of one interview, which was conducted via email with an individual.

<sup>6</sup> The informed consent documents for this study noted that photos shared with the researcher may be chosen to illustrate the resultant paper with faces and name tapes edited out; some may not have wanted photos used in this way, and did not realize they could opt out of this aspect despite the consent document outlining this. Others, especially those who were not personal acquaintances, may have been wary of the researcher due to prior negative experiences with journalists (who the researcher may have been lumped in with in some participants' perception).



Those photographs that the researcher desired to use to illustrate the thesis were digitally altered to remove personally identifiable features such as faces, name tapes, and the like. The altered images were then entered into a Google search-by-image; when the altered image no longer pulled up the interviewee's original photograph in the search, the researcher sent a copy of the altered photograph and obtained the approval of the participant to use the photograph in that format. This permission was given for all photographs used in the final thesis.

For both types of interview, the questions were very similar. Not all of the questions were asked in each interview, or about each photograph when they were provided, but the list below is representative of the questions asked. These were generally allowed to develop organically from the responses and conversation.

Common questions included:

How did you care for your uniforms during this deployment?  
Was this uniform comfortable and/or practical for the situation?  
Can you describe the alterations you made to this uniform?  
What was the ideal that you were expected to strive for?  
Why is this person's uniform different or being worn differently from yours?  
Did you like how you looked in this uniform?  
How was this uniform obtained?  
Was this aspect of dress and appearance regulated? What were the rules?  
Were some service-members expected to uphold a different standard than others?  
How were uniform codes enforced?  
What is a good uniform, in your opinion?

### Data Analysis

The interview data, including notes, transcripts, and images provided by participants, were analyzed alongside military-issued literature using the principles of grounded theory as described by Mayan (2009, 47-48), in which theory is induced from the data via constant comparison. Notes, transcripts, and images were interrogated first by open coding with gerunds to identify the actions taking place in the experiences related by interviewees, as well as with more general themes as is common with general qualitative inquiry, as laid out by Charmaz and Bryant (2008). The data were “tagged” with these actions as laid out by Benaquisto (2008b), e.g. communicating, protecting, distinguishing; as well as more general themes commonly used in coding for general qualitative inquiry such as comfort, gender, professionalism, unwritten rules, garrison vs. combat, faddish, sharp, and discipline.<sup>7</sup>

Then, axial coding of the data was employed to systematically investigate the relationship between participants’ experiences and the regulated ideal, as described by Benaquisto (2008a). “Subject positions” as described by Kaiser (2002) throughout her text were given significant attention. These subject positions can have a profound impact upon one’s experiences, including those with dress, appearance, fashion, and image. The intersectional nature of these positions was an important consideration, as dress is often used consciously and unconsciously to articulate the various subject positions one occupies into overall identity (Kaiser 2012, 35-40).

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<sup>7</sup> The full list is far too numerous to list here.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The interviews yielded far more detail than anticipated by the researcher, with most transcripts over twenty pages in length. Prior experience led to the expectation that the interviewees, as those not occupationally concerned with dress like fashion designers or academics specializing in dress, textiles, or fashion, would not recall much detail of what they wore or have very in-depth opinions. In hindsight, since near-identical dress would be worn constantly when on duty, it made sense that they would be particularly familiar with these items.

### **Variation Within Interviewees' Experiences and Opinions**

The experiences related during interviews varied to a degree that also surprised the researcher. In part because the military literature idealizes and emphasizes uniformity to a high degree, the expectation was that all experiences would either be fairly similar, or would vary along demographic lines such as rank, branch of service, or gender. In actuality, despite the facts that many of the interviewees had served with each other and that a high proportion of them served in military police/security forces units, their stories were not homogenous and so underscored the distance between the real and the ideal. Participants described different standards and levels of enforcement, in and out of combat situations, and had varied opinions on the different uniforms that they had worn. Perceptions were rarely divided neatly according to demographic categories. Moreover, sometimes accounts conflicted, such as when one participant stated that there was no physical training uniform when he joined the Air Force National

Guard, but another interviewee, who was in the service well before *and* well after the first participant, stated that the Air Force National Guard had always had a physical training uniform.<sup>8</sup>

### Range of Variations in Responses

The interviewees described varying levels of strictness in enforcement of dress and appearance policies, differing levels of access to protective equipment, replacement uniform items, and laundry and bathing facilities, and voiced a thoroughly mixed reception of the many uniform changes that took place over the past fifteen years or so. Many of the participants noted that the commander or other person in charge not only determined the extent to which regulations were enforced, but had the power to either authorize exceptions or to demand adherence above and beyond the standard. Some interviewees reported almost no deviation from the regulated standard, but many reported a high incidence of minor infractions and one 36-year-veteran stated flatly that “everyone violated a uniform regulation at some point,” often without meaning to (e.g., having misplaced one’s issued belt and having to wear a similar civilian belt for one day until it was found) but sometimes intentionally (e.g., unnaturally dyed hair colors).

War veterans interviewed frequently noted that the earlier in a conflict that one arrived in the combat zones, the less one had in all aspects of equipment, supplies, and facilities. This was especially noted by those who served in the early days of Operation

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<sup>8</sup> The first service-member was part of security forces, whereas the second was an electrician, so they probably served in different units, which may explain the discrepancy.

Iraqi Freedom in 2003-4. Eventually, most had some access to laundry facilities or laundry services and replacement uniform items, but in the beginning most had to make do with occasional washing with bar soap in a river or lake. One even reported that when officials suspected that a particular lake might have weapons of mass destruction hidden within it, and since potable water couldn't be wasted for hygiene, the troops were not permitted to wash their clothes or bathe in the water for the first month and a half. They simply had to do without until appropriate personnel were available to investigate the lake. Once the lake was proven free of such hazards, the washing could commence:

The first thing we did was get a bar of soap and our uniforms... we took our boots off and left our socks on and we went into the water and, and basically washed the uniform while it was on us. Then we took it off, got down to our skivvies, washed back up, put the wet uniform on, went back out, and then, ah, went back with the rest of our uniforms and just... kinda scrubbed everything in there, so, that's how we washed our uniforms for quite a few months [after that].

-Interviewee 7

The level and duration of privation varied also with exactly where they were sent within Iraq. Those who were stationed near bases and/or major cities already occupied by coalition forces (particularly Baghdad) had relatively easier access to replacement uniform components, whereas those sent to, for example, Fallujah or Habbaniyah, or on long patrols, had to wait weeks, or more, for replacements. One veteran of this campaign noted that, in the beginning, their unit had Kevlar protective vests but none of the ceramic plates that active duty forces had been issued. Another reported that their

unit only received back plates, and had to use those in the front pockets of their protective vests as well.

Additionally, several of the participants shared photographs in which one could see that the base uniforms were printed with desert pattern camouflage but their vests were printed with the green woodland pattern, thus negating the concealment. Active duty troops, on the other hand, had desert pattern ballistic vests. Those who were deployed for a second tour during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2008 reported much better access to the appropriate protective equipment than they had during the first tour in early 2003. In fact, one of those on the second Operation Iraqi Freedom tour felt that the amount of armor they were issued was excessive, “getting caught on everything” and limiting mobility. Perhaps it was over-compensation for the earlier shortcomings.

The interviewees had thoroughly mixed opinions of the various uniforms that they wore and of the many changes over the last fifteen years or so. There was little consensus regarding physical training (PT) uniforms and work/duty/combat uniforms. For example, one participant claimed that he never wore the PT shorts of his own volition and much preferred the pants issued to him, whereas another stated that she couldn’t stand the sound of the pant legs rubbing against each other and preferred the shorts as that occurred less when wearing those; one officer opined that, with the advent of the no-ironing-allowed<sup>9</sup> “Army Combat Uniform” (ACU), it was “a beautiful

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<sup>9</sup> These items were constructed from a fabric treated with protective finishes that could be damaged by the heat of the iron and/or impeded by starch or size. Instructions in dress and

day to be a soldier,” whereas another stated that he preferred the previous generation Battle Dress Uniform (BDU) as regards both looks and comfort/fit.

Interviewees mostly agreed on one point, however: that Class A and Class B dress uniforms<sup>10</sup> of both the Army and Air Force were uncomfortable, impractical, and, some felt, not very stylish.

The army dress uniform is funny, not only comfort wise but style wise. Um. Comfort wise I don't, I—any dress uniform, Air Force, Army, is uncomfortable for me. Unless you don't have *any* body fat on you, [laughing] you, you weigh more than you should? That uniform is not forgiving, ok? It's ah, I was never a thin guy so the uniform always seemed constrictive, no matter what. Unless you bought a large size and you look like you lost a million pounds because you were sick, right? I always thought it was very constricting.

-Interviewee 5

*So I understand that on some occasions you would be expected to wear your dress uniform...*

Oh, God! [groan] I think everybody but especially females would try to get out of wearing it, you know, that if they were like, “Oh, we need somebody to work on the flight line during the ceremony,” “I’ll do it!” because, you know, I’d rather be in my BDUs working than sitting in an auditorium in my service uniform. It was just awful... When I got out [of basic training], I wanted to get all new uniforms, but I was like, “I refuse to put any money into this hideous blues uniform.”

-Interviewee 4

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appearance manuals contemporary to this uniform thus instruct wearers to not starch or iron them.

<sup>10</sup> The Class A uniform consists of a jacket, a dress shirt, a tie, and dress pants for males and dress pants or skirts for females. The Class B is the same ensemble minus the jacket. See Appendix A: Illustrated Glossary s.n. service uniform for details.

Not all service-members gave such dismal evaluations of the dress uniforms; it seemed that the longer a service-member had been in the military, the less intensely negative their assessment was. The implicit attitude seemed to be, “At least the most recent iterations are not as bad as they used to be, when I first joined.” One female service-member, who recently retired after over thirty-eight years in the National Guard, candidly described how awful she felt female uniforms were when she first joined:

When I first joined in Dec. '74, they were horrible and ugly. We looked like Girl Scout Leaders in our "cords", now known as Class B. They were comfortable enough and easy to work in, but not practical or well fitting. The work uniform or "fatigues" made us look like our duffel bags. Once we moved up to the current uniforms (after many phases of battle dress uniforms), the work uniform or combat uniform was the same for the men and women. It is comfortable and practical, but not very flattering! The dress uniform known as Army Service Uniform is nice. It looks good and fits well... the current ASU is classy, well fitting, and sharp looking. They finally got it right! [...] The first PT uniform was a green shirt and a skirt/shorts combination with sneakers. There are no words...<sup>11</sup> The men wore gray shorts or pants and a tee shirt. We all wore white sneakers and socks. For a while after this generation of PT gear, we wore our fatigue bottoms, green tee shirt, and boots. It was very painful to run in boots! The current PT uniform of tee shirt, nylon pants or shorts, and jacket are very nice and comfortable. Very practical too.

-Interviewee 13

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<sup>11</sup> She described the garment in a follow up question as “shorts under a [skirt] panel in the front and back and open on one side... it was all one piece.”





**Figure 1 - Female US Army uniforms from the 1970s; left is the "Girl Scout leader" uniform, and right is the "duffel bag" uniform. The interviewee noted that they were required to tuck the fatigue pants into their boots, unlike in the image. Image source: Cole 2007, 114-5.**

### Differences Across Demographics

Differences correlative to demographics were relatively minor and could only be observed in relation to the interrelated statuses of sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Because the sample of participants had little racial or religious diversity—ten identifying as white or Caucasian, two declining to answer, and one identifying as white and Hispanic; five claiming no religious affiliation or declining to answer, six identifying as Catholic, one Buddhist, and one facetiously identifying as an “agnostic Jedi”—this study cannot claim to speak for or have investigated at the primary level the effect that being a member of a racial or religious minority whose beliefs include dress and appearance stipulations had on service-members’ experiences in uniform.

At first, based on the official literature on dress and appearance codes (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014, US Dept. of the Army 2014a), appearance standards in the Army

and Air Force National Guard seemed similar to the researcher, but interviewees who had served first in the Army National Guard, and then later in the Air Force National Guard, found standards and enforcement to be more stringent in the Army than in the Air Force. The Air Force was described as being a little more lenient on points such as hairstyle, the level of pressing of uniforms expected, and whether or not starching or sizing of uniforms were expected. Both interviewees recounted the amazement of fellow airmen at just how “sharp” or “squared away” their uniforms were, and sharing tricks learned while in the Army with the airmen they now served with, like sewing pockets shut for a neater appearance, or carefully melt-fusing clear fishing line on the inside of a crease with a clothes iron to emphasize and permanently set said crease.

One interviewee presented differences in basic training and general mission as what he saw as the cause of the perceived higher standards in the Army:

So the Air Force was ah, more lax at the basic training and stuff. You had to wear the uniform, and all that stuff, but they didn't drill it into your head [to the extent the Army did] because their mission was greater than 'Take that hill.' It was more technical. Pilots are a different thing because they've got a combat mission... That's why the security force, which in the Air Force are like the MPs, they wore the uniform like the MPs did, because it was drilled into their heads, you have to be looked at by the public. The rest of the folks in the Air Force were—I hate to even say this—not necessarily behind desks, etc., except for the people that were out front, public affairs, etc., so there was definitely a training experience there that made you wear your uniform different, I guess you'd want to call it.

-Interviewee 5

Those who had been military police or security forces, or attached to military police units (and were thus expected to uphold the same standards) made up a

disproportionate number of the sample of interviewees; only two of the thirteen interviewees were never connected to military police or security forces, while nine were specifically either military police or security forces. Participants who had served in military police and/or security forces repeatedly referenced the expectation that military law enforcement were expected to embody the highest possible standard.

“We used to pride ourselves in having our uniforms, and our boots, and our headgear, our hats, in better shape, if you will, than the rest of the troops. We had to present an image to the community or the people we’re policing, so we would never, God forbid, go out looking less than perfect,” recalled one interviewee. “It was frequently explained to me that MP’s must enforce the standard, therefore we have to set the standard, and, therefore, we must hold ourselves to a higher standard,” related another, while a third noted that occasionally she would need to give some of her troops a hard time, admonishing them that “if you’re an MP, you should *look* like an MP” and that you couldn’t be authoritative while looking sloppy. These higher standards could manifest in such ways as boots shined to a mirror finish, carefully pleating and tucking pants into boots rather than quickly blousing them with blousing bands, sharp creases borne of extra pressing and starching, and hair even shorter than regulation (for males). Length alone wasn’t the sole determiner of orthodoxy in haircuts, however. Certain hairstyles, such as the “high and tight” and the “flat top” are so frequently and intimately linked with the US military that service-members can read meaning in what, to civilians, appear to be very minor variations. One ex-MP remarked:

“In describing the high and tight, you could tell a lot about a person from how high and tight their high and tight was. You know, if it was a sort of normal level fade, that’s generally younger soldiers who want to be able to show their friends that they’re in the military, and then, you know, you’ve got your high-speed types who’ve got it up on like, the curve between the top and side of the skull, and it generally never breaks that curve. And then the generally really, really, asshole type people who have only the top of their head with hair, but! It has to have slightly rounded edges, I mean it covers the top of the head. So it, you know, doesn’t accidentally look like a mohawk or anything like that<sup>12</sup>. If you’ve got some hair on the head, if there’s visible hair on the sides of the head, you may be a normal human being but if it only goes as far down as the curve to the side of the skull, then you are definitely a military human being. And if it doesn’t go onto that curve, you’re a dick. Like this one guy: you could tell how much of an asshole he was just by how high and tight his high and tight was.”

