Walking the Walk and Talking the Talk: Military Cadence as Normative Discourse

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Abstract
As new members enter organizations, normative discourses such as organizational stories provide a mechanism in the socialization process. Through stories new members are taught organizational values and culture, assimilated into that culture, and socialized to share in an organizational identity. The military is one such organization that must assimilate large numbers of new members simultaneously. Moreover, the interpellation must be strong and deep, as the organizational identity of “soldier” may require life-threatening risks and a willing desire to enter dangerous situations. We examine military cadences as a mechanism for calling new members to assimilate into the military organization and to assume the soldier identity. An important extension of military cadences is their nearly verbatim adoption in police training academies. The paper concludes by beginning to raise some questions regarding this practice.

Introduction
Cadence calling has a long military history and is a basic technique for teaching new soldiers some basic skills, including being able to walk or run in step with other soldiers. In addition to the primary benefit of synchronicity, we suggest that cadences also serve to initiate new members into military organizations by expressing what it means to have a soldier’s identity and by encouraging fledgling soldiers to identify themselves in compatible ways. The calling of cadence – the lyrics themselves, their repetition, and the inventiveness of creating new cadence lyrics – present one opportunity to assimilate new soldiers and to have their active cooperation in the taking on of that professional identity. Thus, cadences have a multi-functional role in military organizations. This paper examines the function of cadences by treating them as organizational text and investigating the themes that are communicated through cadence calling.

Organizational Texts
Organizational norms are communicated to new members through a variety of means, some formal and others informal. Organizational documents, such as mission statements and guidelines are clearly formal means to communicate to outsiders and insiders alike what the organization’s values and priorities are. Other modes of communication are less formal and less direct, but still function to communicate organizational norms (see Barley 1983; Hatch 1993; Schein 1990).

Stories about organizational situations or members are among the more informal mechanisms used to convey values or norms. For some scholars, stories or narratives have increasingly been used to understand organizational climates and cultures (see Martin et al. 1983; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo 1983; Boje 1991; Hummel 1991; Meyer 1995; Ross 1996). Brown (1985) found that stories can function to assist the assimilation of new organizational members. Through storytelling, initiated organizational members can explain the norms of the organization without explicitly enumerating such norms. Stories encapsulate what is important by highlighting events and situations that clarify norms without necessarily naming the norms as rules. By telling narratives, existing members can express expectations and offer normative guides to the uninitiated.

In addition to assimilating new members, stories also are useful in helping other outsiders understand the climate of an organization. Meyer suggests that “The unique values advocated in an organization can be elicited through narratives, revealing how members believe they ought to behave as participants in their unique organizational culture, and how they persuasively advocate those values through narratives” (1995, 210). While this is instrumental in bringing the uninitiated into the fold, it is also useful for those studying organizations to gain insight into the process of that initiation—that is, into how outsiders learn about and take on the values.
characteristic of the insiders. Through these stories, we can see how an organizational identity is fashioned for and by new members.

Maynard-Moody and Kelly point out that “Stories, of course, are not the only way organizational members interpret and communicate” (1991, 72), and identify argument and gossip as other mechanisms for intra-organizational communication. It becomes a difficult task to delineate what parts of “talk” are stories, per se, and which parts are gossip or other kinds of communication. We briefly touch on this below, and suggest that it is not necessarily important to draw a line in that sand. What is important is that through talk (or what we will loosely call “discursive text”) about sets of actions and characters, whether formally “stories” or not, there is an important window into the interpellation of new members into an organizational identity that ultimately serves the organization. Our interest lies in the use of cadences for interpellating new military and paramilitary workers.¹

The Function of Narratives in Organizations

Research shows that stories reveal a good deal about organizational values and how meaning is made in organizations (Boyce 1995; Pentland 1999; Oberweis and Musheno 2001). We argue that cadences fill a similar function, if they are not stories in their own right. Stories can reveal a good deal about organizational sense-making (Boyce 1995) and about the processes by which organizational meaning is produced and reproduced (Mumby 1987; Rappaport 1993). For example, in her study of an international non-profit organization, Boyce identifies “storytelling as a symbolic form by which groups and organizational members construct shared meaning” (1995, 107).

