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Military Perspectives on Public Relations Related to Environmental Issues

Grace D. Lee Jenni and M. Nils Peterson
Forestry and Environmental Resources, North Carolina State University

Jessica Katz Jameson
Communication, North Carolina State University

Fred W. Cubbage
Forestry and Environmental Resources, North Carolina State University

Environmental management decisions on United States military lands are becoming increasingly important. We used qualitative methods to explore military perceptions on building and maintaining relationships with their local communities related to environmental issues. Informants believed that 2-way public relations (PR) were effective ways to build, improve, and manage relationships, but practiced 1-way PR. Perceived barriers to 2-way PR included lack of public interest, leadership turnover, and security concerns, which were considered unique to military contexts. We highlight how these findings contribute to scholarship on environmental public participation and relational models of PR, and offer recommendations for improving military conservation efforts and the relationships between installations and communities.

Environmental policies written in the 1960s and '70s (e.g., the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969) required government agencies around the world to allow public participation in decisions that impacted the environment (Twight, 1977; Wellman & Tipple, 1990). Militaries, however, were often exempt from these requirements. In the United States., the Department of Defense (DoD) was largely free of public participation obligations until 1997, when Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans were mandated in an amendment to the Sikes Act, requiring the DoD to allow public comment on land use decisions (Sheridan, 1994). These changes allowed for public participation in decision making regarding wildlife species, rare ecosystems, water resources, and historical and anthropological sites on DoD lands (Boice, 1996).

The need for improved public relations associated with environmental decision-making in military contexts grew rapidly after the 1990s, as suburban sprawl adjacent to installations limited flight routes and the use of technology that created noise, smoke, or interference with

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Correspondence should be sent to Grace D. Lee Jenni, North Carolina State University, Forestry and Environmental Resources, Turner House, Box 7646, Raleigh, NC 27695. E-mail: graise@gmail.com

civilian electronics (Hanlon, 2001; Senate, 2004). Troop relocation and shifts in overall troop numbers (US Governmental Accountability Office, 2008) simultaneously created pressure to expand training areas, as well as housing and dining facilities on installations (Jones, Messenger, Webster, & Stine, 2002; Lillie & Martin, 2003). These trends created an environment where the military was forced to make difficult and public decisions on how to balance training needs with natural resource conservation.

At the same time, the nascent warfare ecology discipline has highlighted the huge ecological footprint of the military (Doxford & Judd, 2002; Foster, Ayers, Lombardi-Przybylowicz, & Simmons, 2006; Hanson, 2011). Recent conflicts between the military and adjacent publics in diverse arenas including suburban encroachment around military installations, noise pollution, radio frequency overlap, endangered species management, unexploded munitions issues, chemical pollutant concerns, air quality requirements, ocean resource competition, competition for airspace and land, and decisions about developing new military facilities (Senate, 2004; Zagacki, 2008) highlight a need for improved public relations.

Despite the mandate for public participation and recent public backlash associated with high-profile environmental decisions made with inadequate public relations (Esque, Nussear, & Medica, 2005; Maslia et al., 2009; Zagacki, 2008), little research has addressed how military personnel view building, improving, and managing relationships with their local communities (Plowman, 2013). This is an especially important issue for the military, because improved public opinion is needed to ensure successful recruitment and retention of US military forces, training, and readiness (Edge, 2009; Zagacki, 2008). Given that the US military's primary goal is to protect freedom and democracy, it can be argued that this organization should be especially sensitive to engaging community members in decisions about important issues including the environment.

In this article, we use qualitative methodology to explore how military personnel in the Southeast perceived public relations associated with environmental issues. Specifically, we focused on informants' perceptions of best practices in public relations, how they believed public relations should be used, and why they felt the way they did. The study sits at the intersection of research on environmental public participation (Norton, 2007; Peterson, Peterson, & Peterson, 2005; Predmore, Stern, Mortimer, & Seeholtz, 2011, Senecah, 2004) and government public relations (Liu, Horsley, & Levenshus, 2010; Waymer, 2013), because research on military–community relationships utilizes both (Edge, 2009; Plowman, 2013; Powledge, 2008). Integrating these literatures provides a framework for improving public relations practice for the military when dealing with environmental decisions and developing theory associated with military-public relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review summarizes what is known about environmental public relations, with a focus on literature relevant to military contexts. Many US government agencies responded to the public participation mandates of the 1960s and '70s by adopting the ''decide, announce, defend'' (DAD) model (Beierle, 1998; Belsten, 1996). Using this model, agencies decided upon a course of action, announced the decision to the public and then defended their decision if questioned (Belsten, 1996; Hendry, 2004). This form of public participation fosters the antiquated press

agentry model of public relations in which organizations orchestrated events that would attract public attention and raise awareness of the product, service, or cause (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This one-way model of public relations ignored the importance of audience feedback, which is necessary for effective communication and organizational adaptation.