-Interviewee 12

Female service-members were technically also over-represented in the sample at 3 out of 11, or approximately 27%, as compared to 18.2% of the Selected Reserve overall (US Department of Defense 2012b, 65-70).<sup>13</sup> One interviewee noted that about 25% of the troops under his command in the signal corps of the Army were female, which was a much higher ratio than other sectors of the Army. The female service-members interviewed all mentioned at least one fit issue that they perceived as specific to female body shapes. As far as they knew, work/duty uniforms and physical training (PT)

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<sup>12</sup>“Haircuts with a single, untapered patch of hair on the top of the head (not consistent with natural hair loss) are considered eccentric and are not authorized. Examples include, but are not limited to, when the head is shaved around a strip of hair down the center of the head (mohawk), around a u-shaped hair area (horseshoe), or around a patch of hair on the front top of the head (tear drop). Hair that is completely shaved or trimmed closely to the scalp is authorized.” –AR 670-1 (US Dept. of the Army 2014a, 5)

<sup>13</sup> The Selective Reserve encompasses National Guard and Reserve units.

uniforms were not cut any differently for men and women, and used sizing schemes based on male bodies. While the experiences of only three people should not be construed to speak for the experience of *all* women in the service, this is potentially indicative of a general problem experienced by female service-members in general.

One service-member noted that the helmets made available to her were oversized, and felt the designers and makers probably hadn't had women's (usually) smaller heads in mind when they came up with the sizing. Another noted that female service-members with anything larger than a B-cup bra size would have to choose between being uncomfortably constricted and compressed in the chest by their shirts, or going up a size and having impractical and unflattering excess fabric about the waist. She noted that body armor, even the later models actually designed for females, was particularly uncomfortable in the chest, again especially if one were above a B-cup. Women with larger buttocks could choose from uncomfortably tight pants and adequate waist fitting or oversized pants, neither of which was ideal for range of motion or comfort. After basic training, some women purchased garments that fit their hips and/or bust, and then paid to have the waist taken in for a better fit.

Female service-members were not the only ones to speak of the difficulties they had with their uniforms. Male interviewees also regularly described issues that they had seen female fellow service-members experience. "[Uniforms] never seemed to fit well for some reason or another, especially for females. I don't know what it is; they just never seemed to get the right cut or the right size for them. It was always somehow not right for them," said one male service-member. Another observed the way that bustier

females would end up uncomfortably squished into their protective vest, and a third observed how some small-framed female service-members in his unit could not be issued uniforms that were small enough.

In 2010, the Army began testing new combat uniforms for women, designed to take into account the physical differences between the sexes (Blottenberger 2010). Policymakers later chose to incorporate the best-reviewed changes into an “Army Combat Uniform, Alternate” (ACU-A) that came in a wider range of sizes that would be permitted to all soldiers regardless of gender (Gregory 2013). None of the interviewees had worn the ACU-A; they are very slowly starting to be issued and only started less than a year ago, which was after all interviewees separation dates. Thus, they were not able to evaluate whether the ACU-A effectively addressed the fitting issues of female soldiers.

Multiple male interviewees who had served in the Air Force National Guard objected to the length of the shorts that used to be a part of their PT uniforms. One called them “very tiny” and not like normal “shorts that men wear today<sup>14</sup>” and another said “the shorts were probably closer to girls’ booty shorts than actual, functioning shorts. You kind of felt exposed at times.” They seemed incredibly uncomfortable to have had to wear garments that they perceived to be linked to an effeminate,

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<sup>14</sup> These shorts may have been designed and produced originally in the 1970s, when shorter shorts were fairly normal for a man to wear, but that they continued to be used in that design at least into the 2000s, by which time shorts shorter than knee length or so were not normative for men. One participant said that the Air Force PT shorts were still cut very short, but another said that as of a few years ago, the shorts were now cut longer, so the actual situation is unclear to the author.

potentially sexualized display of bare skin.<sup>15</sup> While both male and female interviewees noted that with PT shorts cut baggily and made from slightly stiff nylon windbreaker fabric, one tended to be subjected to a view of whatever one's PT partner was (or was not) wearing underneath their shorts during sit-up exercises, this was characterized by an amused, jovial tone, rather than stark mental/emotional discomfort to the point that they were deemed non-functional.

Short hair on women, on the other hand, appears to have lingering associations with female homosexuality. One interviewee who spent over three decades in the military noted that after the end of military regulations that mandated the discharge of alleged or open homosexual service-members and, specifically, the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, he saw more female service-members who chose to wear their hair short:

In the past I think females didn't [wear their hair very short] because they'd look—they didn't want to be perceived as maybe, you know, homosexual or something. But um, now, that you can be [without official punishment]— which is fine— it means that they don't care. So you get a lot more shorter looking hair, almost male-ish looking hair cuts, if you will, I hate to say it but that's the way it is.

-Interviewee 5

If the aforementioned service-member's observations about a changing trend in female service-members' hairstyle choices is correct and carries through to other

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<sup>15</sup>"Short shorts" on men have a lingering connotation of male homosexuality. In Cole 2014, the author notes the prevalence of extremely short shorts in gay male pornography of the 1970s now regarded as classic, iconic, and helping to codify the typical gay male look of the time; Warkander 2013 refers to the perception of short shorts on men as "queer" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century club scenes in which he conducted his fieldwork.

sections of the military, it could indicate that the stigma of perceived femininity from a male service-member is stronger than that accorded to female service-members who exhibit dress and appearance choices that read as masculine, once the potential for punitive investigation of sexual orientation was removed.<sup>16</sup>

While the military is now officially much more welcoming to GLBT individuals, perceived transgression of gender boundaries may still meet with disapproval from peers or superiors. Perceived masculinity in female service-members may be tolerated, especially now that all sexual orientations are officially permissible, but it is allowed only

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<sup>16</sup> Sexual orientation is still generally a delicate issue in the military community. At least half of the participants in this study seemed uncomfortable with demographic inquiry into their sexual orientation. Several opted not to answer, and others asked what sexual orientation meant exactly, struggled to remember the “proper” term for “straight” (heterosexual), or seemed uncertain if “married” was the appropriate response. One service-member asked why the question was part of the demographic survey. After an explanation of how seeking information on the way demographic groups may have differently experienced uniforms and dress and appearance codes, and assurance of the confidentiality of demographic surveys, the interviewee hesitantly identified themselves under the LGBT umbrella. The touchiness of this issue is quite understandable; the US military only very recently has accepted openly non-heterosexual service-members. They could not serve openly until President Obama signed into law a bill passed by the Congress ending this policy; as of September 20, 2011, openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals may serve in the military. In fact, the current policy is that, “sexual orientation is a personal and private matter. DoD components, including the Services are not authorized to request, collect, or maintain information about the sexual orientation of Service members except when it is an essential part of an otherwise appropriate investigation or other official action,” (Stanley 2011). This may partially explain why some participating service-members, especially those who left the military after 2011, seemed taken aback or affronted by the question on the demographic survey. It may have been a painful echo of prior questioning and persecution. It should be noted that while gay, lesbian, or bisexual service-members can now serve openly, transgender individuals (and, theoretically, those with other non-normative gender identities) are still subject to expulsion, as noted by Weiss (2011). While Bendery (2015) notes that recently the authority to hand down a discharge for being transgender has been taken away from local unit commanders and given solely to the assistant secretary of the Army, making it more procedurally difficult to do so and implying that attitudes are slowly changing, discharge is not merely an abstract possibility.



up to a point: the dress and appearance codes establish many careful sartorial separations between male and female service-members. In one example of grooming regulations reinforcing gender lines, “female Airmen”<sup>17</sup> are subject to minimum hair lengths of ¼ inch<sup>18</sup> and are not allowed to shave their heads, though they *are* required to shave their leg hair if it is visible with the hosiery worn with dress uniforms (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014, 20). Another example comes from the Army manual:

All personnel will keep fingernails clean and neatly trimmed. Males will keep nails trimmed so as not to extend beyond the fingertip unless medically required and are not authorized to wear nail polish. Females will not exceed a nail length of 1/4 inch as measured from the tip of the finger. Females will trim nails shorter if the commander determines that the longer length detracts from a professional appearance, presents a safety concern, or interferes with the performance of duties. Females may only wear clear polish when in uniform or while in civilian clothes on duty. Females may wear clear acrylic nails, provided they have a natural appearance and conform to Army standards.  
(Dept. of the Army 2014a, 7)

The uniforms themselves have also been made with different styling for males and females. While contemporary work/combat uniforms and PT uniforms are now basically the same for men and women, service uniforms still show notable differences. Males wear either a standard necktie or a bow tie, depending on the level of formality called for, whereas females wear what is referred to as a “neck tab.” a two-lobed tie, of sorts.

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<sup>17</sup> This is the terminology used in official Air Force publications.

<sup>18</sup> Until very recently (August 15, 2014) the minimum length was one inch in the Air Force (US Dept of the Air Force 2014, unnumbered page).



**Figure 2 The "neck tab" worn with female dress uniforms, in this case the Army Service Uniform. Source: Marlow White Uniforms (<http://www.marlowwhite.com/army-uniforms>)**

Skirts are optional with female service dress and mandatory for mess dress, but males are only allowed pants with either uniform. Male and female Army officers wear different cuts of hat with their service uniform. Collars and lapels are often of a rounder shape on females' uniforms than males; military issue prescription eyeglasses, too, have the rectangular lens contour slightly rounded off.

In summary, the researcher found great variance in service-members' experiences. Service-members shared a broad range of opinions of the uniforms they wore and the policies that governed their wear. Much of this can be contributed to individual preference, and more likely has to do with having served in different units and in different locations at various points in conflicts. Some correlations of experiences with gender and sexual orientation were found, but the researcher was unable to evaluate the effects of belonging to a religious or racial minority due to demographic homogeneity of the subjects interviewed. The heterogeneity of interviewees' experiences in the face of idealized uniformity confirmed that the reality is more complex than would be implied strictly from the regulations themselves.

## **Describing the Ideal**

Several types of sources were used to compile description of the ideal service-member and the look that they project. The dress and appearance regulations themselves, i.e., AR 670-1 (US Dept. of the Army 2014a) and AFI 36-2903 (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014), detail the minimum standards. Recruiting posters and imagery from recruitment-oriented websites provide visual references, and multiple interviewees referenced recruitment posters as depictions of the ideal. Interviewees' descriptions provided further data. The ideal described herein represents a synthesis of these sources.

The ideal look for a National Guard service-member described by interviewees encompassed the wearer as well as the things worn. Their descriptions agreed in the general but showed much more variation in terminology chosen as compared to, for example, the properties of a good uniform. When attempting to discuss the ideal look, a large proportion of the interviewees simply cited a standard or regulation appearance, but others gave more nuanced descriptions.

Ideally, the uniform itself should be clean, neatly fitting, showing no signs of wear such as fading, fraying, or scuffing; boots should be as shiny as possible. The “old-school” military image demands that creases be crisply ironed into the pant legs and sleeves at the appropriate points, perhaps even starched or treated with sizing. Even in modern recruitment imagery wherein service-members are wearing ostensibly no-iron

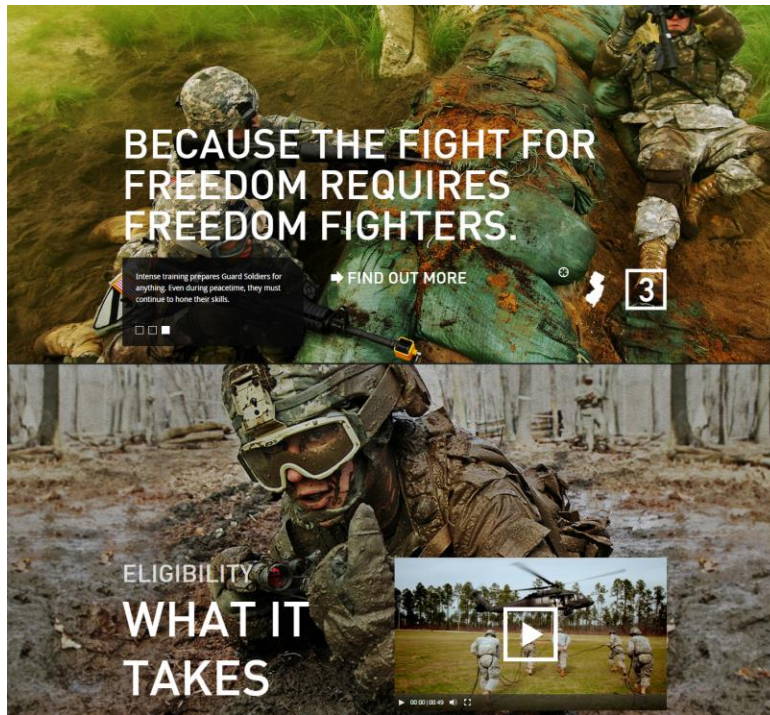
uniforms, the garments generally appear nearly wrinkle free, which is rarely achievable without ironing. Every item should be neatly, flatteringly fitted, carefully tucked, and precisely fastened. The whole look should speak of orderliness, discipline, and conscious effort. The military ideal calls for every aspect of dress and appearance to signal or symbolize efficient professionalism. Casualness is incompatible with this image.

And yet, despite this, despite the heavy emphasis of cleanliness and being neatly groomed by interviewees discussing the ideal as well as in the regulations themselves, a certain counter-current is detectable in the Army's recruitment imagery. There is almost a subgenre of images, showing absolutely filthy, mud-slathered or dirt-encrusted service-members participating in combat activities (or at least very messy field training exercises),<sup>19</sup> doing the "real" work of the military, that appear on the Army's recruiting websites.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> One can only assume that in actual battles, professional photographers are not taking carefully posed photographs. Also, those wielding guns are often shown practicing the sort of trigger discipline, with their trigger finger on the outside of the trigger guard and not the trigger itself, that would not be part of combat situations.

<sup>20</sup> Such images were not found of Airmen, perhaps because, as one interviewee explained, the Air Force's mission is "more technical."



**Figure 3 Top from nationalguard.com front page; bottom from nationalguard.com/eligibility**

Probably due to women’s exclusion from combat positions until 2016, all of the service-members thus shown are male. All official, idealized imagery found by the researcher depicting female service-members depicted them in line with the neat, clean, mainstream military ideal. It will be most interesting to see if women begin appearing in these sorts of images closer to or after the date when these military occupations open to them.

Military service-members should be “clean cut,” sporting approved, gender divided haircuts—preferably a “flat top” or “high and tight” for males. A tight bun is the hairstyle usually seen on females (of any race) in official images and formal posters, although sometimes they will show a woman with a short, straight-textured bob. Although women are permitted to crop their hair closely, they are subject to minimum

lengths (unlike men, subjected to maximum lengths) and women with these haircuts are very rarely shown in the imagery.