Similarly, Mumby (1987) argues that stories are a vehicle for the production and transmission of organizational ideology. Such ideology is critical for the production of social organizations because that “ideology provides a sense of what it means to be a social actor” within the organization (1987, 118, emphasis in original). Thus, it is through ideology that the organization and its members are socially constructed in the particular ways – that is, through ideology a particular consciousness emerges that allows the organization to be what it is. Importantly, this organizational ideology not only constructs the members in particular ways, but also filters members and potential members. Mumby suggests, “ideology simultaneously subjects social actors to a particular social order, and qualifies them for the roles that the reproduction of this social order demands” (1987, 117, emphasis in original). Through stories, order is created and members are instructed about their respective roles within that order. Moreover, members become distinguishable from non-members as the appropriate characteristics of “good members” are clarified. In this sense, ideology is a form of social control within organizations, defining the roles of members and setting the boundaries of approved behavior and members. Stories are a means for the sharing of that ideology.²

Stories provide one mechanism for the interpellation of organizational members (Mumby 1993). Through ideology expressed in narratives, members are called to subscribe to a social order that serves the organization. This is not to suggest that stories are a vehicle for domination. Rather, individual members must voluntarily accept the ideological message. Stories call subjects to actively participate in the order of the organization. Mumby writes, “Thus ideology functions as control through active consent rather than through passive acceptance of pre-given social formations” (1993, 119). An important feature of a story is that organizational members themselves must tell and retell the story, making that narrative their own, and calling the teller to own the values and norms that are transmitted in that story. Moreover, some stories can be dynamic, changing to suit the teller’s

¹Althusser (in Brewster, trans. 1971) argues that identities are formed through interpellation, or hailing, of subjects by ideology. There is always a moment of misrecognition where the subject takes on an identity. Althusser uses an over simplified drama between two symbolic characters to illustrate his point. A symbolic character, Ideology, calls, “Hey, you there!” and willingly, but without choice, the other symbolic character, the Subject, turns, asking “Who me?” In that recognition – that “Who me?” – the Subject acknowledges its identification by Ideology, becoming (perhaps again) the identity that the Subject is.

²For more on the communicative capacity of narrative, see Fisher (1987) or White (1987). Similarly, Rosenwald and Ochberg write, “Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life’ they are the means by which identities may be fashioned” (1992, 1). We suggest that cadences are, in part, about fashioning military identities.
purpose for that particular telling. Cadence shares this dynamicism, as the individual calling the cadence can change words, add verses or otherwise make a cadence his/her own.

Organizational stories, then, simultaneously serve a number of functions. They transmit information about the organization’s norms and ideology. They define the characteristics of “good” organizational members and filter out potential members who lack those characteristics. They interpellate or invite organizational members to actively accept and participate in reproducing organizational order.

**Cadence as Ideology Sharing**

The term “story” has been carefully defined by those interested in narrative analysis (see Abell 1984; van Dijk 1993; Ewick and Silbey 1995). Nonetheless, “there is considerable disagreement about the precise definition of narrative” (Reissman 1993, 17). Still, in the definition of “story” or “narrative” a few consistencies emerge. Stories are primarily about human actions or ideas and generally make those actions and thoughts interesting for others (van Dijk 1993). Others have argued more rigidly that stories must contain a plot with temporally sequenced events, and a finite set of characters (Abell 1984).

Manning and Cullum-Swan open the field of investigation to a more broad conception of narrative, suggesting that “narrative analysis is rather loosely formulated, almost intuitive, using terms defined by the analyst” (1994, 465). They further open the boundaries of inquiry by arguing that “all human communication is a display of signs, something of a text to be ‘read’” (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 466). We suggest that by locating military cadence somewhere on the periphery of organizational narrative, we can understand their role in interpellating new members of military organizations. While some cadences fit even the narrowest definition of “story,” others do not. We refrain from defining cadences as stories, per se, but focus on the ways that cadences serve a similar function in assimilating new organizational members. Parker Night contends that “Jody performances… reflect martial attitudes, and as symbolic action, help to induce attitude changes in initiates” (Parker Night 1990). Our concern lies with the ways that cadences, like other kinds of organizational texts, work to create and inspire a professional identity among workers, in this case soldiers.