An extensive body of research has documented problems with the DAD model in nonmilitary contexts (Beierle & Cayford, 2002; Chess & Purcell, 1999; Hendry, 2004). It does not provide a venue for democratic participation, which is expected in environmental communication (Norton, 2007) and contemporary public relations practice (Kent & Taylor, 2002). These findings suggest that manipulation disguised as participation, and even inadequate participation, leave both stakeholders and agency personnel frustrated, disillusioned, and angry (J. E. Grunig, 2001, 2013; Hendry, 2004). When a stakeholder knows decision makers are not listening, apathy is both logical and likely (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Peterson et al., 2005; Senecah, 2004). Similarly, repeated negative relationships can make agency personnel begin to resent the public and fear the loss of power or public turmoil over agency decisions and outcomes (Predmore et al., 2011).

Both public participation and public relations scholars suggest positive outcomes from interactions with the public require providing information, listening to stakeholder opinions, sharing some level of power over decision making, and building strong and intimate relationships with stakeholders. These key ingredients reflect the idealized form of public relations in most relevant theories: citizen power forms of public relations in Arnstein's (1969) ladder, providing the public a ''voice'' in Senecah's (2004, p. 13) trinity of voice theory, the two-way symmetrical public relations in J. E. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) models, and Kent and Taylor's (2002) dialogical model. Models for measuring the quality of relationships cultivated by public relations vary, but share a focus on: intimacy, similarity, openness, immediacy, credibility, trust, agreement, accuracy, common interests, and relationship history (Ledingham 2003). This research suggests that improved relationships fostered through authentic participation make perceptions of fairness more likely even when stakeholders do not have formal power in the decision making process (Norton, 2007; Shapiro, 1993; Senecah, 2004).

Kent and Taylor (2002) suggested a dialogic model of communication rooted in mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment that complements the aforementioned best practices in government–public relations. Mutuality implies organizations must recognize that an authentic relationship with the public is necessary for mutual (not just organizational) benefit. Propinquity suggests that organizations must engage the public during the process of decision making, not after a decision has been made (as in the DAD model). Empathy is critical to dialogue because parties in authentic relationships must recognize each other's needs and acknowledge their importance. Dialogic communication also carries risk because public encounters cannot be scripted as in the early press agentry or one-way models, and this creates a vulnerability that some organizations are uncomfortable with. This reinforces the commitment organizations must make to a diologic approach. Kent and Taylor argued that dialogic communication requires training in tactics for engaging the public in meaningful face-to-face or online dialogue. This point may be especially important in military contexts where hierarchical one-way communication is often privileged over dialogue.

Government public relations in general, and military installations specifically, face pressure for democratic public participation (Waymer, 2013). Liu et al. (2010) found both greater pressure to meet public information demands and greater restrictions imposed by legal frameworks in

government than corporate contexts. Legal frameworks often reflect security demands, creating a paradox in which public relations officers must simultaneously provide and protect information (Waymer, 2013). Waymer's examination of President Clinton's apology to Tuskegee syphilis experiment survivors suggests that it is important to consider whether the public wants a relationship. He drew on Hess (2000) to conclude that remaining accessible to the public, while also maintaining distance, is advisable in contexts with limited trust. This idea is consistent with Kent and Taylor's (2002) requirements of propinquity, empathy, and commitment because it emphasizes the need to allow the public to be heard while respecting their desired level of involvement.

Military organizations may also experience challenges with community relations due to an ambiguous definition of strategic public communication. Although Plowman (2013) reported that the US Army is still awaiting an official DoD definition, he proposes a definition of strategic communication based on J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) and Ledingham and Bruning (1998): ''the management of communications between the organization and its key stakeholders on a long-term basis to meet measurable objectives in a realistic timeframe'' (Plowman, 2013, p. 549). Plowman argued for more concrete measures of military–community relationships to improve military public relations efforts.