Worth noting is the fact that women in the Air Force are banned from the “flat top” and “high and tight” hairstyles specifically, and are subject to minimum hair lengths while males are subject to maximums. The regulations helpfully point out to male service-members that these same hairstyles are specifically approved for them. Grooming regulations reinforce and highlight, not minimize, the visual difference between men and women. The desire for very clear-cut and visually obvious gender divisions is strongly implicit.

Those chosen to represent the services on the posters generally have strongly masculine or strongly feminine looks. At the very least, gender ambiguity is completely absent from the imagery. Women usually are shown wearing makeup—conservative and relatively subtle makeup, but obvious enough. It would seem to contradict the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Armed Forces’s (DACOWITS) preferred principle of minimizing gender differences in uniforms:

Although the efforts of the Air Force and the Coast Guard to design flight suits that are appropriate for women are laudable, having a separate flight suit that is used only by women is neither necessary nor desirable because it draws unwarranted attention to gender differences. Instead, there should be one suit that works for both men and women.  
(DACOWITS 2011, 16)



**Figure 4** An image from the header of the recruiting portion of the Air National Guard official website (<http://www.goang.com/join/recruits>). The female service-members sport tight buns, plucked eyebrows, and what appears to be light cosmetics (or excellent Photoshop). Males have haircuts well short of male maximum lengths.

In 2013, the Army began offering the “ACU-A” or ACU-Alternate; originally conceived as a uniform specifically for women, it has been authorized for male or female service members for whom the standard ACU is a poor fit. One service-member quoted in an Army.mil article about the new uniform echoed DACOWITS’s sentiments:

Although interested in the new uniforms, she said if they were created to be noticeably different, she wouldn't want to wear them. "What's great about the military is that everyone is equal, and it's one of the few professions where men and women are paid the same, but if you can't tell, and they are unisex, then I'm okay with it," George said. Program Executive Office Soldier, the program that develops and improves military uniforms and equipment, developed the new uniforms by letting male and female Soldiers wear the uniform and provide feedback. This came about after a 2008 focus group of female Soldiers showed PEO Soldier that ACUs have a non-female-friendly fit.

(Gregory 2013)

It would appear that while the regulations themselves as well as idealized imagery in recruitment posters idealize female service-members who are visually distinct from males, female service-members themselves may not see this as ideal.

Another aspect of the ideal requires a certain physique; the uniform is not fully proper without an appropriate body inhabiting it. Meticulous uniforms and grooming are prerequisite, but a thin, “fit” looking body is also integral to the ideal, signaling compliance with physical fitness requirements and symbolizing physical discipline and competence. The wearer of the uniform should not just be physically fit, but look fit, and “thin” is held as the most important visual indicator of fitness. One interviewee candidly described the masculine ideal as “6 foot [and up] and 28 inch waist range,” and the feminine ideal as “5’5 or so, maybe 120 lbs.” Another noted that someone who did not appear to meet physical fitness standards may be perceived as a slob.

It should come as no surprise, then, that “unflattering” fits that may give someone the appearance of being heavier than they are were a point of concern or source of annoyance for a good portion of the sample. Military bodies are also expected to be the product of regular, pointed effort to shape them into the ideal; if they do not fit this ideal, lack of discipline is implied. An improperly fitted uniform that makes one appear overweight could trigger doubts about that service-member’s dedication and professionalism, a cause of anxiety for members of the National Guard who wanted to be well-perceived. According to one interviewee, those in the National Guard, “still meet the same height and weight standards as the AD people do, but [uniforms don’t] fit the same way as when you’re running around like an idiot on active duty 24 hours a day and you’re, you’re in your skinny mode.” National Guard members may feel pressure to defy an active duty stereotype of Guardsmen as less fit than the regular forces.



At the same time, while the military has a definite desire for fit, strong, even muscular service-members, multiple interviewees mentioned that uniforms would not fit right on those who were muscular. “I have a 54" chest and ah, everything was always snug around my chest. I'm not a necessarily a fat guy but... large. I'm a muscular guy and these uniforms weren't built for me.”<sup>21</sup> Another interviewee lamented how her Class A's were always too “tight around the shoulder area... they don't account for the fact that we, uh, we work out, that we're not just shaped up and down, that we have some kind of tone to us, but I always find—found — that they were tight and not very comfortable.”

Recent recruiting posters and imagery on recruiting sections of websites favor two types of image: those of a single service-member in a mildly heroic pose, looking off into the distance, shot from chest-height or so, so that the viewer is looking up slightly at them (which enhances or creates the accompanying air of dignity and authority), and those that show several service-members working together, doing their particular occupational tasks.

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<sup>21</sup> This wasn't vanity talking; the gentleman really was just a large, very broad shouldered man.



**Figure 5 Army recruiting posters from 2012 that show the heroic, looking-into-the-distance pose.**

Military literature uses very consistent language to describe the ideal: by far the most constant positive adjective was “professional.” It is repeated again and again in both the Army and Air Force handbooks on dress and appearance (US Dept. of the Army 2014a, US Dept. of the Air Force 2014). “Neat” and “clean” were also repeated across branches, while the Army specifically repeated the adjective “conservative” in describing how service-members should look. On the other hand, oft-repeated, consistently-negative terms in both branches’ handbooks included “faddish” “eccentric” “unusual” and “extreme.” These terms were applied to haircuts, accessories such as sunglasses or watches, and in general reference to what was not acceptable. “Unkempt” was another adjective of disfavor for hair.

In short, the ideal service-member’s dress and appearance must transmit messages of obedience, discipline, and professionalism in the military-sartorial language. They should be meticulously neat, orderly, and clean (except perhaps in combat), and conformity should extend to gender norms.

## **Patterns of Description**

Participants in this study showed clear patterns in their word choices when describing their experiences and opinions. They used a consistent vocabulary, not just in terms of the unique occupational jargon and abbreviations that accompany modern military service, but also in their highly similar choices of positive and negative adjectives. Additionally, the interviewees expressed certain common attitudes relating to rebellion-in-conformity and detachment from the uniform design and appearance policy process. These patterns in turn point towards a set of shared values and priorities.

### Positive Terms

The most common positive adjective used by the interviewees was “sharp,” as in, “When I pressed my uniform and had it looking sharp and my boots squared away, when I had a close shave and my beret was on properly and I had my haircut... I looked like a professional,” or, “Even my commander was like, ‘You’ve got a sharp-ass uniform,’ and I was like, ‘Yeah, I put a lot of time into this.’”

The etymology of the term is unclear—the Oxford English Dictionary Online and the Online Etymology Dictionary indicate that “sharp” in this context came into use in the 1940s as popular slang through jazz culture, but provide no further illumination.

“Sharp” is readily associated with weapons and martial pursuits, which could have

something to do with its popularity in the military vocabulary, or perhaps it even refers to this sort of sharpness in some cases: “The state headquarters people and such wanted them so starched that you could slice cheese with your sleeve,” noted one interviewee, and the Online Etymology Dictionary lists a mid-17<sup>th</sup> century meaning of “distinct in contour.” Whatever the origin, it was clearly a preferred term.

“Squared away” and “professional” were other very common positive adjectives. “Squared away” as a slang term implies orderliness, neatness, straight lines and right angles, everything in its designated place and under control; the Oxford Online offers these [non-literal] definitions of “square” in its verb form: “To regulate, frame, arrange, or direct, by, according to, or on some standard or principle of action,” and also “To adjust or adapt, to cause to correspond to, or harmonize with, something.” The origins of this usage can be traced back to the sixteenth century, and reflect military service-members’ adaptation and harmonization of their dress and appearance practices with the regulated standards of the armed forces.

While the first two terms are informal slang, “professional” is a buzzword traceable directly to the military literature. The very first page of Army Regulation 670-1: *Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*, begins with, “The Army is a profession. A Soldier’s appearance measures part of his or her professionalism. Proper wear of the Army uniform is a matter of personal pride for all Soldiers. It is indicative of esprit de corps and morale within a unit. Soldiers have an individual responsibility for ensuring their appearance reflects the highest level of professionalism,” (US Dept. of the Army 2014a, 1).

One interviewee's comments very closely echoed the language of the Air Force Guidance Memorandum AFI 36-2903, *Dress and Personal Appearance of Air Force Personnel*: "Oh yeah, yeah, [boot shining] was probably one of the biggest things, because they wanted to teach us that first impressions last a long time, and the American public expects a certain, not only behavior, out of their servicemen, but also a, a look. If you don't look the part, they'll think that you can't act the part. That's why there was so much... stress on the fact that you shined your boots."<sup>22</sup>

Appearance as a measure of military professionalism was brought up again and again by interviewees: "You knew those that were, and those that weren't, real efficient, professional, hooah- hooah soldiers by the way the wore the beret...even though you might be an old veteran with your shapeless bag, other people would look at you and say oh your beret looks new, so you must be a slag, you must be some sloppy person," for example, or "If you didn't [maintain a uniform, regulation appearance], you would seem unprofessional, like you didn't know your job, didn't know what you were doing," as another interviewee explained.

Appearance as a factor in promotions was brought up by several interviewees.

One former Army National Guard member stated very emphatically:

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<sup>22</sup> To quote AFI 36-2903: "Judgment on what is the proper image differs in and out of the military. The American public and its elected representatives draw certain conclusions on military effectiveness based on the image Airmen present. The image must instill public confidence and leave no doubt that Airmen live by a common standard and respond to military order and discipline. The image of a disciplined and committed Airman is incompatible with the extreme, the unusual, and the fad. Every Airman has a responsibility to maintain an "acceptable military image," as well as the right, within limits, to express individuality through his or her appearance." (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014, 9)

All these stupid little things that, in a peacetime army, they have nothing better to do than to find reasons to give you demerits, make it, “Oh, well, you’re not as good of a soldier as they are because, well, I can't tell; there’s no war going on, so I'll just go by looks.” And in a peacetime army, all of a sudden, every single looks thing matters, because they don't have another way of telling if you're a good soldier or not. It's stupid little things like that. Some of the people on high have nothing better to do other than go around checking gig lines.<sup>23</sup> So we're — for the sake of the peacetime army, it's so much easier having a uniform that's low maintenance. People can actually focus on things like *how well you do your job* as the basis for a soldier's worth.

-Interviewee 2

Another participant noted that whether or not other service-members used similar tricks to the ones he used to maintain a “sharp” appearance “depended on um... how high-speed or how well they wanted to be perceived as being professional. It really made a difference... doesn't matter if two soldiers — one's better than the other as far as job knowledge, and on one the uniform looks sharper, you notice that the people who look good get promoted a lot faster.”

“High-speed” was a common, potentially unique descriptor used by participants, in that it was positive, yet slightly derisory and mocking at the same time. “If we wanted

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<sup>23</sup> Gig line: The unbroken straight line that the edge of the placket of one’s uniform shirt, the edge of the belt buckle, and the edge of the pants fly are supposed to form. Another interviewee stated that prior to entry to the Air Force National Guard, he had never heard of a gig line, and another related that though he was now out of the Army National Guard, he still automatically lines up his gig line out of habit. A fourth participant, a self-described misfit, had never heard the term “gig line” before, but had repeatedly been “gigged,” verbally berated for a trivial infraction.

to have an ALICE<sup>24</sup> pack to carry all our gear, we could, like super high-speed, modular, kooky equipment ordered out of the back of ‘Soldier of Fortune’ magazine,” explained one interviewee. “If you were one of those really high-speed guys who got an award every time he turned around, it might be, um, a little much to wear every one of them,” related another.

While “sharp” and “high-speed” were occasionally used in reference to physical uniform items, most of the discussed positive descriptors, including those two, referred more to how the items were worn, or how the service-member carried themselves or behaved, underlining the importance of correct, orthodox wear of the items. Uniformity and uniforms in the military are constituted as much by practice as through a set of visually identical items for each service-member.

### Negative Descriptors and Associations

The negative adjectives used by interviewees were also fairly consistent. Unlike the positive adjectives used, the terms more often referenced the physical properties of uniform items, rather than how they were worn. For example, “flashy” and “obnoxious” were common descriptors for properties that non-issued uniform items such as sunglasses or watches should not have, such as prominent logos, shiny components, and

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<sup>24</sup> ALICE stands for “All-Purpose Lightweight Individual Carrying Equipment”, or a belt with suspenders to which pouches and packs of varying sizes may be attached. Smaller pouches usually go on the front or sides and a medium or large rucksack type item with or without a supportive metal frame attaches in back. While technically ALICE refers to a specific set of equipment issued by the military in the past, the term is often applied colloquially to any of this type of item, whether military issue or private purchase.

colors other than olive drab or black. More colorfully, one interviewee stated that in sunglasses, service-members could not be looking “like Elton John” (in his elaborate and flamboyant stage costumes.) It was considered inappropriate and detrimental to group cohesion to stand out or to call attention to oneself in this way on general principle of uniformity and collectivity, but also because such behavior may cause one to be more readily targeted in a combat situation.

“Cheap” was regularly used to describe items that service-members found lacking, especially in conjunction with “polyester” in reference to the fabric from which dress uniform items were made: “Just a, once again, polyester, cheap material, um, couldn't really tailor it to fit very well, one size fits all.” Sometimes the reference to cheapness was indirect, couched in terms of “lowest bidder,” such as when one interviewee noted, “Well, [uniforms] are made by the lowest bidder, and the lowest bidder cuts whatever corners they can.” Interviewees frequently perceived military-issued uniform accessories such as holsters and goggles as cheap and low quality, finding ones meeting regulations and available for private purchase to be of much better make.

“Sloppy” was another negative descriptor. Wrinkled clothing (even after the introduction of no-iron uniforms), messy hair, “ungrounded”<sup>25</sup> bootlaces, and 5-o’clock-shadows were all referred to as sloppy. Sometimes, however, the offending actions were not solidly related to uniforms or clothing as colloquially understood by civilians;

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<sup>25</sup> Ungrounded, in reference to bootlaces, refers to not tucking the free ends of the tied knot into the boot.



when asked why walking while talking on a cellular phone or smoking a cigarette were banned as part of dress and appearance codes, an interviewee replied, “They don’t want you to look sloppy.” Unlike most civilians, both Roach-Higgins (1992) and the US military conceptualize these hand-held items as part of dress.

The negative descriptor “thuggish,” and related descriptions, arose in several interviews. All of the negative terms like this were connected by associations with inner city gangs and criminality and/or rap musicians. In one instance, the repurposing of Army green, muslin squares intended to serve as slings to instead serve as bandanas was initially common, as it constituted lightweight, comfortable headwear for soldiers deployed to Iraq in the summertime. However, they were disallowed after a few weeks in-country: “There was an order from the brigade commander of the task force. He thought they looked ‘thuggish’ - his words,” explained an audibly perturbed interviewee. Another interviewee described how: “There’s always somebody that wants to be Joe-from-the-hood and wear his cap backwards. And I say, ‘No, dude, you’re not a fricking teenager anymore. You’re not Joe-on-the-street, you’re an actual soldier; try and act like it, will ya?’” Similarly, as described earlier, a former RI National Guard Airman noted that one could not wear the baseball-cap like patrol cap with the brim “flipped up like a gangster.” Another former Airman, speaking of tattoo regulations, said, “I can see not wanting tattoos on my face like Lil Wayne<sup>26</sup>; [it] would be kind of not

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<sup>26</sup> “L’il Wayne” is a popular Black rapper who has served time in prison for drug and firearm offenses. He has numerous tattoos all over his body, but is especially recognizable for his extensive facial tattoos. They include several associated with prison and/or violence: teardrops near the corner of the eye, common prison tattoos popularly associated with either having committed murder or the death of loved ones (the meaning the artist professes); three dots in a

a good thing, or my neck, but I feel like to have a tattoo on my forearm or my lower leg is just not an issue.”