By reading cadences as another organizational text, one that operates similarly to an organizational story, we open the possibility of examining these simple calls as a mechanism for the production of soldiers (Parker Night 1990). We argue that cadences are one locus for the interpellation of regular citizens into a military order – into a soldiering identity – in which active complicity of the newly initiated becomes imperative, a point to which we return below.

It is our belief that organizational texts, including stories and cadences, can fill a similar function with regard to the initiation of new members. Specifically, they share a set of organizational norms that express expectations about how members should behave and what values are important to members of a particular unique organization. The context of calling cadence, their content, and the creativity and flexibility of cadences make them excellent tools for the socialization of new soldiers, for the interpellation of that particular professional identity, and for performing the soldier identity within a military structure.

**Methods**

To understand the functions of cadences more completely, we take a grounded theory approach. We identified as many cadences as possible, using military websites and other related websites to gather the verses together. One of the authors (Petrocelli) has an extensive military background, and identified the most common cadences. While we would like to have an exhaustive sample of cadences, meaning we study the entire population of cadences, the very nature of cadences makes this impossible. Cadences are necessarily flexible and dynamic, making any collection inherently incomplete. We argue that this dynamicism is an important attribute that improves their ability to assimilate new members.

Our efforts to gather cadences resulted in 144 cadences and jodies. Jodies are a subset of cadences that typically involve a rhetorical device that takes the form of a character, “Jody.” Jody originated with the mythical Jody Grinder, whose appearance in U.S. military songs dates back to the 1930s (Jackson 1967; Parker Night

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3 Joan Scott (1992) makes this point quite clearly in her discussion of how humans “tell experience.”
1990). Jody is the generic non-soldier – the essential outsider – who is sometimes the nemesis of the soldier (the one who dates the girlfriends or, we suppose, the boyfriends, which soldiers have left behind, for example). Other times Jody is the one who benefits from soldiering (the “Average Joe/Jane” whose freedom is being protected, for example). Our analysis in this paper does not distinguish between the content of jodies versus other cadences, and when we refer to cadences, we are including jodies.

We read the cadences and, using a grounded theory approach, we coded them according to their content. Categories for coding emerged from our reading of the cadences, and these related to organizational values and a variety of themes relating to the work of being a soldier, often juxtaposing these to lives before military involvement or to the lives of those outside the military organization. Nearly all the cadences fit into at least one of twelve categories that included themes such as bravery and mightiness, as well as themes of killing and facing one’s own death. We discuss some of the primary themes below as they relate to the function of assimilating new members into the military organization and the soldier identity.

**Cadence as Identity Building**

One of the first important themes to emerge in the cadences is a simple, but powerful one reflecting that now the singer/caller is part of the military organization. Sometimes this happens in a very straightforward way, simply by having the group repeat their military membership. A cadence called “Who We Are” illustrates:

**Who We Are**

Everywhere we go-o, People want to know-o
Who we are-r, So we tell them:
We’re not the Navy, The deck swabbing Navy
We’re not the Army, The ground-poundin’ Army
We’re not the Marine Corps, The jar-head Marine Corps
We are the Air Force, The mighty, mighty Air Force
We are the Air Force, the high flying Air Force

In this cadence, the runners simultaneously affirm an identity as an Air Force soldier (although there are, of course, variations that identify Army, Navy, Marine, etc. soldiers) and negates memberships even in similar organizations, i.e. other branches of the military. The simultaneous self-inclusion and self-exclusion can serve to strengthen the commitment to a particular soldier identity, in this instance, the Air Force. Other cadences carry this theme more simply. For example, in a cadence called “We Are the Air Force,” the theme is simple, direct and easy to absorb:

**We Are the Air Force:**
The first to fight, the last to run,
We are the Air Force, We’re Number 1

A similar theme is available through a cadence called “I Used To.” In this cadence, new soldiers contrast their present existence to the life which preceded soldiering. By recalling aspects of the old life and contrasting old and new, the new soldier expresses difference—even from him/her former “self.” Changes in uniform/clothing, appearance, daily activities and modes of transportation are underscored. In the final stanza included below, the caller acknowledges his/her struggle to recognize the old self in the new, conceding that the new face in the mirror looks “mighty weird.”