Plowman's (2013) interviews with Army Public Affairs personnel reinforced the importance of mutuality and commitment in a tool to measure military–community relationships, and extended previous knowledge by noting the importance of transparency as an additional component. This emphasis on transparency is not surprising, given the paradox between information sharing and privacy noted by Waymer (2013). A legal brief addressing the challenge of balancing national security with community interests in environmental decisions (Chekouras, 2007) suggests that there are strategies for improving public relations in this area, but limited budgets and resources for training in community development efforts may constrain government efforts in general (Liu et al, 2010), and military efforts in particular.

Edge's (2009) report on improving public opinion of the military provides a poignant example of the paradox of government–community relations in action. In his conclusion, Edge stated that the DoD ''must be aggressive and publish information about the activities of the United States Armed Forces'' (p. 10). He went on to say that ''the more often positive publicity is released and repeated, the more of an impact it makes with regards to influencing public opinion in a positive manner'' (p. 10). Ironically, although Edge's essay makes the case for a better military relationship with the public, his final recommendation reinforces a one-way model of communication based on manipulating public opinion and appears to neglect mutuality, empathy, commitment, and transparency. Given the challenges to military efforts to promote public participation and engage in two-way public relations, the purpose of this study was to better understand how members of the military viewed building and maintaining relationships with their local communities related to environmental issues. We turn next to a description of our methods.

METHODS

The Southeastern (SE) United States presents a good case study because of the large military presence in the area and long history of conflict over environmental management on

installations. The DoD estimated that the SE United States hosts 66 installations and over 420,000 personnel (Army Environmental Division, 2009) and Base Closure and Relocation Commission (BRAC) activities were anticipated to bring more than 3% growth in SE military populations between 2005 and 2015. Simultaneously, the SE states of Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee experienced rapid population growth, averaging 14.8% region wide from 2000 to 2010 (Mackun, Wilson, Fischetti, & Groworowska, 2011). There are also several high profile cases in the SE where applying the DAD model to environmental decision making has backfired with serious public relations consequences (Esque et al., 2005; Maslia et al., 2009; Zagacki, 2008).

Qualitative Approach

We chose a qualitative methodology with a grounded approach to understand how members of the military viewed building and maintaining relationships with their local communities related to environmental issues. This methodology is well suited for studies of relatively unexplored processes and events, and facilitated entree into a military population where quantitative surveys were both not allowed and likely to elicit strategic responses (Lee Jenni, Nils Peterson, Cubbage, & Jameson, 2012). We included two key elements of grounded theory in our qualitative approach. First, we used an open-ended interview process that allowed informants to define the core story about how the military engaged in public relations, and second we used theoretical sampling, an iterative sampling approach where informants are chosen based on evolving questions about the processes under scrutiny (Creswell, 1998; Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007). This combination of grounding our study questions in initial interviews and adaptive sampling allowed us to continually clarify our understanding of categories, resulting in the emergence of an explanation of military perspectives on public participation grounded in the data (Draucker et al., 2007). Parts of the story emerge organically during the process of analyzing and comparing informant responses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Our theoretical sampling ultimately required three waves of data collection with each wave of data collection informing the subsequent wave (Creswell, 1998).

Data Collection

Access for the first set of interviews was granted through two key informants who provided a list of contacts. Because of the hierarchical nature of the military, we initially faced difficulty gaining access to informants working in positions associated with public relations. When e-mails were sent out requesting meetings to introduce and set up the interviews, many people responded by questioning our authorization to conduct research on installations. Three weeks after we started sending out e-mails, a high-ranking informant at one installation informed his staff that we were authorized to be working at his installation. The initial interviews then snowballed within and across installations as informants became comfortable with the study. For waves 2 and 3 of the interviews, we used a theoretical sampling methodology (Draucker et al., 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994), choosing informants who we thought could help develop the emerging theory.