None of these words inherently single out any one ethnic or racial group, but they *are* more likely to be used in association with persons of color than with white people (Wagner 2014). They are not necessarily indicative of active or intentional racism, but the patterns of usage of these terms in media reports and everyday conversation may point toward implicit, unintentional, and/or unconscious racial biases (Caldwell 2015). Whether or not a racial aspect is asserted, associations with criminal violence would be obviously negative to an armed force that aspires to look professional, disciplined, and law abiding at all times. If the uniform’s intended message became distorted in between transmission and reception to suggest lawless, violent behavior, the uniform would lose credence as a signal of authority and the organization would lose esteem by the tarnishing of its symbol.

“Faddish” was a negative adjective used by only one interviewee, but this term directly echoed Air Force and Army literature. Examples of the official usage include “Extreme, eccentric, or faddish haircuts or hairstyles are not authorized,” (Dept. of the Army 2014a, 4) and “If worn, the bracelet will be conservative (moderate, being within reasonable limits; not excessive or extreme) (which is defined as plain, not drawing attention or faddish) in design, no wider than ½ inch, gold or silver in color, and will not have any inappropriate pictures or writing,” (Dept. of the Air Force 2014, 91). A “fad” in

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triangle, popularly associated with gang life or prison time, though the artist claims symbolism of “Laugh, Think and Cry”; a gun on the side of his neck. (<http://www.lilwaynehq.com/tattoos/>)

fashion trend cycle parlance as well as common speech refers to something that is briefly, suddenly, intensely popular and then just as suddenly dropped for the next new thing. “Faddish” implies frivolity and trendiness, whereas the military holds up a conservative image and serious-minded functionalism as ideals, so it should not be surprising that this would be a negative, if slightly nebulous, term.

In addition to the aforementioned negative adjectives, interviewees consistently used many mocking and/or derisory slang terms for various uniform items. Military issued corrective eyeglasses were frequently referred to as “birth control glasses” or “rape prevention glasses.”<sup>27</sup> Multiple interviewees did not know official terminology for the garrison cap, a type of hat worn with dress uniforms. They could recall only that they were commonly referred to with such derisive nicknames as “the cunt cap,” (the most common, mentioned by several interviewees) or “the taco hat” or “the McDonald’s hat.” A reflective belt that came to be required during physical training was commonly referred to as the “disco belt,” and one’s ribbons and medals worn on the dress uniform were flippantly referred to as “fruit salad.” Multiple interviewees made reference to “ugly couch camo,” or “couch cushion camo,” which the ACU camouflage came to be called after a certain image went viral on social media. “ACU cammo [sic]” it reads, “designed to work everywhere/ doesn’t work anywhere/ except your grandma’s couch.” In the top two photographs, uniformed soldiers are easily visible, but in the bottom photograph, a uniformed soldier practically disappears while lying on a floral patterned couch (Figure 6).

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<sup>27</sup> This did not vary with the gender of the person wearing them.



**Figure 6 - Internet image illustrating the environment in which soldier's found the ACU camouflage most effective: the Neo-Victorian floral couch.**

#### Interpretations of "Good Uniform" and its Qualities

While interviews were generally freeform, the researcher chose to ask during each interview (except in two cases where the participant ventured an opinion on the topic before it could be asked) the question, "What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of a good uniform?" In a case of consistency within variation, interviewees interpreted the question in one of two ways, and their answers were very similar to those of others who had interpreted the question in the same way. In the first interpretation, the interpretation that the researcher originally intended, "good uniform" was taken to mean "well designed." The second, slightly less common interpretation took it to mean "well worn." Since the researcher's primary interest was

in the participants' experience of being in uniform from their own points of view, it seemed inappropriate to "correct" the participants who interpreted the question this way.

Without exception, those interpreting it as "well designed" listed "comfortable," "practical" or "functional," and "durable" as essential qualities within the first two or three properties of a good uniform. They described a number of uniform items that they once wore that succeeded or failed to meet these requirements for them: work/duty uniform pockets that they were forbidden to store items in (and, in fact, often sewed shut for a more "squared-away" look) were held up by multiple participants from both Air Force and Army as failures to be practical/functional. One noted that her Army dress uniform failed to be either comfortable or functional, as it restricted her range of motion and impeded her ability to wield her rifle properly as part of Honor Guard functions like firing the salute at military funerals, the primary activity she undertook in that uniform.

Another noted that the new ACU was very nearly his ideal work uniform, supremely comfortable, "like wearing pajamas," and low-maintenance, as opposed to the BDU which he had been ordered to press and starch heavily. Ease of maintenance was brought up as a desirable quality for a work uniform by several participants in the course of the interviews, but only one participant specified ease of maintenance in response to the specific question about what constitutes a good uniform. It is perhaps not surprising that, from his descriptions, he experienced particularly high expectations and strong enforcement of regulations regarding dress and appearance.

Several interviewees felt that a good uniform should look good—or rather, in one case, “sharp”—but this was never mentioned as one of the first few requisite qualities of a good uniform. The service-members, regardless of rank, gender, or branch of the armed forces, while not averse to looking good, consistently valued comfort and practical functionality over aesthetics. This valuation of function over form is typically associated with men and masculinity, whereas women and femininity are associated with frivolity, decorativeness, and the vagaries of fashion, which may explain why masculinity from a female is more acceptable than femininity from a male (Kaiser 2012, 124-7). This would apply sartorially, as well as generally, as military culture in general values traits culturally associated with masculinity. The female service-members interviewed did not differ from their male counterparts, however, in prioritizing practicality over aesthetic appeal.

Two participants, one who had served in the Army National Guard in the 1990s and 2000s and the other who was serving in the Air Force National Guard at that time, instead interpreted “good uniform” to mean “a well worn uniform.” They had never served or trained with each other, but their descriptions of a well worn uniform were consistent: garments should, at a minimum, not show any visible signs of wear or age, and be pressed, free of wrinkles, worn with boots free of visual blemishes and neatly tucked in laces. Preferably, especially if one was an MP or security forces, the uniform would be neatly and distinctly creased in the appropriate places, possibly starched, and looking brand new, worn with boots polished to a high shine. Everything should look “squared-away” and looking “sharp” was desirable.

These two properties, highly-shined boots and pressed, creased, potentially heavily starched clothes, were brought up by all participants as desirable during the course of their interviews. One officer who spent over three decades in the National Guard related that, in the last few years of his career, when he wore the Airman Battle Uniform (ABU), he knew he wasn't supposed to press the uniform, but "I always did, because they just didn't look right," without being pressed. Given that he would have outranked most of the other RI Air Force National Guard members, and was very unlikely to be assigned to a combat position where integrity of the high tech finishes designed to minimize detection of service-members by technological means would be imperative, it is not surprising that this would be an accepted deviance from the letter of the regulation.

The interviewees who told of painstakingly maintaining their boots and uniforms shared an almost ritual air, thick with symbolism, playing heavily into ideas of the external self mirroring an internal, disciplined, skilled self of which one should be proud. Similar associations of highly starched uniforms with professionalism, discipline, orderliness, and obedience have been explored in *A Cultural History of the Nurse's Uniform*: "Into the twentieth century, the starched uniform embodied the discipline and skill of an emerging profession," notes the author (Bates 2013, 11). Early 20<sup>th</sup> century nurses' uniforms not only consciously borrowed certain features from military uniforms, such as black bands on caps for senior nurses, but "disciplined the body" in similar ways, enforcing certain posture and carriage as central to proper wear of the uniform (Bates 2013, 58). Echoing military service-members' quasi-ritualistic uniform maintenance,

Bates describes how “the discipline of getting the uniform just right every day was internalized as a moral imperative” (Bates 2013, 59). In the military today, this “moral imperative” is couched in terms of combat effectiveness. “The lesson is, if you can’t maintain a simple shirt or a haircut or learn to put a hat on, how can you learn to launch a missile or fly a plane or guard something that’s, that’s absolutely necessary in a time of war?” explained one participant. Another explained,

If you can’t take direction on how to wear the uniform, and we get you in battle? If you’re not gonna listen and button your button in here, and you’re gonna bring your troops over there, to fight somebody, you’re not going to listen to me over there either. So, if you can square yourself away and show some pride and square your troops away and have their pride, then when it comes to a battle, they’re going to listen to you whether you say “Button that button,” or “Take that hill.” That’s why.

-Interviewee 5

### Shared Attitudes

Two attitudes expressed by most interviewees are worth exploring here: rebellion-in-conformity and detachment from the uniform design and appearance policy process. Both represent significant aspects of the real-ideal gap as pertains to military dress and appearance.

Open sartorial rebellion or complete rejection of the uniform was only very rarely reported. However, interviewees much more commonly described themselves or others as clinging fiercely to the relatively narrow range of personal appearance choices



allowed to or tolerated from them. In one example, a service-member pushed hard against the boundary of tolerability:

From there I went to the Air Force, and the [RI] Air Force [National Guard] had no PT uniform [when I joined]. It was actually pretty cool; I could tell you a story about that... the whole wing [was] on a training operation in Wisconsin, so we had, you know, air wing PT. So I show up in some yellow Corona [beer] pants, and a muscle shirt, and I show up and I'm like, "This is awesome!" [laughs] My commander didn't really think too much of it, but I was all, "Hey, you guys don't have any PT [uniform] policy!" and he was like, "You're right, we don't, but you should know better!" I said, "I know I *should*, but I don't *have* to!" [laughs]

So what did most people actually wear in the absence of a PT uniform?

You'd get the absolute variety of, uh, what people would get away with. Um, if you were in good shape you'd see a little bit more of muscle shirts, for guys. Girls would, uh, you know, wear the yoga pants and the, uh I don't know what you want to call it, the uh, the sports bra, but not? Like a longer one, basically?<sup>28</sup> Um. Or you know, you'd see like, random like, T-shirts, like Budweiser, or whatever else on it. It was just a, a mixture of things that people would wear, and then they finally put in a policy of, transition to a more formal Air Force [PT] uniform.

-Interviewee 6

Any inclination to dismiss this as the antics of someone decidedly not a model soldier was squashed by both the impressively meticulous behavior otherwise described by the interviewee, and the fact that these rebellions-in-conformity were not limited to any one interviewee. In a rather different case, a participant who had served in the Army National Guard described how, during his deployment to Iraq, one person "had to be ordered to cut his toenails, and he'd refuse. 'They're my toenails and I'll wear them

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<sup>28</sup> Probably racer-back athletic-wear tank tops with a built in shelf bra.

like I want, there's no regulation about toenails!' he said... When he wasn't wearing socks it could be seen that they grew at odd angles, because, you know, they're crammed into boots." While the Army manual does exhort service-members to practice good hygiene daily, this service-member clung like a barnacle to the fact that it didn't specifically say he was required to do that one thing even though it had to have been terribly uncomfortable. In a more understandable example, an interviewee reported that he kept his hair just at the edge of the regulated length limit, and cut his hair every two days in order to maintain it always just at that line. It was important enough to him to expend that much effort, or that much money; it seems as though many service-members needed these little individualisms to bleed off some of the pressure and strain of constant conformity to group identity at the expense of individual identity.

One interviewee related the following humorous story, in which he found a "culturally acceptable" method of relief:

If you show up at a soiree, and the RI National Guard typically had two of them in a year, one was the Sergeant Major's Ball, which was for the senior enlisted and the officers were invited, and that was a big to do, usually at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet or Twin Oaks and we would show up and it was a biggie thing out and we would dress to the nines. We would have our [dress] blues on, the tuxedo of uniforms.... The background color of my rank is orange, the color of the signal corps, so our rank is trimmed in orange, and I'd be surrounded by artillery people wearing their red. Their nickname is red leg, because in the nineteenth century their dress uniform had a red stripe running down the side, to show *they're artillery* and you're not. [snicker] Well, they got cocky. One of the non-strictly-uniform [things], you are supposed to be wearing your [standard] white suspenders underneath. But they would be wearing their *red* suspenders and get all cocky about it: "Ahh, yeah, we've got our red suspenders!" And everybody smiled and said, "Haha, they've got their red suspenders." Well, me as the communications officer surrounded by them, I work for them, but, uh, there's a certain bravado

that says you can do whatever you want and get away with it by being outrageous, points for being outrageous. So [wife's name] got some orange fabric and made me orange suspenders, for signal orange. It's not regulation, but neither are the red. So when they would come up to me and be like, "Ha ha, I'm wearing my red," I would whip these out and go "I'm wearing *orange*, haaahaaaaa!" And they were like, "Get out, really?" So I got bravado points for being a wise buy but in a fun, culturally acceptable way. Against regulation, but we did it anyway, and that's the culture of the artillery. [...] So the artillery took it a step further and wore red socks. So [wife name] went and found me some orange socks. [laughter] Like get out, really? And I was so tired of being surrounded and getting all of this, this artillery stuff, that one military ball, I showed up with my orange suspenders, orange socks, and when nobody was looking? I put on an orange bow tie.

*[researcher bursts out laughing]*

And I turned around and they were all like, "*What?!!*" The commander saw it and he said "That's *great!* Get out on the dance floor and show everybody!" [laughter]

*[laugh] so this was not regulation but clearly supported?*

Oh yeah! [laugh]

-Interviewee 2

Part of the acceptability of this "rebellion" was surely the way it was rooted in – and a commentary on— group identity. If he had worn orange suspenders, socks, and bow tie because he simply liked orange, it would have been completely unacceptable. However, because it was linked with pride in his particular military profession, the signal corps, and congruent to a longstanding equivalent tacit exception rooted in old traditions, it was considered humorous and permissible.

A second attitude detected in interviews was that of detachment from uniform design and policy. Former members of the RI National Guard didn't feel any connection

to or influence over these processes, though several mentioned the nearby presence of the Army and Navy uniform research centers in Natick, MA. Reactions to this perceived disconnection from the process included shoulder-shrugging resignation, irritation, and resentment. “But that wasn’t my decision to make,” was frequently added after a complaint about a particular policy or design change, manifesting the resignation. One complaint was,

Later uniforms did away with the sleeve rolling. It's one of the things that the average soldier missed a *lot*... That came directly with the change from the BDU uniform, battle dress uniform, to the ACU, Army combat uniform, which is the greenish gray digital... because of the pockets on the sleeves and on the arms, and you couldn't roll them for duty use.

*And you didn't find it more beneficial to have those pockets there?*

The upper arm pockets were useful. If you were in an administrative situation, the sleeve pen pockets were useful, but they, ah, again, this was thought up by one team that did one job and was never thought it out for anyone else's job, and I knew a few people, where, there haven't been any serious ones that i know of, but they have been stabbed by pens.