**I Used To** (excerpts)
I used to wear my faded jeans
Now I’m wearing cammie greens
I used to drive a pickup truck
Now I pack it in my ruck

I used to spend time at the mall
Now I can climb any wall

I used to drive a Subaru
Now I’m marching through this goo

Cut my hair and shaved my beard,
Now I’m looking mighty weird.

These cadences illustrate a theme of membership. They articulate an identity, what we have called the “soldier” identity, and differentiate that identity both from its opposite, or the “non-soldier” identity, as well as from other similar but distinct identities, such as Air Force membership from Army membership. Thus, cadences communicate a group membership that is both a large distinction (from those who do share any soldiering identity), as well as a more nuanced distinction (from those who are soldiers, but of a different type). Also of note, cadences communicate this identity membership both by affirmation (“We are the Air Force” or “Now I’m wearing cammie greens”) and by negation (“We’re not the Navy” or “I used to wear my faded jeans”).

Communicating Organizational Values
Aside from the important task of communicating what a soldier identity is and how it is different from the non-soldier’s life, cadences also provide an opportunity to express organizational values to new recruits. Through the calling of cadences, new soldiers can learn far more – and more quickly – about the norms and duties of their new lives than they could through classroom instruction or reading formal policy. It is during Physical Training (PT) that catchy rhymes loaded with organizational meaning are chanted. It is a time when the trainees’ minds are focused on little else and the singsong rhythm of cadences provides an ideal focal point for the exercising mind. Thus, the delivery of the cadence makes it an ideal tool for teaching organizational norms and values. Moreover, as recruits become established in their soldiering identities, they become leaders in calling cadences—taking on the role of teacher, rather than student—and for the inventive soldier, cadences provide a vast amount of flexibility for soldiers to adapt cadences and literally make them their own. Thus, cadences provide a means of communicating to soldiers, but also a means for communication by soldiers, with the added bonus of adaptability, so that soldiers can inject themselves into the communication of the organization’s norms and values. Upon careful examination of the cadences, at least four themes emerge that communicate apparent organizational norms and values.4

1. Love of Danger
Love of danger is a major theme in the cadences. It appears as both an affirmation of thrill-seeking and as a rejection of those whose lives are not filled with danger. In the affirmative, danger is not just accepted as a part of the job, it is relished. In the untitled cadence presented below, the excitement of the life of danger is immediately clear:

4 Of course, with emergent themes there is frequently the problem of too rigidly identifying categories or trying to separate out related ideas into discreet categories. Drawing boundaries between related categories can lead to reification of the categories and/or arbitrary distinctions. Rather than struggle with such fine distinctions, we describe the broad themes and mention sub-themes where they are relevant to or help clarify the broader category. Categories were not mutually exclusive and are not intended to be understood that way. The organizational themes that emerge may support each other in the context of the holistic body of norms and values.
Walking the Walk and Talking the Talk

**Untitled**
I don’t know but I think I might
Jump from an airplane while in flight
Soldier, soldier, have you heard
I’m gonna jump from an iron bird
Up in the morning in the drizzlin’ rain
Packed my chute and boarded the plane
C-130 rollin’ down the strip
64 Rangers on a one-way trip
Mission Top Secret, destination unknown
They don’t know if they’re ever coming home.…

In this instance, the cadence identifies a subgroup of soldiers (“64 Rangers”) who will face dangers even beyond those faced by the normal soldier. These are not regular soldiers, but instead are Rangers, an elite group tasked with the most dangerous military training and missions. They address their lyrical passion for danger to their peers with less dangerous lives (“Soldier, soldier, have you heard”). Through the cadence, Rangers become accustomed to the dangers of their profession (“They don’t know if they’re ever coming home”).