Our first wave of data collection began with 23 interviews with military members (MM) from installations across the SE United States from September 2008 to March 2009. This initial group was purposively selected from active duty soldiers and civilian employees from installations' environmental divisions who had experience with public relations. Because we had difficulty gaining access and because responses could have career ending implications for informants, we do not to disclose the names of any installations or the ranks or titles of any informants. All interviews were unstructured and open-ended, although we began with question prompts. Initial interviews were all conducted face-to-face. During our protocol pretesting, we found that informants considered questions asking about public relations leading (e.g., they suggested that the military was manipulative), so we created a more neutral starting point by restructuring the interview protocol to ask about public participation. The first round of interviews focused on defining public participation in environmental issues within the military context and responses to these interviews provided the starting point for our theoretical sampling. In the first round of interviews, our guide included eight prompts:

1. How do you think the military influences communities in this region?
2. Within your Military Occupational Specialty or position, what are your main objectives?
3. Do any environmental issues influence your ability to successfully meet those objectives? (Which ones? Why?)
4. How do you feel those issues should be balanced with your objectives?
5. Will any nonmilitary groups be impacted if the military addresses these environmental issues? (What groups? How?)
6. Do you think the military works directly with any of these groups? (In what capacity?)
7. Do you think the military is interested in using public participation to address environmental issues? (Why or why not?)
8. Do you think the military would gain from public participation? (Why or why not?)

While analyzing our data, we found a theme emerging that suggested that MM perceived public participation in any form as a way to gain public support for environmental management decisions (traditional one-way public relations; Hutton, 1999; Taylor & Perry, 2005). To investigate this theme, we designed a second wave of sampling focusing on what the military hoped to gain from public relations. For this second wave of sampling, we conducted 32 more interviews from April 2009 to April 2011 using the same prompts, but asking for elaboration on how ''the military would gain from public participation.'' The second group of informants consisted of informants from the previous interviews (6), as well as new informants who were identified by informants from the first round of interviews as having experience with military public participation issues (26). These interviews were a combination of in person and telephone interviews, based on informant availability. During the second round of interviews it became apparent that informants thought one-way public relations approaches were best suited for military contexts. We then conducted a third wave of interviews focused on why informants considered one-way public relations the best way to conduct public participation in military contexts. This third wave of interviews took place over the phone. We interviewed 14 informants (9 selected from wave 2 and 5 new informants) from June 2011 to July 2011 and added the question: ''Why do you feel this way about public participation?'' In total, we conducted

52 independent interviews. All interviews lasted from 30 min to 1½ hr. We worked to improve trustworthiness and credibility using triangulation in data collection and by intervening until theoretical saturation occurred (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Shenton, 2004). Triangulation included interview data, document review (government reports, academic research, congressional hearings, as well as local news stories and press releases), and participant observation (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Participant observation occurred during meetings on environmental management decisions, conversations before or after interviews, and social events on installations.

Analysis

We examined our data using open, axial, and selective coding to unravel the relationships within our data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding involved breaking down transcribed interview data into broad categories, and dividing those categories into their constituent properties. Axial coding included using context, behaviors, and consequences to define relationships between categories and properties. Selective coding consisted of looking at the interactions between categories and creating core categories to begin to build a story around the central events of the study.

All interviews were recorded on a hand-held recorder, transcribed, and analyzed using NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 8, 2008). We used the following citation format to identify quotations from interviews or field notes: Pseudonym, Interview number. For example, a quotation identified as (Joseph, I3) was spoken by Joseph during interview number 3. Installation and branch names are withheld to protect confidentiality of informants. Quotations or paraphrases from field notes were attributed to speaker's pseudonyms when possible (e.g., Joseph, field notes) but otherwise were cited simply as (field notes).

RESULTS

Although MM believed two-way public participation was the best way to build and maintain relationships, they reported practicing one-way public relations. Instead of using public participation as a way to engage the public in dialogue over environmental issues, MM were using it as a way to gain support for existing policy and decisions. They did this because (a) they believed that the public was not interested in actually engaging, (b) they believed that the frequent turnover of military and civilian leadership made it difficult to develop meaningful relationship, and (c) they had concerns over operational security.

We found a discrepancy in how the military defined public participation versus how they implemented it in the first round of interviews. When we asked MM to describe public participation in environmental decision making, informants described it as two-way symmetrical public relations: Ethan (field notes) said the military ''work(s) in partnership with them [the community], leverag(ing) our time and energy to help come to collective solutions that are of benefit to both groups.'' Ethan (I5) said:

> Building partnerships is an important facet of what we do, no one service or no one department, no one state, no one community can do many things alone in a vacuum anymore. There's a high desire

> to leverage people's time, people's energy, their intellect, their lessons learned, best practices, and creating partnerships to resolve issues together.