-Interviewee 11

This service-member clearly felt that uniform designers were too disconnected from the actual, day-to-day needs of military service-members. Another complaint stemmed from a perceived violation of the adage, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

This [Class B] shirt, not only did we have to buy that as we changed our shape and such, we had to change it as fashion changed.

*How were they different?*

There's a couple of things. The, ah, collars were different in the '80s and early '90s, and by the time you got to around 9/11, they decided to change it such that there was a pleat running down the center of the two breast pockets. And all we know that ever caused was that now all our old shirts were — mostly, we had to go out and buy new shirts. So there was no actual practical reason for that.

*So, ah, it was changed probably just for aesthetic reasons?*

Uhm, probably, or it might mean that some Congressman got a pork barrel cut saying "We'll have one of the factories in your state get, ah, get the contract for millions of new shirts, and there's jobs everywhere!"

-Interviewee 2

This service-member was clearly not happy about having to purchase new uniforms, and had a fairly cynical attitude towards the change. He implied that if a uniform had changed for practical reasons, he would have accepted the change, but since the only discernible potential reasons were keeping up with fashions or pork-barrel politics, he resented the expense.

Another service-member was placed sufficiently highly in the Air Force National Guard to receive reports about tests of new uniform designs, but still expressed disconnection from the process: "They test uniforms for like two years before they put them out. I'd read the reports." "Hmm. Did you ever participate in any of the testing?" "No. I don't know *where* they get those people," he said, shaking his head and making a face. Online news articles talking about military uniform design changes or regulation

will often reference focus groups,<sup>29</sup> but even those who receive copies of reports of the same have little knowledge of how the research was conducted or how participants were recruited for the testing.

Another service-member went out of his way to call attention to and emphasize the isolation he felt from the process:

*Ok, so, anything else you can think of that you would like to say while the recorder is still going?*

I know uh, a lot of the equipment and uniform and everyday sustainment sort of things come out of soldier systems over at, uh the labs at Natick, MA. It just would have been nice if they had asked us a few things prior to that.

*Prior to one of the changes?*

Prior to *any* of the changes. Uhm. The uh, the new PT [uniforms] for example, not reflective, all black, black jacket, black T-shirt black shorts black pants, which as you can imagine is going to be a *lot* of fun in the direct sun in the desert... it's going to be unpleasant at best and, and it's a change that exactly no soldier's asked for.

*I see.*

We were cool with it before. Nobody asked me anything.

-Interviewee 11

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<sup>29</sup> Within two days of the issue of afore-discussed controversial and quickly rescinded hairstyle rules for female Army service-members, the Army very defensively pointed out that the "Army's new hair rules, which ban a number of styles popular among black women, were approved only after surveying hundreds of senior enlisted female soldiers as part of a focus group led by a female sergeant major," (Tan 2014).

The consistent descriptors chosen by interviewees point to patterns of value and symbolism in RI National Guard uniform practices. Positive terms indicated a desire for military service-members to project an image of orderliness, discipline, and respect for hierarchy as well as an air of efficiency, confidence, and competence. The emphasis on highly starched, sharply creased uniforms in the past may have contributed to the much more casual positive descriptor “sharp,” while more abstract implications of organization and order derived from “squared away.” Negative terms were linked to disorderliness and criminal violence, or to frivolous, disorderly individualism in appearance.

## **Dichotomies**

The researcher perceived several major dichotomies in the ways participants described their experiences. Foremost among them was that of the garrison environment vs. the combat environment, which interrelated with the secondary dichotomies of officers vs. enlisted and office work vs. field work.<sup>30</sup> Tertiary dichotomies included active duty vs. National Guard, basic training vs. “real” service, and aesthetics vs. functionality.

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<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this paper, “combat environment” is considered a setting in which service-members generally expected to come under attack. Official military definitions are much less straightforward.

All of these dichotomies extend deeply into the military experiences described to the researcher, far beyond the uniform dress and appearance practices into most facets of military life and culture—except, perhaps, aesthetics vs. functionality. For non-dress aspects of military life, aesthetics didn't seem to be a consideration at all. If the interviews had been more broadly based in RI National Guard culture in general, it is possible that aesthetics would have arisen as an aspect of design or practice in other areas. Nothing in the interviews gathered for this study suggested this, however.

Understanding the nature of these dichotomies is critical for understanding how the “military service-member” subject position structures their use of dress. Civilians, the conceptual opposite of military service-members, operate with much different parameters and priorities... and yet, several service-members related experiences that revealed that the lines between civilian and soldier, or garrison environments and combat situations, can be less clear-cut than they initially seem.

### Garrison vs. Combat

In a garrison environment, military service is rendered on an established base where the National Guard service-member is also usually living for the duration of that training exercise, activation or deployment.<sup>31</sup> Many officers are usually present, the scrutiny is close, and the standards are high. The service-member is much more likely to

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<sup>31</sup> Active duty service-members also spend most of their work time in a garrison environment. They may live in on-post barracks, or, if they have families, in “normal” single-family housing either on-base or off-post. Base-specific regulations often require higher ranking service-members to obtain their own off-base housing and/or that the lowest ranking members live on-post unless they have families and no family-style housing is available.



interact with the civilian public or with other military units in a garrison environment than while in combat. Combat zones, where service-members expected to encounter active and violent opposition, were accompanied by very different expectations toward dress and appearance.

Every interviewee who had served in both combat zones and garrison environments related experiences that underscored a sharp division between the two, even if not all participants used the same specific terms. Whether “on post,” “in a war,” “in the field,” “stateside,” or what have you, they all referenced congruent experiences. In a garrison environment, interviewees agreed that dress and appearance standards were comparatively higher. Boots were expected to be even shinier, uniforms crisper, and hair neater than when reporting for drill weekend at the home base. Service-members were expected to alter their practices in ways that privileged aesthetics and looking “professional” over practical matters:

You see, when you’re in garrison, you’re not allowed to have anything in your pockets. You can’t use them. But when you’re not in garrison, and you’re out in the field, pockets. You need pockets and you store everything in your pockets. Like if I was on a deployment and we’d been out on the road for a couple days you would, I wish you could see the amount of stuff I had in my pockets. I could empty out my pockets and fill this [coffee table] with stuff. You know?

-Interviewee 7

At certain times you knew the higher ups were coming, just to look at you, and they would, anything from like a cat or a dog hair on your uniform, to just a stray... whatever, a hair or lint ball or whatever, they would pick up on it. [...] I spent hours every day, morning or night, every chance I could, because—break time, you would try to take the mud off your boots. They would call it policing, we would call it policing because

we'd check each other's uniforms. You're always tucking something in, kind of just fiddling with it to get it a little bit better.

-Interviewee 8

Maintaining the ideal appearance expected in a garrison environment required a substantial continuous investment of time and effort. One interviewee described the procedure he followed to maintain his uniform:

It would be machine washed and dried. Then I would — it's actually a process. I would then take them out of the dryer, spray them completely wet with the starch, hang them on the line, come back [when they were dry], apply another coat, soaking them once again with starch. While they were still damp, I would go through the process of ironing them, and as uh one side would dry, I would spray it again then do the other side and dry it. They would get like almost this crust on them. Super thick, it was almost like cardboard. You had to, like, punch your legs through them, and your arms... polishing the boots, back in the day when I first came into the military, we would have to make sure they were highly spit shined and ah, I would spend an hour a night basically doing my uniform, just to make it look good before, before shift, so, yeah... work a 12 hour day and then after doing PT for another hour or two, um, go home and do all that stuff.

-Interviewee 6

Not all service-members put in this amount of effort — not even all MPs/security forces — but some of this definitely related to the law enforcement occupation that many of the interviewees held. All who had been in law enforcement or assigned to an MP unit spoke of the expectation that they would hold themselves to a higher appearance standard than “regular” or “normal” service-members, whether or not they actually did.

This was particularly pronounced when sent to a base other than their home base to perform law enforcement duties. As noted earlier, many felt it would be hypocritical to cite or arrest someone while they themselves were “out of reg” or sloppy or casual looking in any way (or, at least, because that’s what their superiors explained to them). A former member of the Air National Guard security force emphasized: “We’re the first people people see at the gate, we’re the first people they call if there’s trouble, so we kind of need to look a step above the rest.”

Another factor more pronounced when away from one’s home base was the majority presence of active duty soldiers and airmen on the base. Many “traditional” guard members (i.e., not working full time for the military) only wore the uniform once a month on drill weekend and for their annual two-week training exercise, whereas most active duty members wear it daily<sup>32</sup>. At a minimum, dressing “properly” may have been more intuitive for them than for infrequent wearers. “Ok, fine, then if you go into the active duty military, it is kind of continually reinforced, but in the RI National Guard [not as much]...” acknowledged one interviewee. Another stated:

Nobody ever questioned our sneakers [for wear with physical training uniforms]. But then again, we were in the Guard; active duty’s completely different. So, I mean, like, we went out, we wore our uniforms like we were supposed to, but nobody really like... nobody really gave anybody any crap over their sneakers. The only time they would really get into it was when we were working on an active duty post. We made sure that we had strictly the uniform.  
-Interviewee 7

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<sup>32</sup> Not all National Guard members were part time. Three of the interviewees had worked for the National Guard full time for 30+ years and had never had a non-military career. They wore the uniform daily for work.

Some interviewees felt that it went beyond this, and that active duty troops had a tendency to look down on them; some were naturally a bit defensive about this perception, insisting there was no visible way to tell National Guard from active duty unless, perhaps, you recognized a unit crest as belonging to a National Guard unit. Because this study did not encompass seeking active duty personnel's opinions of National Guard service-members, it is impossible to conclusively, objectively state that this was happening, but it is clear that at least some of the sample group perceived and experienced this.

Perhaps because of this, sometimes National Guard groups would pick up practices attributed to the active duty forces:

Regulations do not *require* that you have your ribbons — what we call the fruit salad — on one side... however, in the RI National Guard, they thought it behooves you to show that. Ah, that started at the RI military academy down at Camp Barnum. They started doing that because they heard that was something that the active component did.

*Is that actually something they did?*

Well, certain people did. The training schools did, because they thought it looked more hooah-hooah:<sup>33</sup> “Look at all the bright colors on my uniform!” And because it looked all hooah-hooah with all the bright colors on the uniform, people thought, “Ooh, I wanna do that too, so I can look shiny,” and it caught on, and because the RI military academy

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<sup>33</sup> Hua/hooah/huah is a term of contested origin with no singularly agreed upon definition, used by the contemporary US Army as a generally positive, yet sometimes mocking term. It's similar to, but not quite the same as, the terms “high speed” or “gung-ho” in many contexts; as a response to a question, it is affirmative. As difficult as it can be to document unofficial military slang, Wikipedia contains a fairly well-referenced summary that is congruent with the interviewees' usage of the term at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hooah>.

did it, Camp Barnum, the headquarters got a hold of that and said, “Ooh, I wanna wear my bright shiny ribbons, too,” and they mandated it as a local thing to do.

-Interviewee 2

Emphasis on uniformity was more pronounced in garrison environments. It would be unseemly for one to randomly choose to wear their ribbons while the rest followed the norm, as it would be for just one or two members to not wear them. Mandating it created uniformity. When working in a garrison environment, the “uniform of the day” would precisely describe not just which uniform was to be worn by all (i.e., PT, work, or dress uniform), but also what version of that uniform would be worn what optional or protective items could be worn.

Exactly how the “uniform of the day” was conveyed is not entirely clear and may have varied. One interviewee who had served in the Air Force National Guard described how, in basic training, the “uniform of the day” would be announced—verbally, it was implied — the evening before, but drill sergeants would frequently show up in the morning in a different one than specified, causing all of the trainees to have to run back to their bunks and change as quickly as possible into that same uniform; an interviewee who had served in the Army National Guard confirmed that this was common in basic training for the Army as well. One participant noted that he had been required to conduct morning PT in shorts in 40° Fahrenheit weather, because that was the uniform that had been prescribed. Another recalled the announcement happening at “first

formation... but you had to be in uniform for first formation, so..." one may have had to guess for the first formation of the day.

If it was a very warm day and the dress uniform jacket was stifling, no one could remove it until the person in charge gave permission; similarly, in a work uniform, groups could be expected to either all leave their sleeves down or all roll them up.<sup>34</sup> Details that civilians would likely not even notice were subject to scrutiny, such as gig lines, precise placement of a cap on the head, or whether service-members started lacing their boots above the eyelets or underneath the eyelets:

You had to wear [the garrison cap] at a certain angle. You couldn't wear it flipped up like a gangster, or too far down to cover your eyes. It had to be so many inches above the eyes.

*Did anybody actually go around with a ruler?*

Not with a ruler, but you could tell. Everybody learned to wear it the same way eventually... We got so good at putting those on that we could just do it, didn't even think about it, you would just put it on. I mean if you had 50 guys lined up, and you just told them, 'Put on your hats,' within half a second they'd all have them on, all lined up perfectly.

-Interviewee 9

*So there was a correct and incorrect way to lace your boots?*

It wasn't that, it was that... we got to choose, either you're all going to do it this way or we're all going to do it that way. Whatever [is chosen] is fine as long as you all look the same.

-Interviewee 3

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<sup>34</sup> On this last point, several interviewees acknowledged this standard, but noted that in practice, especially when doing manual labor in uniform, a mix of wearing styles according to the comfort of the individual would often be accepted. One service-member indicated that she recalled this being put in to practice after basic training, even for a formation. Individual officers or NCOs in charge still make an issue of it if they so chose.

Visual uniformity at the unit level was emphasized, and sometimes this principle could be manipulated to allow for exceptions, so long as everyone in the group differed from standard practice in the same way. In one example given by a former member of the Army National Guard, who was on a major active duty base receiving preparatory training before shipping out:

So, the first day of my first deployment, my RI National Guard unit... had an earlier company formation before the greater [multi-company] training formation. And naturally being a RI MP company we sent people on a coffee run in between those times. In fairly short order the scouting party came back with coffee for everybody... We were called to attention... to move out as a training unit, which is to say, you know, in formation, marching, because you have to march when you're moving more three or four people at a time in a military environment. Have to be organized, also have to be uniform... The NCO in charge of our unit at the time was a master sergeant, who was pulled off by one of the... staff sergeants working for the company training us while we were at our mob<sup>35</sup> site. And our master sergeant was told that we had to get rid of all of our coffees, because we were out of uniform in having them<sup>36</sup>. After a little bit of back and forth between those two, our company commander arrived on scene and became involved. The staff sergeant continued to insist that we had to get rid of our coffees because it was out of uniform and the captain countered, "Oh? How is it out of uniform? Everybody's got one." Which was true, so we were essentially allowed to keep our coffees.

-Interviewee 12

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<sup>35</sup> Pronounced with a long O sound; short for "mobilization"

<sup>36</sup> Walking while eating or drinking while on duty is prohibited under both Air Force Instruction 36-2903 2.13.7.3. (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014, 16) and Army Regulation 670-1 3-6 a. (2) (d) (US Dept. of the Army 2014a, 13). The Air Force regulation notes, "Exception: Beverages may be authorized during wear of PT uniform and commanders may authorize food and/or beverage consumption during special functions." Similar language was not found in the Army publication, but comparable authority is implicit.