Moreover, cadence can also be a vehicle to encourage soldiers to move beyond normalizing danger and embrace it. While many cadences glorify danger and affirm that part of soldiering, other cadences reinforce the organizational norm of thrill-seeking by mocking those who do not share it. That is, the love of danger is reinforced through negation. The “Chairborne Ranger,” making a play on the title “Airborne Ranger,” reveals clearly the communication of norms by converse. The norm is love of danger and the lyrics mock soldiers who are perceived to be lacking in that value.

**Chairborne Ranger**
You want to be a Chairborne Ranger
A life of leisure’s what you’re after.
You want to be a writing man
Sit around and get a tan

It’s one thirty now on the strip,
Chairborne Ranger gonna take a little trip
Stand up, lock up, shuffle to the door
To the club for lunch and home by four.

If there’s something to decide
Close your door and try to hide
And every time you get a call
You’re all tied up with racquetball

First revise the SOP
Make a change in policy
Ours is not to wonder why
It’s written in the LOI

Staffer, you can make the grade
Learn yourself an honest trade
Get the message from the source
Come and run with the Big Iron Horse
The Chairborne Ranger’s biggest adventure is merely to “shuffle to the door/To the club for lunch and home by four.” Painted as the opposite of the decisive, strong and capable soldier, the Chairborne Ranger hides from decisions and work, and seeks a life of leisure. The cadence ends with a telling call for the Chairborne Ranger to change his/her ways and join in and “run” with those who espouse the ideal organizational value – bravery and the love of excitement and danger.

2. Ferocity

A second organizational theme emphasizes ferocity, both personally and for the military unit. Ferocity is a military point of pride, a value that is necessarily espoused in an occupation that exists in a literal “us-against-them” dynamic. Yet, ferocity must be fostered; we assume that it is not nearly as ubiquitous a trait of those who enter military service as it must be for those who will enter combat. Instead ferocity must be cultured, and cadence lyrics prize ferocity at two distinct levels. Ferocious individuals are valued in their own right, and also for the ways that they contribute to the fierceness of the organizational unit overall.

The ideal ferocious colleague is a fighting machine. He is a strong and capable fighter, and he is able to continue the fight long after normal people would have been exhausted. Moreover, he is confident in his abilities and is aware of his fighting superiority. In “Monkey in a Coconut Grove,” a cadence with apparently wide popularity, the protagonist “monkey” represents just such an ideal colleague.

**Monkey in a Coconut Grove**
Up jumped a monkey from a coconut grove
Was a mean little monkey, had his fists in a glove

He lined a hundred monkeys up against the wall
Bet five bucks he could beat ‘em all.

Whipped ninety-eight til his fists turned blue
Stepped back, jumped up beat the other two.

Our fighting monkey is tough, tireless and atypical. His exceptional ability and the confidence he has about those abilities set him apart from others. His ferociousness is cause for spectacle.

A related, but contrasting theme tied to ferocity emphasizes not the individual fierceness, but that of the whole unit. There is a nearly endless stream of cadences detailing the toughness of the various branches of the military, and also of a range of subgroups within the branches (i.e., SEALs, Rangers, etc.). These are abundant and rather explicit in their meaning. However, this theme is incorporated more subtly in cadences that link the personal and organizational fierceness that new soldiers, particularly those aspiring to elite memberships, must take on. Consider the cadence excerpted below called “The Bushmaster.”