Official reports also called for early and consistent public involvement, with Major General Edward Hanlon, Jr. saying before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2001, that it is ''in our best interests to reach outside the fence and actively engage our neighbors, educate them on our mission and operations in support of readiness work to understand their concerns, and develop working relationships built on respect'' (Hanlon, 2001, p. 36).

But when we asked informants to describe actual relationships that the military had with the public, the examples were indicative of a one-way process. The informants' stories portrayed public engagement as a way of informing people ''outside the fence'' and influencing more favorable views of environmental decisions made by the military (field notes). Examples of interactions with the public included accounts of annual public events on installations, such as the summer fair, when the public was invited on post to see demonstrations from the Golden Knights (an Army parachute team) and the color guard (field notes) or of opportunities to use installations for hunting or fishing. Victor (I43) offered the example of the 4th of July holiday when ''we open the gates and anyone can come in and celebrate on post.'' Ethan (I5) said:

> There are general things that I think almost every installation does, where you host events on base. There are military support groups that we belong to. There are tours that are conducted. There's hosting of various civic groups and functions they make around the base.... There have been in the past demonstrations that are open to the public to look at how we train.

Ken (I11) said:

> People who have hunting privileges aboard the base can sponsor guests. So, in accordance with our base order, somebody that has hunting privileges on base can bring up to one or two guests. We do have one program where we invite some local hunting clubs to the base three weekends a year, so those folks are essentially the public.

Public Participation Goals

The apparent discrepancy between how MM defined the way the military should interact with the public and how they actually interacted with the public suggested that the military personnel thought they would gain something by maintaining relationships with the public. We began a new round of interviews to explore what MM were hoping to gain. Informants believed that the public held generally negative views of military environmental impacts and the military in general, and wanted to use public participation to improve public relationships. Neil (I14) believed there was hostility from those outside the installation toward those on post, and thought this ''animosity happens from just lack of appreciation for what these young men and women do for our country.'' Not only was there a general feeling that the public did not support MM, there was a feeling that the public was more willing to accept bad news about installation actions over good news. Mason (I13) said, ''The public is always ready to believe the negative things they hear about what we're doing ... in conservation issues and land use issues.'' Kenny (I12) agreed,

saying, ''The public . . . tends to be too ready to believe the negative aspects of any issue and they are largely ignorant of all that we do to support . . . habitat conservation [for endangered species].''

The overriding instrumental goal of improving public perceptions of the military helps explain why MM used one-way public relations as an informing and placating tool, versus adopting more substantive forms requiring power sharing. Neil (I14) thought that public participation ''makes the base look good.'' Ethan (I5) said, ''A positive thing I would see with the public being . . . involved is maybe it would give them a better view of the military and like how much we actually do to try and, you know, mitigate environmental issues and stuff like that.'' Harold (I8) hoped public relations might change perceptions of the military as being ''secretive.'' He said that people think the DoD has ''a mission to fight wars and they're going to get it done no matter what it takes. Even if it impacts the environment or health, and that's just not true.'' Some informants suggested alternative forms of public relations, but the new suggestions also reflected informing and placating goals. One informant (field notes) thought there needed to be more public participation in terms of watching maneuvers to educate the public on environmental impacts. He said, ''The best way to reach out to the public would be to take them out in a field exercise so they can see what we do and why we need so much space.'' Brad (I2) also thought taking the public out into the field would help the public ''understand. It benefits us [when] they [the public] have a better picture of the effectiveness of our training.'' He thought that showing how maneuvers actually impacted the environment would be a good form of public relations.

Barriers to Substantive Public Relations

The apparent discrepancy between informants describing public participation in terms of two-way public relations involving partnerships, but implementing one-way public relations intended primarily to inform and placate stakeholders was surprising. The difference could be explained if the substantive vision of public relations expressed in the first round of interviews was, itself, a case of one-way public relations, rather than a belief in leveraging shared resources, intellects, and talents. We, however, focused the third round of theoretical sampling on trying to understand why MM thought the military chose not to engage in two-way public relations or other more substantive forms of public participation. We found that although MM saw the value of two-way public relations, they considered public participation methods other than one-way public relations unrealistic due to (a) public disinterest, (b) high turnover among military officials and public community leaders, and (c) operational security concerns.