This anecdote illustrates both commanders' general authority to waive or alternatively interpret certain requirements and the sort of friction that could arise between National Guard service-members who may have felt that such customs were frivolous formalities, and active duty service-members who were accustomed to strict adherence to written regulations borne of constant scrutiny and enforcement.

All of these stories point towards an implicit expectation that looking good, professional and soldierly is one of the most important jobs of the National Guard service-member in a garrison environment. Military service-members are expected to maintain an image that leaves civilians with the impression of an efficient, skilled, and orderly group working together for a common patriotic cause: the defense of America. "The American public and its elected representatives draw certain conclusions on military effectiveness based on the image Airmen present," the Air Force uniform manual states very bluntly (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014, 9) and the conclusion that the military wants the public and Congress to come to is that it is well-protected by highly-trained professionals who take pride in their military service.

Going back to Joseph (1986, 1-9), the uniform items themselves function as authenticating emblems, simple, direct, signals of military membership, but the ways in which the uniform is ideally maintained and worn—shining boots, painstakingly pressed and possibly starched shirts and pants, insignia carefully attached at the regulation fractions of an inch from reference points on the garments—are what function as visual symbols of the desired values of discipline and efficiency. Grooming practices such as male service-members as always appearing clean-shaven with haircuts short enough that



even the most conservative viewer could not read their haircut as frivolous or effeminate, or female service-members keeping long hair pulled up and back in tight, severe buns, are part of the same symbolic communication. Uniformity in appearance functions as a symbol of subordinating individual desires and preference to the greater common good.

In a combat environment, however, smaller groups of people are often required to function independently of each other in undertaking various missions. Participants noted that they spent days or even months away from their main group while deployed to war zones. Oversight is necessarily much more distant. As one insightful interviewee put it:

Combat expects reliance on training (and therefore on self), where garrison expects reliance on micromanagement, kind of like how brand new privates can't do anything without being told to. Garrison environment is basically the military vision of what normal, home, civilian (even civilized) life should look like—soldier's personal homes [on base] can be inspected for cleanliness by commanders, non-military spouses expected to participate in military [occasions]. Expectations in a combat environment aren't exactly lesser, so much as they are fewer, because extraneous elements such as family, private space, and personal time are meant to exist only theoretically, if at all.

-Interviewee 12

Accordingly, uniform dress and appearance practices in combat environments described by participants varied notably from practices in garrison environments. One interviewee explained:

I went from being somebody that had a meticulous uniform at all times to somebody that probably shaved, I guess. I had to be told to shave. I was told to get haircuts, and uh, uniforms were worn until somebody complained that it was too nasty. Um, I guess I really went the other way with it. I'm gonna — I'm here to do my job. I don't care about other things. The one thing I kept clean was my weapon, because to me that was what was important. So I went from realizing its important in garrison — looking nice, looking better than the rest, knowing the job, which was one of the things I [prided] myself on — to actually focusing more attention on my job and the safety of my men and women, that served with me, so that was my primary focus.

-Interviewee 6

This interviewee was not someone that higher-ups would have considered “a discipline problem.” This is the same service member who melted clear fishing line into the creases of his uniform for a permanent perfect look, who was frequently praised for his flawless uniform, and who described his hour or two of daily uniform maintenance. Another interviewee said very bluntly, “That was still a war zone, so everybody, everybody was just trying not to die. So nobody cared what you looked like. Nobody cared what they looked like after a couple weeks there.” Later in the interview, he elaborated:

That [photo, Figure 6] was [taken at] the end of the deployment. If you watch the progression through the deployment, it just gets, it gets heinous because we were in an area—the area we were in wasn't with everybody. It was out in the middle of nowhere, out in the Sunni triangle, and we just, after a while we just didn't care... in this one, we had just gotten in a firefight the night before. We'd been up all night, and we had to go back and deliver a report to the command. This is in one of Saddam's palaces and I'm in this dirty, nasty, disgusting [uniform]. I mean, we were just disgusting, living in squalid conditions. I mean, as the deployment went on, uniforms just changed. I mean, we're out in Fallujah and guys have got do-rags on and going [around] in T-shirts...

-Interviewee 7



**Figure 7 Service-members taking a short break (and photo-op) in one of Saddam Hussein's abandoned palaces, 2003.**

In a combat environment, practicality might actually receive consideration over appearances:<sup>37</sup>

We were allowed to use the boonie caps. Boonie caps were fantastic. They're one of my favorite uniform items of all time. Super comfortable, protected you from the sun, lightweight so you got a little ventilation. There's, uh, one of the wins they actually had in Army [uniform] design, in my opinion... especially considering that [in] typical garrison or stateside services, you'd normally be wearing a beret, which, in the sun — it's made of wool and gets *extremely* hot, and you end up having an *awesome* tan on one side of your face that doesn't match the other side, so... I liked the boonie cap a lot better.

*Strange, they don't show that lopsided tan in the recruiting posters...*

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<sup>37</sup> This isn't always so. Recall the earlier quote wherein a service-member stated that bandanas had been proscribed as headwear by one member's brigade commander because they looked "thuggish."

No! [laughs]  
-Interviewee 6

As noted previously, more than a few interviewees experienced limited water resources. In part because of this, the garrison emphasis on a clean, neat, tidy appearance morphed almost into the opposite, with service-members implying a sort of pride in the dirt, grime, and sweat that characterized service-members' appearance in the combat environment. Being filthy, besides being an inevitable consequence of the field conditions described by many, implied that one was doing real, serious soldier work:

Usually if you wear body armor for 4-5 days in that heat, [your uniforms] would end up, uh, getting this kind of like... salt on them. They actually get kinda really stiff, from salt. Sometimes it was actually kinda nasty, because we didn't always have access to stuff to wash them with. We were limited on water, so we're not gonna use up a limited resource like the water, especially early on, in the deployment [for] laundering uniforms. It was pretty much a contest, like, to see who had the stiffest uniform top.

*I'm just going to guess some of them could stand up on their own?*

They could! [laughs] I actually have a picture somewhere, I don't know what happened to it...

*[laughs] Well if you ever find that picture, please do send it to me!*<sup>38</sup>

-Interviewee 6

In a combat environment, the hyper-uniformity idealized in the garrison environment simply went out the window. This was partially due to individualized practices to suit the specific needs of each service-member in their combat roles. Figure

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<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, he did not find this photo before this writing.

7 is an excellent example, a participant's personal photograph taken just after return from a mission, edited for privacy and security: some wear black knit caps, some have bare heads, and one wears a brown neck gaiter. Many have private-purchase thigh holsters, some have knee protection, and a lone service-member in the background wears a black jacket liner<sup>39</sup> over his Desert Combat Uniform jacket.



**Figure 8 - Variety of uniform items worn by service-members during Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003-4.**

The service-member in the foreground wears a uniform in the desert pattern with a protective vest colored with woodland camouflage atop. Attached to the vest are pouches in shades of olive drab and khaki. This particular non-uniformity was not a choice on the service-members' parts, however. One interviewee explained at length:

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<sup>39</sup> Technically it is forbidden to wear the removable liner to the winter jacket alone like this, but it was common in such environments.

During the initial surge<sup>40</sup> they didn't have enough equipment to go around, so what happened was, they just gave us whatever they could. That uniform that I'm wearing is actually two sizes too big for me, and I think it actually uh... yeah... no, wait, this isn't that one. One of the uniforms I got was actually a winter uniform, so it was just, like, big, bulky, heavy, and in the summer it was really hot. The thing was the National Guard guys didn't get any priority at all. During the beginning of the invasion, they didn't have enough equipment, so they just gave us whatever they had... we didn't even get any [body armor] plates until halfway through the deployment, so it was just a vest. Actually, the majority of the active duty guys all had vests with plates, and we didn't. We didn't have anything, uh, in fact we went through our first couple firefights that we had with no plates. So we were, we were uh, working it old school. And uh, eventually I believe Jack Reed, stood up in front of Congress and flipped out<sup>41</sup> because ah you know we were, were in direct combat and ah, we didn't have any of the equipment that active duty guys had<sup>42</sup>. We had plenty of ammo, food was limited, um, everything was ill-fitting, didn't really work all that well, and uh, but we made do with what we had.

-Interviewee 7

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<sup>40</sup> In 2003, at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

<sup>41</sup> Probably in reference to Sen. Reed's reaction to the testimony that led to this statement from 2006, found at <http://www.reed.senate.gov/news/releases/reed-statement-on-pentagon-study-on-body-armor>: "It is deeply troubling that lives could have been saved by providing extra body armor to our soldiers. Our troops not only deserve the best equipment available, but they have a right to receive this equipment in a timely manner. I am pleased that the Pentagon is beginning to take the right steps to provide increased body armor to our troops fighting overseas. This necessary step is overdue, but I am hopeful it will save many lives."

<sup>42</sup> Multiple interviewees attributed this relative lack of equipment to budget shortfalls, especially as compared to active duty budgets. One reported that until 9/11 happened, National Guard units were never given the budget necessary for prescription eyeglass inserts for gas masks, meaning that in training exercises they would have to choose between being able to see and not getting "gassed."



**Figure 9 - Another service-member wearing gear in a variety of patterns and colors, 2003-4.<sup>43</sup>**

Whereas a neat, orderly, *uniform* appearance was used to symbolize the subordination of individual preference to the group ideal in garrison environments, in combat, it was nearly the opposite. Anecdotes from interviewees' combat experiences implied that considerations of personal appearance were largely viewed as frivolous vanities in this environment, and instead, service-members' dusty, dirty look was transformed into a symbol of selfless service to the country:

*So I imagine even if you wanted to it would have been next to impossible to maintain usual appearance standards?*

Oh yeah, I mean no way. No way.

*So things like shaving and maintaining haircuts, was that... doable?*

"Ah well, I mean, a couple of the guys brought clippers, so we'd just, like, shave our heads<sup>44</sup>, but nobody had a fancy haircut. People's sideburns

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<sup>43</sup> Why the puppy? A local stray dog living in a nearby sand dune would bring her pups to the MPs every day, seemingly just so they could play together.

<sup>44</sup> Except, probably, for female service-members, who are specifically banned from shaving their heads and must maintain a minimum hair length. While standards were relaxed in combat, it is unlikely that this would have been acceptable, though realistically she would have just been verbally reprimanded and told to grow it back out.

grew out, people grew their sideburns long on the sides just to, ah, just to screw around, and then... I mean, I think when we were out in Habbaniyah, I don't even remember taking a shower while we were out there, honestly. I think the whole time we were out there I didn't take a shower once, or bathed, or whatever. We had like wet wipes, we'd like wipe down with wet wipes maybe every once in a while, that's if anybody had any."

-Interviewee 7

This all can be tied back in to Joseph's (1986, 86, 101) assertion that while an unkempt appearance may be an expression of low morale or disrespect for the hierarchy of command in many situations, it can also be its own form of esprit d'corps, especially for the lower enlisted service members. Here is that observation, manifested in interviewees' descriptions. They are still human, though, and did modify—or not—their appearance somewhat according to their own desires at times. Hairstyles requiring more than absolute minimal maintenance are dismissed as "fancy" but in the same breath, the interviewee notes that sideburns were grown out in violation of regulation "just to screw around." Another participant described how, during Desert Storm, he traded his black boots to an Egyptian for brown combat boots. When asked why, he responded, "I don't know, I guess I just wanted brown boots."

Aspects of dress considered important and unimportant can give a revealing look at the altered priorities in a combat situation.

You didn't want to spend 200 bucks of your own money on [better boots than those issued by the military]. Now, you gotta, remember I was an enlisted, and not making an entirely whole heck of a lot of money. You know, expenditures on little comforts like boots, I'd rather spend it on



gear that I know will help me defeat my enemy, and, uh, boots are not going to be one of them. [...] That picture is me, sitting on Saddam Hussein's throne<sup>45</sup>. Actually, that's a perfect example of — if you notice in that picture, there's a holster that's on my leg. That, I purchased myself. They issued us a holster that actually goes on the hip, and it was not — you couldn't use it there. It was impossible. It'd get caught on everything, knock things over, gun would come out, so you had to use this issued lanyard — which was also *awful* — on the uh on the weapon to, uh, tether it, to the, uh, to like a belt or a piece of equipment that gets attached to you. It was totally uncomfortable. So I went to the uh, this holster, which I believe I spent about 150 bucks for, a drop holster which attaches to the thigh, uh, actually one of the best things I ever purchased, it was a, a really big help.

-Interviewee 6



**Figure 10 The above-mentioned photo of a service-member on Hussein's throne, wearing a privately purchased thigh holster.**

Better boots are dismissed as an overly expensive “little comfort,” though foot injuries are common for military service-members on deployments, especially among

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<sup>45</sup> As part of confidentiality measures, participants' photos were edited to obscure identity, then input to Google's search-by-image feature to make sure the altered image would not pull up the original image and so be connectable to an individual service-member. Upon searching for the image in Figure 4, the original did not come up, but over a dozen other service-members' photos in the same uniform on the same throne did, along with a link to the Wikipedia entry for the palace which had housed said throne. It is apparently fairly representative of its type and nearly a genre unto itself.

infantry, but a better holster is worth nearly the same expense and considered a need.

The service-member mentally linked both the gun (the only thing he kept clean) and the holster to defeat of the enemy, but *not* the boots.

Some solutions were more do-it-yourself. On-site improvisation characterized many of the dress and appearance practices during service in combat zones. As noted earlier, service-members improvised bandanas from cloths meant to be used as slings for field injuries, until it was forbidden. Another service-member was particularly proactive with field modifications to his dress, and reported all of the following improvisations:

One of the issues that we had was, was the pockets on the, here, on the front, they were inaccessible because of the vest. So what a lot of us guys did on our patrol uniforms, we took the pockets off of the front of the uniforms and put them on the shoulders. Which is a reason why I think they changed the uniforms to have pockets on the shoulders... everyone had a field uniform which ended up being modified.

See that bulge right there? I made that, that was a, ah, dump pouch, but I used a [worn-out] pair of pants and I put a bottom on it and made a giant dump pouch out of it, because they didn't have enough of them, so I made one. So I could put extra rounds or my empty magazines into it.

A lot of the guys cut the fingers off some of their gloves because it made it easier. Some guys like the feel of their finger on the trigger, a more tactile response, but they still needed protection on their palms, because they'd get in the dirt a lot, so some guys cut them off. I think I did after a while and then I stopped, I just stopped wearing gloves.

Especially for us guys who were working in small groups out in the middle of nowhere, I think they need to incorporate some sort of escape and evasion kit... I ended up, ah, modifying a belt, and I had a razorblade in the back that was covered, that I could uncover in case I got zip-tied, for capture. I had a, uh, right inside the belt I cut down the side of the belt so that way I could put a silk map in of the area that we were in.