**Bushmaster (excerpts)**
Deep in the Jungle where the tall grass grows
That’s where he lives and it’s all he knows
Six foot four black, brown and green
The world’s most deadly killing machine

Refrain:
Hail, Hail, Hail the bushmaster
Always gonna get what he’s after
He’s the baddest things there is around
Pray that you never have to stare him down…. 
Walking the Walk and Talking the Talk

The bushmaster’s saga is known far and wide
Makes the mortal man wanna run and hide
Some say he’s nothing by a nasty dream
But I know he’s real, he’s a U.S. Marine

In this cadence, the protagonist is an individual. The singular pronoun “he” designates a single person who is fierce through and through, who knows no other life than as a vicious “killing machine.” However, the implication of the cadence is that this single soldier is not unique; instead, he’s any one of countless U.S. Marines. In this cadence, our protagonist is not some extraordinary soldier, but the norm for the whole unit—he’s any U.S. Marine. This cadence links individual ferocity with the organizational unit as a whole. Thus the soldier learns to be ferocious as an individual in order to multiply the intensity of the unit as a whole. Through cadences, the norm of ferocity is valued at both levels.

Moreover, three sub-themes are worthy of comment here. The idea of mightiness prevails throughout many of the cadences that idealize the ferocity of the military. Rather than attempting to delineate a clear boundary between “mighty” and “ferocious” we simply treat them as related aspects of this theme, which we have called “ferocity.” Many of the cadences, particularly those emphasizing ferocity, also repeat a theme of toughness in the sense of endurance or tenacity. Again, this theme had frequent overlap and at times merged with the notion of ferocity and so we note the sub-theme, and treat it as a part of the idea of being ferocious. Finally, a willingness to engage in fighting was glorified in the lyrics. Widely available and explicit in a variety of cadences, this theme was also treated as an element of, but not clearly distinct from, the notion of ferocity. Thus, mightiness, tenacity, and willingness to fight were clearly valued in the cadence lyrics, but have been analytically categorized as supporting ideas for the broader theme of ferocity.

3. Killing

As an extension of ferocity and closely related to it, a third theme explicitly exposes soldiers to killing. This theme is one of the two largest categories to emerge from the cadences, which is to say that more cadences reflected this theme than nearly any other theme. Moreover, cadences in this theme also appear to have some of the most variation in verse, which implies that soldiers’ creativity in producing new cadences emphasizes this theme in a more pronounced way. We return to the creation of new cadences in a later section.

**Killer Pilot**

If I was a pilot with my wings
I wouldn’t be bothered by many things
I’d fly my killing craft up high
They’ll think I’m in control of the sky

If a commie and I should meet today
I would blow that sucker right out of the way
Everyone should realize—they should know
An Air Force pilot’s always ready to go….

Although this cadence may be outdated in terms of who is at the receiving end of the death dealing, the point remains clear: the soldier is a vehicle of death to enemies and the soldiers’ tools (i.e. airplanes) support the ultimate goal of killing the enemy. Once again, this normalization to killing is required for new initiates in the same way that ferocity is required because most entering military service will not join the organization psychologically prepared for the task. Although a minority of today’s military members will actually be a part of live combat, many more will serve in units supporting those on the front lines and thus supporting the killing that is the essential task of the soldier. Soldiers, more than anyone else in any other occupation, must be prepared to face this reality in advance of its arrival. This normalization of killing is a necessary, indeed a critical part, of
assimilating new members into a fully functioning military and even of reassuring existing members and renewing their commitment to the organization, however gruesome its ultimate purpose.

Indeed, cadence is a tool for normalizing the brutal and gruesome. “Yellow Bird” was among the most common cadences uncovered in this examination, with a number of verses and variants on the verses. Consider the violence of the lyrics.

**Yellow Bird**
A yellow bird with a yellow bill
Was sitting on my window sill
I lured him in with a piece of bread
And then I smashed his little head
The doctor came to check its head
“Indeed,” he said. “The bird is dead.”

A little mouse with little feet
Was perched upon my toilet seat
I pushed him in, I flushed him down
I watched him spin ‘round and ‘round.

The representation of killing here is telling. For no obvious reason, the protagonist “I” lures a bird to its death and intentionally drowns a mouse. Inconsequential lives end and the protagonist “I” is apparently not affected by the harsh reality. The fact of death is presented bluntly: “‘Indeed,’ he said. ‘The bird is dead.’” and the details provided realistically, as with the drowned mouse spinning “‘round and ‘round” after being flushed. Cadences such as these expose the new and the existing soldier to the stark facts of killing and death with a bluntness that may serve to normalize what could become a necessary task facing the soldier. No drama is involved; no emotion is presented. Death is simply dealt and the details noted factually and realistically.