Public disinterest. MM believed public ignorance and apathy would prevent alternatives to one-way public relations. Randy (field notes) summed it up by saying, ''I don't think that Joe the plumber man out here in [city name] really cares what's going on, on this base per se.'' Joshua (field notes) agreed that ''yah, [federal mandates] say we have to tell the public what we're doing—but they (the public) don't really get it anyways.'' Kenny (I12) thought that it would be difficult to even get the public to care enough about what happens on installations to want to know how environmental resources are being used. He said that the public is

> Largely ignorant of what goes on [on the installation] and to get Joe Q. Public to get to that level of understanding that they see what we're doing and then understand why we're doing and they acknowledge the benefit, that's kind of a long haul. I think it takes years to get to that understanding.

Jason (I10) thought that the public just did not care to know what was happening on installations unless they felt that it was directly impacting them in an obvious way:

> Generally speaking, I don't really think we get all that much public involvement. I kind of feel like . . . they don't really care because unless you are military or some kind of way associated with the base, you really don't see what's happening day to day inside the base's boundaries. Unless you are active in natural resources management and you know what's on the base and you want to be involved. If we're doing something on a base and it's not going to affect anybody outside of the base's boundaries, I think it's safe to say that your average citizen usually isn't interested.

There was a pervasive idea that the public did not care because they already had too many other things to think about and what was happening on installations or within the military was not part of their mindset. Frank (I6) said, ''I think . . . very few people have time beyond daily regimen and taking care of their families to engage [in public meetings].''

Turnover within military leadership and local communities. Our informants considered high mobility among military leadership and active duty personnel on installations, as well as among leaders in adjacent communities, to be an additional barrier to building community relationships. Kenny (field notes, I12) explained how mobility impacted installation procedures, noting that ''once you start moving up in ranks and you actually have a say in what goes on, your assignments get shorter and shorter and so you move around a lot. That's why policies on post change all the time.'' He said that these changes in policy made it difficult to maintain meaningful relationships between military leadership and community partners. Frank (I6) said mobility among commanders meant

> There's a learning cycle. I think it takes time and maturation to build trust and to build the kind of long-lasting relationships that we all need. And that's something that's difficult to do when you're working in an environment with turnover every two to three years.

Joseph (field notes) described the differences in leadership focus: ''Commanders are interested in different things. Some are really into education, some into family, and some into community involvement. Things happen slowly on post and it's hard to make big changes.'' Thus, the turnover not only made forming personal relationships with community partners more difficult, it created a constantly shifting base of support for environmental initiatives relative to other areas.

Informants believed issues involved with changes in military leadership were compounded by high turnover within adjacent communities. Frank (I6) said,

> There are people moving into the area that have not had any prior exposure to the military, and may or may not understand the synergy between the military and the community. As people move in, there's a constant need to refresh the relationships.

Kenny (I12) offered a simple example of a change in leadership within a community organization.

> We used to work really closely with the ED [executive director] at [name withheld]. But then the ED changed and he had a different agenda. He was more focused on other things than working with us, so we lost that relationship.

Operational security issues. Finally, informants considered operational security (OPSEC) incompatible with two-way public relations. ''Operational security entails procedures and actions that individuals take to protect information from falling into adversarial hands'' (Ben, field notes). The OPSEC concerns associated with environmental decision making largely revolved around training. Although military actions associated with construction, management of resources, and daily operations obviously have environmental impacts, the connection with training is intuitive given its urgency to MM (Lee Jenni et al., 2012).

The tendency to selectively disseminate information to stakeholders was described as rooted in military tradition of protecting OPSEC by only providing information on a need-to-know basis. Jason (I10) spoke about how he believed the structure of the military made it impossible to engage outside groups in genuine two-way public relations and a transparent process.

> I don't think it would make it easier and I don't think we need to involve the public with everything we do. Because—it might be interesting to them or nice to know, but it won't affect them and they are not necessarily a decision maker in a lot of the stuff. I think it's safe to say that in the military, what we tell people is often kind of based on a need to know.