-Former Army National Guard service-member

The lack of pockets, or of helpfully-placed and usefully-sized pockets, came up in nearly every interview. Here, the interviewee reveals that they frequently improvised and modified their way around this and similar issues, and the last example, in particular, shows how the above service-member effectively reconstituted pieces of dress into tools that could specifically be used to defeat the enemy—and survive!—by facilitating escape from captivity and navigation back to an area controlled by friendly forces. This ingenuity and proactive behaviour did not, however, necessarily equate to slavish adherence to regulation:

“Technically, I guess, by the letter of the law, yeah, nobody was [supposed to wear civilian clothes at any time, even off-duty], but once we got off patrol, nobody’s in uniform anymore. Everybody’d put on civvies. I had a pair of ah, those comfy fleece pajama pants, I put those on. I had a pair of ‘combat slippers’ I called them; they’re a pair of, ah, Iraqi flip flops that I wore, and I had those and flannels and a T-shirt on and that was it. Nobody really—I mean, maybe the active duty guys did that stuff a lot more, because I’d see them sporting around in their PT uniforms, and that was like their relaxed clothes, but not us. We’d just, the minute we got the uniform off, and a lot of us, we’d have some like civilian clothes with us so we just, we just wore that stuff. I mean, there was no need where we were; we weren’t in Baghdad to go marching around in our uniforms all the time. We were just in a tent. We... weren’t on a base, we had our own little compound, and guys were walking around in their boxer shorts and that’s about it.”

“The more at war or in the field you are, the more liberty you have with your uniform,” stated another service-member, touching on a complicated truth: as much as

garrison vs. combat is a dichotomy, it isn't always black and white. Those who were sent to Iraq in 2003 were "more at war" than those who were sent a second time in 2008; a service-member deployed to this theater in 2008 indicated that no one would have even brought civilian clothes with them.

Depending on where a service-member was sent, they may have taken fire frequently, or only occasionally. One group might patrol a relatively secure area near an established base, but still find themselves the target of a suspected chemical weapon attack or be called out as first responders to an improvised explosive device (IED) detonation that had targeted a convoy. In the same timeframe, another group might repeatedly execute "SWAT-style" raids "kicking in doors."

Multiple interviewees had deployed together to patrol an area of Bosnia and Croatia from a US base in Hungary in the late 1990s; one noted that you could tell that she had crossed into unsafe territory, technically still a war zone, in one photo because she was under arms (carrying a firearm) and wearing a helmet. They didn't *expect* to come under fire, but it was a possibility they had to be prepared for. Service-members who weren't doing patrols at that specific time would have the duty of base security, and all had access to full laundry and bathing facilities, so they were mostly expected to maintain a garrison-level appearance, even when heading out on patrols into hazardous, contested territory.

Other dichotomies detectable in interviewees' accounts linked in and overlapped with that of garrison vs. combat as well. Office work vs. field work closely paralleled the

officer vs. enlisted dichotomy: office work often called for Class A or Class B service (dress) uniforms but field work would usually call for work or combat uniforms. Enlisted service-members go to front lines, where officers usually are expected to stay behind and command; this wasn't necessarily a clean division in practice, but it *was* a pervasive thought pattern.

One interviewee opined that while the ACU, the no-iron Army uniform that succeeded the BDU, was well-liked among "officers and office workers" because it was comfortable and low maintenance, like pajamas (and hence was nicknamed "the pajama uniform" or "the PJU," "field workers" tended to dislike it because it was not very durable, like inexpensive pajamas, and "tended to get caught on everything." Not all officers liked it, of course—recall the officer mentioned previously who ironed his ABU (Airman Battle Uniform, the Air Force equivalent of the ACU) because "it just didn't look right," and it won't be surprising that he preferred the "sharper looking" BDU.

Almost all we ever wore was BDUs. That was it... desert [pattern] was not an option. After [Operation] Desert Storm, most of the desert camouflage stuff was either turned in, or ended up at army navy [surplus] stores.... MPs, the RI military police that came back from Operation Desert Storm, they kept theirs for a while, but when it wore out they went back to the BDUs and so pretty much everybody just wore BDUs. The only people who wore Class B's or Class A's were state headquarters [personnel] who went to a nice, air conditioned or heated building every drill. The rest of us, well, I'd say we worked for a living, but the standard is officers don't work for a living. And I was an officer [by this time], so I didn't actually work for a living. But I was in a line unit, a deployable unit.

-Former member, Army National Guard

Wearing desert camouflage uniforms issued during that deployment would have served to very visibly mark the wearers as combat veterans who had gone and done “real soldier work” and thus a higher position on the ladder of military social esteem. Pride in their contribution to the war effort was probably a factor.

In an example of the blurred distinctions in actual practice, one service-member opined that some of the military’s difficulty with female service-members derived from the intersection of class, gender, and military service-member subject positions, right in the surprisingly messy center of officer and office work vs. enlisted and field work:

The thing is, I was used to having females... my mother worked for a living. She was a pediatric nurse forever. Huge family. And we grew up just knowing that [both] men and women worked, because we were just working class people. That's kind of just the way I grew up treating women: they're just workers like everybody else. However, in the RI National Guard, a lot of our officers came from white-collar workers, and families that are generic suburbanites, kind of middle class. They thought that women... we started out treating women completely equal because we were ordered to and then it was cool. I mean, you're going into an all-volunteer military, they said “All right, women are equal. That's just the way it is. You have your orders.” And we all said “Sir, yes, sir, women are equal!” and that's just the way it was. When the Reagan era came around and a wave of conservatism ran over, we kind of got the feeling from on high that we were supposed to treat them like... office secretarial, real, you know... the dumplings of America and we were like, “What? What's going on here?” The first thing we were told was that you can't swear around a female. Now an officer is different, they're supposed to be a gentleman, or a lady, and we're not supposed to swear quite so much, but we kinda did, we kept it on the down low, sorta saved it for a special occasion. But soldiers are soldiers, and soldiers swear, and when we were told no swearing around females, it bothered the men, but it bothered the women *worse*. “What? Wait a minute, what do you mean, like I can't swear like everybody else?” and they were mad. “You're not going to

swear around me, that means I'm not gonna swear around you? Well, fuck that!" [laughter] But that's what we were *told* [to not swear around them]!

-Interviewee 2

If most of the officers—implicitly mostly male, and certainly mostly male according to the military's statistics— had grown up with women who were primarily stay-at-home mothers and full-time homemakers, it makes sense that they may have had difficulty conceptualizing them as workers much the same as male service-members. Naturally, not all service-members would agree with this interviewee; additionally, some lower or working class mothers of lower enlisted service-members would not have worked outside the home and some middle and upper class mothers of officers will have had their own independent careers, and yet others may have been raised by someone other than their biological mother. However, this theory was rooted in the interviewee's personal experience and is at the very least, plausible.

These dichotomies, however messy they may be upon close inspection, do reveal the malleable symbolism of the subordination of the military service-member's personal desires and preferences in favor of the ideals of group identity and service to country. Whereas a meticulous appearance served as the symbol of this in the garrison environment, in a combat situation, a dirty, slightly ragged, and decidedly rugged appearance symbolized the same. The appropriate sartorial symbol of service to country is context-dependent; a ragged or dirty appearance may not be intentional or a matter of choice, but it becomes symbolic all the same.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992)'s conceptualization of dress as inclusive of body modifications, adornments, and hand held items as well as garments (enclosures) aligned with the military conception of what dress and appearance practices include. Official regulations were in place around all of the components and practices of dress identified by these two authors. Uniforms as a subset of dress by their nature emphasize group identity and obscure individual identity, but cannot erase it completely. As seen, for example, in the interviewees' discussions of the personality traits readable in the specifics of a military "high and tight" haircut, or the ways they pushed against the limits of the code, they communicate not just the message desired by their creators, but a whole range of beliefs, actions, and attitudes of the wearer through each choice made within the confines of the regulation—or through choices that diverge from the letter or intent of the regulation.

Joseph's (1986, 1-9) assertions that clothing is both a social artifact and a form of communication were proven definitively correct upon analysis of the data from interviewees. [This was seen in the various methods of symbolizing acceptance of the group values and dedication to the mission and ideal, such as polishing boots to a mirror finish, as well as the antics of the interviewee with his custom-made signal-corps orange socks, suspenders, and bow tie. He also maintains that the signs that make up this communication all derive meaning from their context, and this, too, was supported by the data from this study, such as how, in a combat situation, former members of the RI National Guard communicated their acceptance of and commitment to the



organization's goals, ideals, and hierarchy in ways that would have been completely unacceptable in a garrison context. Dirty, worn uniform items that were already mismatched were modified and improvised to suit the situationally-dependent needs of war-veteran interviewees, and grooming regulations dropped to a very low position on their priority lists. This appearance in this context sometimes functioned as a symbol of disciplined, selfless service for the greater good of the nation and could represent rejection of frivolous, trivial personal interests in a time of war. Visual uniformity symbolized the subordination of self-interest to national interest in a garrison environment, but simply did not exist to the ideal extent in war zones. Army recruiting imagery incorporates images of soldiers covered in mud and grime participating in (simulated) combat, establishing this as an alternate or corollary ideal.

Stateside, however, the context of garrison duty constituted attributes such as shiny boots, meticulously pressed (and perhaps starched) uniforms with sharp creases, carefully maintained but eminently practical and conservative, regulation haircuts, and thin but athletic builds produced through regular training as the symbols of discipline, orderliness, and pride in service. Exhibition of these attributes indicated respect for the hierarchy and a desire for advancement; disorderly appearance in the inappropriate context was equated with disrespect for the chain of command and military ideals. Sartorial messages were not limited to black and white expressions of perfect compliance and/or complete rebellion, communicating not just the message desired by their creators, but a whole range of beliefs, actions, and attitudes of the wearer through each choice made within the confines of the regulation—or through choices that

diverged from the letter or intent of the regulation. The dress of RI National Guard service-members as reported in interviews reflected not just the group message but also the individual in such aspects of choice of hair style and private purchase holsters.

Interviewees and the military literature used internally consistent language to describe and contextualize their experiences. While the tone of most interviewees was far less formal than the official literature, peppered with colorful and often politically incorrect slang, it clearly derived from and was shaped by the language of the regulations and much of the terminology overlapped. “Sharp” as a positive descriptor of appearance didn’t appear in the formal texts, but interviewees and regulation alike emphasized a “neat, orderly, professional” appearance. Interviewees and rules disapprovingly referenced “unusual, eccentric, and un-conservative” dress that called “unnecessary attention” to the self. “Faddish” was a preferred Air Force term to denote that which was too unusual or insufficiently conservative.

A major dichotomy exposed itself in the divide between garrison and combat environments. Implicitly, regulations and attitudes emphasized a primary duty of the stateside service-member to maintain an appearance that made the American public feel well protected by dedicated and disciplined professionals. In combat, however, the military’s “real job” came to the fore, and the primary job was to “defeat the enemy.” Service-members could show their dedication by caring about dress and appearance only as necessary to render them physically capable of defeating this enemy. A neat and orderly, uniform appearance went by the wayside in a combat environment in favor of a mindset that considered dress only worthy of attention if it could, say, be modified into

an escape and evasion kit by an enterprising service-member. This was reflected in a counter-stream within recruiting imagery to the meticulously dressed and groomed heroic service member in which exaggeratedly portrayed service-members in extremely “down and dirty” positions and dress.

As clear as the patterns were, the experiences related during interviews did vary to a degree that initially surprised the researcher. In part because the military literature idealizes and emphasizes uniformity to a high degree, the expectation was that experiences would either all be fairly similar, or might vary along demographic lines such as rank, branch of service, or gender. In reality, though many of them served and/or deployed together, and a large proportion of the study sample had been military law enforcement, their stories were not homogenous. Individual leaders made differing decisions and larger units were often split off into small, independently operating groups in combat, making interviewees experiences highly variable. Participants described different standards and levels of enforcement in and out of combat situations, and had varied opinions on the different uniforms that they had worn. Perceptions rarely divided neatly according to demographic categories.

Still, regulations and policies that undermined unity and fostered divisions were apparent upon analysis of interview data. The history of the separate evolution of men’s and women’s military uniforms underscored the unequal division of roles that men and women were permitted to take on. It was plainly visible that as women were permitted more and more participation in combat, their uniforms increasingly resembled men’s uniforms. Uniforms that tried to position female service-members closer to what service

members described as “Girl Scout leaders,” genteel secretaries, and “dumplings of America” than to “real soldiers,” slowly gave way to more and more identical uniforms for men and women for working. But the design features of formal uniforms and dichotomously gender-divided grooming rules still visually define males as the unmarked “standard” category and make women readily apparent as “other.”

As previously discussed, DACOWITS, the official advocacy group for female service-members, has successfully advocated for an Army combat uniform that takes into account physical sexual differences between males and females for fit purposes, but is otherwise visually identical to the standard ACU worn by males. The wear of this uniform (the ACU-Alternate) has been approved for any gender of service-member for whom it is a better fit, and it is slowly being made available to service-members to purchase new, post by post. Other branches of the military are looking towards following suit. Analysis of the interview data supports a general desire of female service-members to have uniforms that accommodate their bodies without necessarily calling any attention to their gender.

Sometimes, rules not consciously intended to single out a specific minority group still conferred an unequal burden on certain groups of service-members. Such was the case with recent short-lived regulatory changes for female service-members’ hair that made it very difficult for Black female service-members to maintain a regulation appearance without regular harsh cosmetic treatments designed to make their hair behave more like the hair of European Americans. Hairstyles traditionally worn by people of African descent with natural hair texture were conceptualized as

“unprofessional,” in a way that may be linked with the potential subconsciously bias that leads to increased proportion of persons of color who are labeled “thuggish.” This affair affected some Black female service-members deeply and negatively, causing them to feel like they were being told they were less worthy. These regulations were quickly put up for review and revision, and altered military-wide in an attempt to heal the wound that had been caused. The military is still struggling to become more inclusive of its increasingly diverse array of service-members, but is at least attempting to modify divisive practices and see to the needs of all of its members.

Going forward, the US military could/should consider carefully examining the ways in which its dress and appearance policies and uniform designs may be creating divisions and/or imposing greater burdens on certain groups of service-members than other — or, alternately, may be used to better integrate certain groups into the military by first sartorially integrating them. As women begin to officially enter combat-centric military occupations, it may be beneficial to examine the possibility of at least allowing female service-members to cut their hair as short as males, or even permit them to shave their heads as men may. This is not a suggestion that female soldiers and airmen should or should be encouraged to “become male” or “act as masculine as possible.” Rather, it is a suggestion that the military expand its idea of what a female soldier or airman should look like in accordance with the changing roles deemed suitable for women in the military and in wider society, making it a more inclusive ideal.

Forcibly policing gender identity and visually reinforcing the division between the genders in this way may sartorially imply that females are unsuited for this work. Being

permitted the hairstyles traditionally associated with military service would allow them another way to communicate their harmonization with military values and symbolize complete belonging. Many females will probably still choose to wear their hair in longer, more distinctly feminine hairstyles, but forcing them to is probably not necessary for the maintenance of good order and discipline and a military-professional image.

