

Jeff Keller

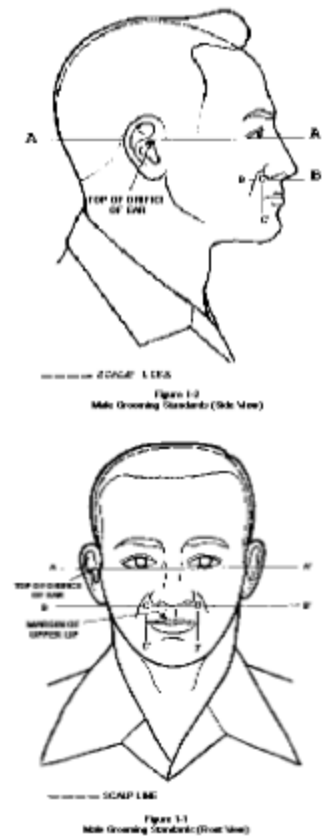
Dr. Brian Bailie

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### Assignment Three

I was watching the streetlights pass one by one as I anxiously stared out of the bus window I was riding. I was twenty years old and I was on my way to Lackland Air Force Base to begin my initiation into the discourse community I just became a part of; the US Air Force. It was a surreal moment at around 5a.m. as I watched the familiar glow of lights from restaurants, hotels, and grocery stores give way to unfamiliar buildings, colors, and drab uniformed lights. I had made it onto the base and my daily life wouldn't be the same for the next fifteen years. The Air Force is a discourse community that is joined by its sister services to achieve the goal of national security. Each branch has its own community and they sometimes differ greatly but in general, the ending guidelines are similar. The initiation I was about to encounter was Basic Training or "boot camp". This is a very real physical and mental indoctrination into this discourse and it bonds all who have gone through it on a higher level than most other discourse communities. The Air Force broke apart and reshaped my old ways of thinking and conducting myself to how they wanted. Every aspect of physical appearance is also scrutinized. Uniforms had to be pressed with crease marks in all the right places, hair had to be within regulations, and shaving was a mandatory daily to sometimes twice a day requirement.

Figure 3.1. Male Hair Grooming Standards.



3.1.3. Hair-Female. Minimum hair length is  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch, to a maximum bulk of three inches from scalp and allows proper wear of headgear. Hair will end above the bottom edge of collar and will not extend below an invisible line drawn parallel to the ground, both front to back and side to side. Bangs, or side-swiped hair will not touch either eyebrow, to include an invisible line drawn across eyebrows and parallel to the ground. See Figure 3.4. When in

Fig. 1 an excerpt from AFI 36-2903

The above figure is a sample from the 185 page document known as the Dress and Appearance Air Force Instruction, or better known to those in the discourse as AFI 36-2903. This is the most basic AFI and it is the first of many that is given to initiates with the expectancy of immediate compliance. This AFI covers a broad range of topics from how each uniform is to be worn and how all accoutrement is to be placed, to fitness standards that ensure the physique requirements are also met. This AFI also helps lays the groundwork for the numerous customs and courtesies

that are frequent within the military. An easy example of this is the custom of saluting an officer; right hand up, middle finger to corner of eyebrow, five feet away, maintain salute until officer drops theirs. But there are many others that seem odd at first but become common after time. Some examples are; taking hats off inside buildings, not walking on grass if it can be helped, stopping your car at 1700 during the National Anthem if your driving on base, and not holding hands or showing signs of affection while in uniform. These standards I have explained are really just the very tip of an extremely large and jagged iceberg but it's easily enough to meet Swales criteria of a discourse community.

Five years after my initiation I would make the rank of Staff Sergeant and while my own understanding and compliance of the most basic AFI was innate to my existence at this point, my engagement with it was just about to begin. I had just made the rank that is primarily the front line for enforcing these standards among the newly initiated. This is where the rhetorical aspect comes into play. Every Airman that goes through training is aware of the numerous standards placed upon them. When an Airman breaks a regulation everyone around that person is conscious of it. There is a stigma about doing anything imperfect in the Air Force. Leadership will swarm a problem until it is fixed and this fixing was all done at my new level. AFI 36-2903 was a frequently used source of correctional documentation by myself and my peers. I was charged with ensuring those under me were compliant, if they weren't, then ultimately I wasn't and that was something I couldn't have. Policing of regulations is done primarily on a rhetorical scale in the daily life of an Air Force sergeant. For example; I run a shift of aircraft maintainers, I need to ensure production is met and the squadrons have their fighters for the next morning's sorties. Airmen Snuffy is on my shift and his hair is touching the top of his ear. I notice my boss who just walked in look at him and make a certain "look", I now feel embarrassed that I did not

notice and correct it first. Now I need to step away from my work to correct a nineteen years olds hair being ¼ inch too long. This is an example of a minor and fairly common occurrence but it highlights the attention to detail that was required by members of this discourse. If an individual was unable to adhere to basic regulations, where else might they cut corners? AFI 36-2903 is the foundation for good order and discipline within the Air Force and that is why it is regarded as the gateway to all other instructions and regulations.

While the above infraction scenario was negative and perhaps common, it hardly detracts from the unity members of this discourse have for each other. We were all there for a certain goal that we felt passionately about in some form, be it belonging to something great, patriotism, or tradition. Air Force members have their own way of speaking to each other, whether it be in acronyms, or foul language. We all paid our due by getting through Basic Training and feedback to one another isn't just encouraged, its required annually. The Air Force maintains hundreds of genres in the hundreds of different Air Force Specialty Codes or "jobs" that one could perform, from avionics to pararescue. All of which are constantly evolving to meet today's requirements. Lexis that are unique to each Airman are established quickly and used daily. Acronyms are the Lexi of choice for the military but there are others. An F16 fighter jet could be called a "lawn dart" or a lieutenant could be a "butter bar". Finally the Air Force meets a certain membership number determined by congress. Members filter out through attrition or by choice but there is a steady flow of new initiates. There is a healthy balance of novice and expert at all times to ensure the mission is met. All of these aspects would earn Swales' seal of discourse community approval.

Works Cited

Swales, John. "The Concept of Discourse Community." *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Boston: Cambridge UP, 1990. 21-32.

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