William wondered why two-way communication would even be an option. He didn't think that the public had to be informed of things that even soldiers are not privy to (I22). He explained the need-to-know tradition saying:

> You only tell your soldiers what they need to hear to get their job done. There's no need to clutter their minds with any other garbage. Having too many people chiming in makes it hard to make decisions, especially in a combat zone. You just want your guys to focus on what they need to do in that moment. So, why would I ask the public before I do this or that during training? I don't tell my soldier that he has to pick up his munitions because it can pollute the water or hurt animals or something, I just tell him to pick it up, because my CO [commanding officer] told me to pick it up, like his CO told him. I don't know why we would have to tell some civilian why we're doing something or what it's impacting. (field notes)

Mason (I13) agreed with William, ''The public as far as, you know, trying to get the public to really appreciate and understand everything that we do and, and all that, I'm not sure that we'll ever get to that point.'' David (I4) said genuine dialogue with the public was difficult because

> It's hard to involve other agencies or other civilians when there's stuff going on tactically that you know, maybe the public shouldn't be aware of. I mean—and not that they shouldn't be aware of it, but maybe, like sensitive information.

Brad (I2) also thought that too much participation might endanger the mission, ‘‘because . . . missions and what they [the military] do is a little bit more—you know, I don’t want to say secret, but . . . ’’. Louis (field notes) also noted it was not possible to share information with the public because ‘‘they don’t really understand the day to day, and we can’t explain it to them because that would defeat the whole purpose of operational security!’’

Informants were also unclear as to how the public would be able to contribute to the decision-making process without being aware of operational needs and objectives. Robert (field notes) asked, ‘‘Why would we listen to what outside people want us to do? They don’t know why we need to train a certain way or what we need.’’ Brad (field notes) also said, ‘‘They don’t know what we need. How can we even listen to their suggestions of what to do with our training land?’’ The unanimity of responses regarding the need for OPSEC demonstrates that the very idea of engaging in two-way public relations is counternormative for MM, creating the perception of a serious obstacle to authentic partnerships and two-way public relations.

DISCUSSION

Our findings suggest that despite a strong rhetoric of public participation and relationship building, the public relations strategies described by informants reflected a one-way, press agentry model. This may reflect military doctrine that simultaneously treats public relations as a one-way process for improving public perception of military actions (e.g., Army FM 3-05.301; Army FM 3-13; Army FM 33-1-1; Army FM 46-1; Edge, 2009) while acknowledging the need for a two-way process to develop trust, shared influence, and transparency (Plowman, 2013). Further, military public affairs specialists attempting to apply two-way models (Edge, 2009; Hess, 2000; Plowman 2013; Wayner, 2013) face operations specialists in environmental management contexts, and we found the latter group prefers using press agentry models.

Our results contribute to public relations theory and practice by highlighting three specific barriers to improved military–community relations and public participation: perceptions of public disinterest, military personnel turnover, and operational security.

Although MM perceived lack of public interest in decision making was a unique barrier to two-way public relations, previous research suggests local community members do care about military land use decisions (Zagacki, 2008). Further, apathy problems faced by MM may reflect mutual influence theory where apathy emerges when the public does not believe organizations are listening (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Senecah, 2004). The military can begin dialogue with stakeholders by sharing access to nonsensitive data and working with stakeholders to build a shared view of problems and interest in solving them (Hamilton & Wills-Toker, 2006; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Peterson, Peterson, Peterson, Lopez, & Silvy, 2002). The dialogic model suggests that these mutual interests can be further strengthened by highlighting how the military’s environmental decisions affect the social, economic, and political climate of communities surrounding installations (Cowan, 2012). Military norms supporting public engagement, and MM’s explicit understanding of benefits associated with substantive public engagement identified in this study, should support relationship-building efforts.

Conversely, recent theory in government–public relationships (Hess, 2000; Waymer 2013) suggests several instances where relationships are better cultivated by distance than by intimacy. These theories may be particularly apropos for military–public relations associated with

environmental management. Four reasons for distancing described by Hess (2000) seem relevant to military–community relations: ''protection from getting hurt, ... protecting others from getting hurt, ... disliking for things with which another person [organization] is associated, ... [and] public versus private distinctions'' (pg. 481–482). Indeed, this study highlights how OPSEC was perceived as protecting MM and civilians from being hurt, and how public versus private distinctions define engagement between the military and stakeholders engaged in environmental management. Because public relations may actually be enriched by distance in these contexts, traditional public relations evaluation metrics focused on increasing trust, transparency, commitment, and openness (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Plowman, 2013) may actually backfire. Future empirical research addressing this issue would help clarify the costs and benefits of distance in military–public relations, and explore the kinds of relationships communities wish to have with military installations.