Subtleties such as different types of neckties and hats with dress uniforms for males and females potentially being redesigned to be as visually similar as possible may help to signal and symbolize women's upcoming full participation in all military roles as well. As concerns the ideal, the military should consider producing public relations and recruitment material that shows service-members of mixed gender in the sort of "down and dirty" imagery seen in Figure 3. The lack of women in these images visually conveyed their exclusion from combat and implied that women did not belong there. However, choosing to show female service-members taking part in combat exercises and getting filthy would tell women who choose less traditionally feminine ways of dressing that are more practical for combat operations know that there is room for them within the ideal, that they are wanted, and that their contributions are valued.

Many future avenues of research are suggested by this study. The researcher hopes at some point to conduct a detailed examination of the processes and procedures that the military follows to develop new uniforms and policies. It is not clear to the researcher or to the former RI National Guard members interviewed how this is currently done, nor by whom precisely, and if current research methods, such as "surveying hundreds of senior enlisted female soldiers as part of a focus group led by a

female sergeant major,” as per Tan (2014), are resulting in policies that provoke divisive hurt and intense controversy upon implementation, perhaps the methodology itself needs to change.

Moving away from focus groups to other formats of data gathering should be considered, as more individualized one-on-one interviewing is more likely to result in candid, honest responses. As Sunderland and Denny (2007, 175-179) note, the focus group is distinctly performative, with participants performing for each other as well as for the focus group leader or leaders. In an organizational environment that emphasizes conformity and the subjugation of personal opinions and desires to the group ideal, the focus group format may be particularly uncondusive to service-members giving opinions they think designers and policymakers don’t want to hear, or would make them sound whiny, vain, or frivolous to their peers.

Other potential avenues of research include exploration of the historical evolution of dress and appearance policies within the military. Archives which contain prior editions of these codes are kept at several institutions, such as the Naval War College in Newport, RI, would be an invaluable resource for tracking how and when changes in policy were made and give clues to certain generational differences. Similar study of actual, real practices of individual service-members could also be conducted. Data could be generated by interviewing a broader selection of participants who served in different eras, and/or by reviewing candid and formal photographs of service-members in uniform.

Further research into how the experiences and opinions related by service-members relate to group dynamics, organizational change, and team cohesion could also be beneficial not just to the military, but to civilian organizations as well. The experiences of RI National Guard service-members pointed towards the many ways in which variations from the regulated ideal constantly occur within the US military. Their stories highlighted the intensely context-dependent nature of the symbolism of dress and appearance practices, especially the way in which acceptance of the group ideal could be communicated in near-opposite ways in garrison and combat environments.

Upon close examination, the codes themselves allow for a small amount of personally expressive leeway, to which service-members may cling fiercely in order to feel like they retain their individual identity even when prioritizing group ideals and goals far above their own. The regulations also codify different standards for different groups, and these can have a divisive effect when they are more intensely burdensome to certain groups or position them as “other.” The US military could, instead, craft policies and design uniforms whose symbolic stylistic attributes actually help to integrate these groups and individuals more completely into the military.



## **APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATED GLOSSARY**

ABU: *See Airman Battle Uniform*

Active duty: 1) The full time, “regular” armed forces 2) Periods of activation to full time service for National Guard service-members.

ACU: *See Army Combat Uniform*

ACU-A: *See Army combat uniform, alternate*

AD: *See Active duty*

AFI 36-2903: The regulations that govern “Dress and Personal Appearance of Air Force Personnel.” (US Dept. of the Air Force 2014)

Airman Battle Uniform: the basic combat uniform for the Air Force that succeeded the BDU in the mid 2000s; see Figure 11 and 13.



**Figure 111 Left: An airman wears the ABU with a patrol cap. Right: Two service-members wear the ACU in the Universal Camouflage Pattern with a patrol cap and a boonie cap. The badges and unit patch worn by the soldier on the left are worn incorrectly. Source: PEO Soldier.**

Airman: Generic noun used to indicate a member of the US Air Force, regardless of gender or whether serving in the active duty, Reserve, or National Guard component

ALICE: ALICE stands for “All-Purpose Lightweight Individual Carrying Equipment”, or a belt with suspenders to which pouches and packs of varying sizes may be attached. Smaller pouches usually go on the front or sides and a medium or large rucksack type item with or without a supportive metal frame attaches in back. While technically ALICE refers to a specific set of equipment issued by the military in the past, the term is often applied colloquially to any of this type of item, whether military issue or private purchase, much in the way someone might call any brand photocopier a Xerox.

AR 670-1: *Army Regulation 670-1, Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*, the publication containing the actual text of Army dress and appearance regulations. (US Dept. of the Army 2014a)

Army Combat Uniform: the basic work and combat uniform that succeeded the BDU in the mid-2000s. Sometimes referred to as “the PJU” because many feel it is like wearing pajamas, though opinion is divided as to whether or not that’s a good thing. See Figures 11 and 19

Army Combat Uniform, Alternate: A differently-sized but nearly identical-looking version of the standard male ACU, originally developed as a female-specific uniform, but recently put into production and authorized for wear by any service-member for whom it is a better fit.

Batman shit: derogatory colloquialism for expensive, high tech “solutions” to military problems, such as spider silk ballistic vests.

Battle Dress Uniform: the basic combat and work uniform worn by both Air Force and Army from the mid 1980s-mid 2000s. It succeeded the old khaki and olive drab uniforms; see Figure 12



**Figure 112 - Members of a unit posing for a group photo, all clad in the Army BDU.**  
Source: Interviewee

BCGs: *See birth control glasses*

BDU: *See Battle Dress Uniform*

Birth control glasses: a derogatory nickname for military-issue prescription eyeglasses, so called because they were considered so ugly no one would consent to relations with the wearer. Term is applied equally to both males and females; see Figure 13 and 14. *See also RPGs*



**Figure 113 Brown version of the "birth control glasses" or standard US military issue prescription eyeglasses. While much derided as far as looks, they have a reputation for indestructibility. Source: Rochester Optical (the manufacturer)**



**Figure 114 Air Force service-members wear the ABU; the rightmost wears black "birth control glasses" or "rape prevention glasses." Source: Department of the Air Force/Airman 1st Class George Goslin, 2011.**

Blouse: In military parlance, this can refer to a button-front collared shirt for both males and females, unlike the colloquial usage.

Boonie hat: A soft canvas hat with a circular brim, similar to what is sometimes called a fisherman hat or a bucket hat in civilian parlance; see Figure 1

Class A [uniform]: *See service uniform(s)*

Class B [uniform]: *See service uniform(s)*

Couch cushion camo: *See universal camouflage pattern*

Cunt cap: *See Garrison cap*

DACOWITS: Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services

DA PAM 670-1: *DA Pamphlet 670–1: Guide to the Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms*, a supplemental guide explaining the regulations found in AR 670-1. (Dept. of the Army 2014b)

DADT: *See Don't Ask, Don't Tell*

Disco belt: Derogatory slang for a reflective belt worn by service-members doing physical training (PT) to minimize the chance of their getting struck by a vehicle whose driver could not see them at night, but often required to be worn in the daytime as well. In 2014 the Air Force discontinued use of this item. See Figure 15.



**Figure 115 US Army soldiers doing PT in PT uniforms complete with reflective safety belt AKA disco belt. Source: <http://archive.armytimes.com/article/20140120/NEWS07/301200036/PT-belt-axed-Air-Force-should-Army-follow->**

DoD: Department of Defense

Don't Ask, Don't Tell: the colloquial term for the relaxed policy towards non-heterosexual service-members implemented in 1994 under President Clinton and repealed/superseded under President Obama in 2010, effective 2011. Recruiters and commanders were now instructed not to inquire as to sexual orientation, but service-members who admitted to or were witnessed engaging in "homosexual behavior" were still subject to involuntary separation with a bar to re-enlistment—or, in plain English, would be thrown out of the armed forces and not allowed back in.

Dress uniform(s): Uniforms worn on formal or special occasions. Encompasses "service uniforms" which may be semi-formal or formal, as well as "mess dress," which, despite the name, is the height of military formality, such that many service-members never purchase this level of uniform, excepting mid- to high-level officers.

Flat top: A hairstyle often associated with the military and specified as acceptable in military regulations. The sides and back of the head are shaved or extremely close-cropped, and the top is slightly longer, with the hair cut so that the top edge of the hair is flat and parallel to the ground rather than following the contour of the head. Females are largely banned from wearing their hair this way. *See also high and tight*





**Figure 116 - Flat top haircut. Source: <http://clipperguy.hubpages.com/hub/flat-top-hair-cuts>**

*Floral couch camo: See universal camouflage pattern*

Fruit salad: Slang, flippant but not outright derogatory for the often quite colorful collection of ribbons and medals worn on dress/service uniforms, which indicate particular achievements and tours of duty.

Garrison cap: The much-maligned cap(s) worn with service or dress uniform, which are brimless and perch precariously high atop the head; also variously referred to as the cunt cap (for its resemblance to female genitalia), the taco hat (resembles the food item, also a slang term for female genitalia), the McDonald's or fast-food hat (for its resemblance to hats worn by low status non-military service workers); see Figure 17.



**Figure 117 An Air Force garrison cap, also known as a cunt cap among other colorful names.**

Gig line: The unbroken straight line that the edge of the placket of one's uniform shirt, the edge of the belt buckle, and the edge of the pants fly are supposed to form.

Gigged: Cited over an extremely minor and superficial infraction, such as a misaligned gig line.

High and tight: A hairstyle often associated with the military and specified as acceptable in military regulations. The sides and back of the head are shaved or extremely close-cropped, and the top is slightly longer, following the contour of the head. Females are largely banned from wearing their hair this way. *See also flat top.*



**Figure 118 A Marine with a "high and tight." If the patch of longer hair/not shaved hair crept any higher up the curve of his skull, he may pass into out-of-reg territory. Cpl. Earnest J. Barnes, 2005.**

High speed: Common adjective, positive, yet slightly derisory and mocking at the same time. When used to describe a person it designated someone who was trying to be particularly efficient and gunning for promotion, and probably sharp-looking as well. When used to describe gear, it was even more likely to be slightly derisory, and generally referred to privately-purchased optional items that were deemed better or slicker than the standard-issue equivalents.

Hooah-hooah: Hua/hooah/huah is a term of contested origin with no singularly agreed upon definition, used by the contemporary US Army as a generally positive, yet sometimes mocking term. As a response to a question, it is emphatically affirmative. Doubled into its adjectival form, hooah-hooah, it's similar to, but not quite the same as, the terms "high speed" or "gung-ho" in many contexts. In April 2015, Wikipedia contained uncited listings of some of the many meanings of the word that were congruent with the interviewees' varied usage of the term; however, they were subsequently removed for being uncited. An archived copy of the April 2015 version of the article is available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hooah&oldid=658097396>

Locs: the term adopted by the Air Force in 2014 to replace "dreadlocks," and/or "matted or unkempt sections of hair," which was put forth as more correct terminology and more respectful towards the Black military community.

McDonald's cap: *See garrison cap*

Military pay grade system: Salary is a function of time in service and rank. The US military uses a three-tiered hierarchy of ranks that are abbreviated with a letter



indicating the tier and a numeral denoting position within that tier. Each branch of the service assigns its different unique ranks onto this same tier. Multiple ranks may share the same alphanumeric designation at times. For example, in the Army, Master Sergeant and First Sergeant are both E-8, and though Master Sergeants outrank First Sergeants, if they both had been in the service for the same amount of time, they would get paid the same. The lower echelons are “E” (for enlisted) with a number from 1-9. Enlisted are further divided between “lower enlisted” and “non-commissioned officers” (NCOs) who lead small to medium groups. Most E-4 ranks and all E-5 and above ranks are NCOs. The middle tier is labeled “W” for warrant officers. The Air Force discontinued use of this tier in the 1960s, and so technically only uses a two-tiered system. Warrant officer grades range from 1-5. They are generally specialists with extensive technical experience who advise the officers in matters requiring a specific background to be fully understood. Officers’ tier is designated with an “O” and are ranked from 1-10. In a time of officially declared war on another country, the special rank of O-11 is added, but these positions have not existed since WWII.

MP: military police (Army law enforcement). *See also security forces*

NCO: *See Non-commissioned officer*

Non-commissioned Officer: Enlisted service-members in leadership positions over a small to medium sized group. *See also military pay grade system*

OIF *see Operation Iraqi Freedom*

Operation Iraqi Freedom, the conflict initiated with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and declared over in 2011.

Out-of-reg: short for “out of regulation” or in violation of military policies.

Patrol cap: A hat worn with work or combat uniforms that resembles a baseball cap with a flatter top.

Physical training: mandatory group exercise aimed at enabling a unit’s members to successfully pass their branch’s Physical Fitness Exams. In some situations, service-members may be permitted to log a certain amount of time spent doing independent exercise in facilities such as the on-post gym instead of all exercising as one large group. This is more likely when a unit is split into shifts for round the clock coverage of a position or other reasons.

PT: *See physical training*

RPGs: 1) Rocket propelled grenades or, more likely in the context of this paper 2) “rape prevention goggles,” a derogatory nickname for military-issue prescription eyeglasses, so called because they were considered so ugly not even a rapist would target the wearer. Term is applied equally to both males and females. *See also BCGs.*

Security forces: Air Force law enforcement

Selected Reserve: Consists of the Reserve and National Guard forces of each branch of the military. These service-members are mostly, but not exclusively, part-time.

Service uniform(s): Semi-formal to formal uniforms. “Class A” uniforms consist of a jacket, blouse or shirt, tie, and pants or sometimes a skirt for women. “Class B” uniforms are the same minus the jacket and tie, with the option of short sleeves. See Figures 19 and 20.



**Figure 119 Versions of the Air Force Class A uniform. GOODFELLOW AIR FORCE BASE, Texas-- Students from Airman Leadership School class 14-A, Dec. 02. The students graduated Dec. 12. (U.S. Air Force photo/ Senior Airman Michael Smith)**



**Figure 20** Different version of the Army Class B uniform. The women on the left wear the tie tab.

Slag: Slang, a sloppy, careless, and/or incompetent person.

Taco hat: *See Garrison cap*

Tie tab: A bifurcated necktie worn with female dress uniforms; see Figures 19 and 20.

UCMJ: *See Universal Code of Military Justice*

Ugly couch camo: *See universal camouflage pattern*



**Figure 21** Internet meme mocking the Universal Camouflage Pattern, aka ugly couch camo, etc.

Ungrounded: Describing boot laces which did not have the free ends tucked into the top of the boots

Uniform of the day: The specified uniform and version thereof prescribed for wear on a specific day. Often, especially for full time or active duty service-members, there is a PT uniform of the day for morning exercises (e.g., the PT T-shirt and shorts, or windbreaker, T-shirt, and long pants) and a work uniform prescribed for the day. However, some service-members reported that they were permitted to wear whichever PT uniform components they preferred at the time.

Universal camouflage pattern: The camouflage developed for the ACU that was supposed to work in all environments but in practice was not very effective. Also called “ugly couch camo,” “couch cushion camo” and “floral couch camo” due to a popular mocking internet meme. See Figure 9.

Universal Code of Military Justice: a document ratified in 1950 as the laws governing all US military service-members’ conduct that standardized, codified, and superseded previous branch-specific rules of conduct.

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