4. One’s Own Death
The theme of killing is an important one for obvious reasons, given the soldiers’ job. With exposure to killing comes the realization of one’s own mortality. This fourth and final major theme is widely available in the cadences as well. Indeed, along with the theme of killing, this idea of dealing with the possibility of one’s own death is the most common theme to emerge from the review of the cadences. Unlike the theme of killing, cadences dealing with the potential for one’s own death or the potential of the death of someone organizationally similar were frequently filled with emotion and emphasized the dramatic element. Such cadences emphasize the loss, play up the grief of those surviving the death of their loved one, and frequently acknowledge the willingness of the departed to have put him/herself in harm’s way. Consider the emotionally laden untitled cadences below:

**Untitled Ranger Cadence**
Somewhere there’s a woman
She’s crying for her man
He’s an airborne ranger
He does the best he can

Refrain:
Don’t cry for me
I don’t need your sympathy
‘Cause I’m an airborne ranger
And that’s all want to be
Walking the Walk and Talking the Talk

Somewhere there’s a mother
She’s praying for her son
He’s an airborne ranger
And his work is never done

Somewhere there’s a father
His head is bowed in grief
His son was an airborne ranger
And he died for his beliefs

Somewhere there’s a mother
Flag folded in her hands
Her son was an airborne ranger
And he died for his land

These cadences may fill two functions. First and most explicit is to accustom new soldiers to both the possibility of their own death, and also to brace them for the deaths of close colleagues. In the same way that a soldier willingly, although perhaps sadly, leaves his mother “praying for her son” with a “flag folded in her hands,” so, too, do soldiers leave one another grieving. Such cadences not only remind soldiers of the risks affiliated with their professional identity, but they also remind them of the willingness with which each has made the choices that brought death.

Soldiers may be assimilating a framework to help cope with the loss of close colleagues on the job. By emphasizing the choices made gladly, soldiers may be better prepared to both accept their own morality and the risk of their professional identity as well as to accept the mortality of beloved friends and coworkers.

However, the emphasis on the activeness of the decision structure may be important for another reason, as well. Identity-making is an active, dynamic process (Oberweis and Musheno 2001). The focus on individual decision-making in dealing with one’s own mortality may serve to draw on the active part of identification. While the above themes have addressed mechanisms for organizational themes to be supplied to new recruits – often in repetitive and catchy sorts of ways – the equally important task of active participation in learning, accepting and taking on these values has not been addressed in the existing literature. This focus on decision-making may implicitly remind soldiers of the active parts of “becoming.”

Becoming a Soldier

Cadence appears to be a highly functional mechanism for communicating organizational ideology. The themes are easily available from the lyrics and do not require much introspective analysis to identify or absorb. Three features of the cadence calling make the lyrics particularly potent for assimilation. First, the same cadences will be repeated often over a long period of involvement with the military. In the eight or so weeks of initial training, new soldiers will have heard the same cadences repeated many times along with having them reinforced nearly every day of their active duty commitment. Second, the singsong rhythm makes cadences catchy—they are the sort of jingles that sticks with one long after the singing itself is done. Finally, these easy, catchy lyrics involve repetition by soldiers who are physically tiring or tired. They are often sung from rote memory while the soldier is exhausted. The lyrics necessarily get into the heads of soldiers: the words are absorbed whether or not the values they communicate are. Thus the message to soldiers about how to be and what to value is clearly presented in an effective way that soldiers will almost certainly learn. However, actual implementation of that learning, the active commitment to becoming a soldier is a separate aspect of identity-making.5