Informants viewed high turnover rates among military personnel and civilians in communities near installations as a barrier to two-way public relations, but literature on organizational trust-building highlights how this barrier can be overcome (Duffield, Roche, O'Brien-Pallas, & Catling-Paull, 2009). Turnover is inevitable, as duty assignments change often within the military, but a two-way approach to public relations could reduce the time required to build trusting working relationships between military and civilian leadership because dialogue promotes ''commitment, trust, and open and honest discussion'' (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998, p. 320). Research suggests that trust between the groups, or relationship management, can be improved by shifting focus from instrumental goals (e.g., improved public relations or legal mandates associated with the Sikes Act), to include more transformative goals (e.g., community building, empowering citizens, and improving bureaucracies; Predmore et al, 2011; Yang, 2005). The military also can begin to build trust and a shared vision through informal social interactions and problem solving workshops (Kelman, 1986).

The reluctance to promote two-way public relations among MM may reflect both the need to protect public safety and operational security within government organizations and the long-standing military traditions of providing information on a need-to-know basis. Although expecting orders to be obeyed without question and without background information was standard operating procedure for the MM informants in this study, the approach contrasts with traditional norms in democratic society (Osiel, 1999). The ''sunshine laws'' requiring government agencies to allow for public decision making (Vladeck, 2008) are diametrically opposed to the military norms of only sharing information when commanded. This difference in communication expectations presents unique challenges for those attempting to facilitate two-way public relations associated with environmental decision making on military installations.

Providing for two-way forms of public relations may create legitimate OPSEC concerns (Dunivin, 1994; Hillen, 1999), but security concerns are not unique to the military and can be addressed. Other federal agencies, researchers, and the corporate sector are faced with security concerns (e.g., digital invasion and loss of intellectual property; Hill & Smith, 1995; Huong, 1999) and use risk assessments to minimize vulnerability without wasting resources or losing opportunities by protecting low-risk information (Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Goetz, 2007). The military could utilize this approach to provide information access associated with a host of low-risk environmental issues. The US Army already offers an OPSEC protocol that focuses on analysis and assessment of vulnerabilities and risks before engaging in strategic and tactical maneuvers and employing appropriate measures (Army FM 3–13, 2003), and risk

communication is an integral part of the military communication procedure. These protocols could be adopted to identify issues and information available for supporting valuable two-way public relations in environmental decision making. The military can begin dialogue with stakeholders by sharing access to nonsensitive data (Chekouras, 2007) and working with community members to build a shared view of problems and interest in solving them (Hamilton & Wills-Toker, 2006; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Peterson et al., 2002).

CONCLUSION

The military has motivation to develop collaborative forms of public relations related to environmental issues (Edge, 2009). The one-way public relations approach to public engagement has embroiled the military in high-profile and expensive environmental controversies and created serious threats to training. The battles over the Navy's decision to build a new Outlying Landing Field in coastal North Carolina (Zagacki, 2008) and the court case over contaminated water at Camp Lejeune that started in 1987 (Maslia et al., 2009) are notable examples of recent controversies that could have benefited from meaningful collaborative environmental decision making. Similar public relations challenges have been well documented in other regions, including the use of Wilderness Areas as landing zones (Hanlon, 2001), as well as the Fort Irwin decision to translocate the endangered Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), and Lane Mountain Milkvetch (*Astragalus jaegerianus*; Esque et al., 2005) being well documented in literature and local media.

Conversely, many of the military's most notable environmental success stories have emerged from partnerships based on authentic two-way public relations between the military and civilian stakeholders. These successes include recovery of endangered species on some installations (Beaty et al., 2003) and development of the Northwest Florida Greenway, a collaboration of military, government, and nonprofit organizations working together to protect ''one of the six most biologically diverse regions in the United States'' (Powledge, 2008, p. 146). These examples of conservation successes demonstrate that two-way symmetrical communication can result in collaborative environmental decision making on military installations that is both a possible and beneficial way to protect both the environment and the military mission. Expanding public participation using two-way public relations by addressing low-risk environmental issues with nearby communities will help promote trust, positive sentiments, and more sustainable decisions. Such efforts, however, would benefit from future research exploring potentially unique and negative impacts of building relationship intimacy in military–public relations.

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