5 Many have suggested that identity-making is not a one-way process. In particular, Judith Butler (1990) suggests that the becoming some identity, such as “soldier,” is an endless process of performativity. That is to say that an actor must continually re-create the identity through actions in an endless and dynamic performance of the identity’s characteristics (which themselves can be understood dynamically). Cadence-called is particularly well-suited to this aspect of identity-making due to its endless flexibility.
Here again cadences provide an excellent opportunity. A special feature of cadence is flexibility. That is, the caller is free to invent new lyrics, to insert personal names or the name of his/her unit into the lyrics. In short, the caller is welcome to personalize, be creative, be active, and to make it his/her own. Although this feature doesn’t capture the whole of the active part of identity-making, it certainly provides a strong opportunity to begin or to reinforce that process. By making up new verses, the caller makes the cadence, and perhaps the ideology within it, his or her own. This feature makes cadence unique in that it not only communicates organizational culture, but it also provides the space for individuals to become organizational members by adding their own creativity into the organizational mix.

Thus, we argue that cadences provide a powerful mechanism for the communication of values and norms of military organizations that must be transmitted to new organizational members. Such norms as pride, ferocity, killing and dealing with one’s own death were prevalent in the cadences we examined. Moreover, cadences provide the unique opportunity for new members to actively and creatively become integrated into the organization and for the organization’s values to become a part of the member’s self-representation.

Implications and Future Research

It is obviously desirable for the military to cultivate soldiers who are ferocious killers, willing to enter dangerous situations without regard for their own lives. Moreover, it is critical that these soldiers feel an intense bond and membership to their own unit, as it has been noted that men in battle rarely die for a cause per se, but rather for the survival of their comrades in arms (Marshall 1978). It is interesting, though, that paramilitary organizations such as police departments have also relied on cadence calling in the instruction of new recruits.

Policing has always had close ties to military dating back to the first modern western law enforcement agency, the London Metro Police Department in 1829. Its creator, Sir Robert Peel (who authored the London Metro Police Act in Parliament), envisioned police as a fusion between the military and legal worlds; officers would be tasked with enforcing laws, but they were to carry out this function with the discipline, efficiency and motivation associated with the armed services. To that end, the first commissioners of that department were Richard Mayne, an attorney, and Charles Rowan, a former military officer (Gaines and Kappeler 2003).

The training of police officers has always mirrored that of soldiers. Police academies are, indeed, a military experience replete with recruits being subject to short haircuts, demanding standards for appearance and performance, tough instructors and the morning ritual of physical training (PT). Daily PT is conducted in almost identical fashion to that of the military, including the culminating experience of a synchronized formation run while singing cadences. In a purposive sample of the 50 state police academies across the United States, we found that 43 academies (86%) used military cadence for either running, or marching, or both; only four academies did not use cadences (three did not provide data). Many of the cadences identified by training officers in our sample are nearly identical to those named in this paper. Given our analysis, this is problematic in the era of “community policing.”

Deemed a “quiet revolution,” community policing evolved in the 1980s as a response to the “professional” policing paradigm of the 1950s-1970s (Kelling 1988). Far from the detached, cold and confrontational style synonymous with those decades, community police reformers called for increased intimacy and the formation of partnerships with the public. Strategies to enact the philosophy include a return to foot patrols, regular neighborhood meetings, shared problem solving and the officer acting as advocate for their given neighborhood (Kelling and Moore 1988; Goldstein 1990; PERF 1990, Trojanowicz and Bucquerox 1990). Yet, it is apparent that this community policing philosophy, which is supposedly embraced and purportedly permeates most police departments, is at odds with the actual paramilitary training of officers. As police departments turn to the ideals of community policing, increasing questions have arisen about the extent to which the police practices have actually shifted (Kraska 1996, Kraska and Cubellis 1997, Kraska and Kappeler 1997).

With the new emphasis on community relations, training strategies should move away from the paramilitary approach that includes cadences. Because of the messages that are presented in cadences, including separateness from other kinds of civilians, ferocity, danger, and death, we argue that training police officers using cadences sends a mixed signal to new recruits in the era of community policing: “recognize your difference from other citizens, be ferocious, live dangerously, but mingle with the citizenry and spend your work time in non-dangerous
situations with no ferocity.” We suggest that the use of cadence is one obstacle in achieving the community policing ideal, and one that is not likely to be easily surmounted. This is a fertile and largely untapped venue for future research.

REFERENCES


